

The ABC's digital transformations: a continuing (hi)story.

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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. This paper explores how a public service broadcasting organisation, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is introducing cross-platform skills in regional radio, and the implications for traditional work practices and workplace relations. It also considers the ways in which broadcast journalists using digital media think about their professional roles and the changing nature of the relationship with their audiences.

The first part of the paper 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 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.

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’²(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.

. 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 journalism described in this chapter has begun in radio rather than in television³.

‘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 re-structure 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 News⁴, 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. More so than radio, television is under challenge from the combination of the availability of relatively inexpensive digital video, cheaper and more powerful computers, and the Internet. The combination represents a direct challenge to the historical divide between the amateur and the professional.

The 'new breed' of broadcast journalist

Professionalism can be described as 'a work-related affective orientation' (Pollard and Johansen, 1998: 356). That is, practitioners in any occupation may or may not think of themselves as (and try to act as) professionals. Typically, professionalism involves 'developing competence through education or experience and ensuring full, ethical application of that competence' (Pollard and Johansen, 1998: 357). Another definition of professionalism equates it with 'credentialed expertise, with disinterested service, and with a strong adherence to a set of occupational norms' (Prasad and Prasad, 1994: 1438).

Media practitioners do not necessarily have 'credentialed expertise'. Even today, not all recruits to the media have media, communication or journalism degrees (although they will probably, but not necessarily, have an undergraduate university degree). Professionalism among media workers is thus more likely to be a matter of personal orientation and emphasis in the workplace than of a professionalised occupational structure. There is evidence that among media practitioners, high professionalism as a matter of personal orientation is associated with high quality or better performing organisations, and contributes to superior performance by the individual (Henningham 1988, Coldwell 1974 cited in Pollard and Johnson 1998, p.357). This suggests that the culture of an organisation can influence the attitudinal predisposition of those who work for it, in relation to professionalism.

As a public service organisation, the ABC is likely to have as one element of its institutional belief system what Prasad and Prasad call ‘the ideology of professionalism’ (Prasad and Prasad 1994, p.1435), not least because ‘disinterested service’ is a core characteristic of that ideology. In addition, the ABC is required by its Charter to offer the ‘highest quality’ of programs, and the ideology of professionalism confers status and prestige on anything designated as ‘professional’ (Prasad and Prasad, 1994, p.1438). Finally, as has been established, the ABC has historically had a very demarcated workforce and such institutional factors have an influence on the meanings and interpretations of professionalism within any organisation. Given all this, some anxiety might be expected among ABC workers about the maintenance of professional standards, in the face of the changes to the relations of production represented by the world of digital media.

Tickle and Keshvani (2000) envisage the journalists of the future: as an ‘intrepid new breed of broadcast warrior’ who ‘will be expected to move effortlessly at warp speed between radio, television and online news gathering and presenting. The authors name this multi-skilled individual the ‘electronic journalist-editor-producer, or “Jeder”’. Each of these functions – journalist, editor, producer – has historically been separate, especially in the national public service broadcasters. In public sector broadcasting, as we have seen, these differences in work were formalised in job classifications and in union-enforced demarcations, as they were in print journalism. In the past ten years, the ABC has rapidly adopted digital media technologies, driven by the need to make the most efficient use of its most expensive resource, people. In so doing, the definitions of professional roles within the organisation have progressively expanded, subsuming once-separate ones. However, the use of digital media for the ABC’s World Wide Web site came largely from the grassroots of individual television and radio producers (see Martin 1999). Planned, long-term investment in cross-media production as the way of the future, has emerged relatively recently and not across the whole Corporation.

In 2001 the Federal Government granted the ABC 17-million dollars, specifically for ‘regional initiatives’. These included the appointment of fifty new positions in regional radio, of which one third (18) were designated as multimedia (also called ‘online’ or ‘cross-media’) journalists. The first 18 journalists appointed using the regional initiatives grant were all given an institutional ‘home’, in local radio⁵.

With its extensive network of regional radio stations, the ABC plays a primary role in local broadcasting. Like the BBC, the ABC has for some years sought to exploit the extent of its news gathering resources across the nation and internationally, through using satellite, ISDN and network servers to distribute throughout the organisation all the material it generates (for a historical description of this process see Dunn 1998). The decision by the Head of Radio at the ABC, Susan Howard, to use the new positions within local radio, is an important factor in the likely success of this initiative. The ABC's first attempt to appoint and train people in multimedia roles, nearly ten years earlier, was dissipated, with all but one of the original eight trainees having left the ABC by 2002. This was in part because there were only eight such trainees but mainly because they did not 'belong' anywhere in the ABC's corporate structure. Susan Howard has provided them a home, but for the journalists, finding themselves a place may take a bit longer.

Training of the 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. It covered both editorial and technical issues, with a slightly stronger emphasis on the technical, because there was so much to learn. 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 Backyard⁶. 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.

At the start of the week, the Head of Network Scheduling for Radio addressed the new recruits. She described their jobs as ‘radio staff with a cross-media focus’, and told them to expect to spend 50 percent of their time on local radio, producing field reports and presenting in studio and 50 percent in online and video production. This ratio proved to be much more variable in practice, once the journalists were back in their workplaces, as a result of local interpretation of what the new jobs entailed and an underestimation of the time it would take the journalists to prepare content for the Web.

The online component was to involve updating their local regional Web sites⁷ with radio-related and other local information and stories. The video would be produced for online, but also for the ABC’s fledgling digital TV channels, specifically the youth network, Fly⁸.

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. They would need to look for radio stories suitable for extended content on the Web (in the form of pictures, text and short videos, as well as audio); and to look for stories suitable for the digital channel, Fly. The expectation was that they would produce one story per month for Fly, with content also suitable for use on radio and the Web.

These new jobs, she emphasised, involved producing, presenting, writing, recording, shooting and editing their own stories - the ‘Jeder’ indeed. She described the opportunity as a continuing building of skills, across platforms. She concluded by urging the participants not to panic. Skills acquisition takes time, and projects and tasks that seem daunting now, won’t be in a very short time, she reassured them. That the Head of Network Scheduling felt it necessary to reassure and encourage in this way suggests that, in relation to her own professional experience as a radio journalist, these new jobs not only sounded busy, but that also having to acquire skills across platforms was a daunting prospect. What the ABC may have underestimated is 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.

The 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'. This pressure was expressed initially in the form of a real concern about time management. One of the trainers described time management as 'a huge difficulty' for these staff, while another conceded time is 'an issue'. Both of them put the onus back on the journalists: to 'be organised', to prioritise, in order to do what they want to do as well as what they have to do. Self-management is one of the qualities by which 'professional' work is defined⁹.

The intended 50:50 split of the cross-media journalists' duties between production for radio, for the Web and for digital TV worked well in some radio stations and not so well in others. Regional Program Managers (RPMs) run their radio stations with a high level of autonomy on a day-to-day basis and communication problems between senior radio management and the RPMs are not unprecedented. RPMs may be told that this new 'body' is only to work on radio for half their time, but the temptation to eat into that other half, when your station is under-resourced is hard to resist. And if you offer an eager new recruit the chance to present the Breakfast program - the timeslot with the largest number of listeners, on any radio station - then are they going to refuse? This was the case with at least two of the eight people on the training course observed. One of these, who had been working as the breakfast presenter at his radio station, described himself as feeling 'a bit overwhelmed' by the parameters of the new job. He was not sure how his role would turn out once he returned to his station. He 'loved' being on air but could not see how to balance his own desires with the demands of his RPM and those he now realised he had been hired to fulfil. Another of the journalists had acted as Station Manager for a couple of weeks not long after starting her cross-media job. She appreciated the opportunity but had found it impossible to keep up the same level of output for the online material, which was very frustrating for her. She described her work as an online and radio producer as having been 'swept aside for two weeks'.

Once back in their regional radio stations, anxiety about professional competence surfaced for the cross-media journalists, particularly around the requirement to produce short items for the digital television network Fly. 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. Eight months after their initial training, two of the journalists who had made their first four or five-minute story for Fly, had had their edited footage sent back several times from Sydney to the regional station, with requests and advice to re-edit. Both journalists had been sent to spend a week with the program production unit in Sydney, time rather resented by their local station managers who are of course down one person each time the ABC sends them off for further training. The fact that it took a second round of training and repeated attempts to satisfy the Fly producers in Sydney suggests the cross-media producers were not working in the first instance at an acceptable professional standard of video production. This is hardly surprising given not just their inexperience but also their relative isolation (each is alone in their workplace in producing digital video and is simultaneously producing online stories and sometimes also radio stories). This challenge to the video production component of the cross-media roles will probably be met over time, as the journalists acquire greater skill and confidence, given support and experience.

Professionalism needs cultivation to flourish, however, 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 multimedia journalism. Australia's geographic size makes it expensive and time-consuming to keep bringing the cross-media journalists together. It may be that the regional radio stations cannot offer sufficient personal or professional support to someone who arrives to do a job that may look a bit like the existing ones but actually has quite different demands and duties. A trainer pointed out that 'these people won't have many people around who understand what they're doing'. Two participants talked about not having a clear professional 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'. Participants mentioned the importance of keeping in touch with one another and with the trainers, to build their own network of support. They do this using an email list and a regular telephone conference call.

Professional identity is an interesting issue, especially given the contested professional status of journalism to start with. Assuming that the organisational culture of the ABC is to identify journalism as a profession and to expect professional

standards and behaviours from its radio journalists, 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. What they are being asked to do is far from the traditional work of a radio journalist. Most, however, are expected to include traditional radio journalism in their production, and there may be limited understanding from managers and colleagues of the demands of these hybrid roles.

The uncertainty around professional identity appears to extend to the local radio managers, although they described themselves as completely supportive of the cross-media initiative, with some caveats. One described the cross-media position as adding ‘immeasurably to the station’. They recognised the significance of the Web site in two ways: as a resource that extends and archives the ephemera of daily radio, and as a new means of interacting with the audience. They were wary that ‘ad hoc extensions’ to the cross-media role might be imposed by senior management. In one case, the local manager was aware that the cross-media journalist in his station had sometimes worked very long hours in order to do all that was asked of her local radio and online roles. This journalist was also producer of the morning program on her station, which would be a full-time job in itself for some. She was investigating obtaining access to the ABC Web site management system from home. Her manager was dubious about this, recognizing that this journalist would probably work a lot more unpaid hours at home, if the system were available to her there. On the other hand, the reason she was thinking of working from home at all was that she found it difficult to do the ‘cross-media’ part of her job in her workplace. She felt that other people in the station could not understand what the cross-media journalists’ jobs are like. The noise in her open-plan station sometimes made creating and uploading a multimedia story to the Web almost impossible for her, even using earphones.

Despite all these concerns, there was no doubting the productivity of the new recruits. Between the first and second training courses, a matter of a couple of months, the first nine people through had added 1200 pages to the Backyard Web site.

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. It is considering registration processes as a way of authenticating individual identity of participants in online forums. 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. Whether this is still true or whether the advent of cable and satellite television with its hundreds of channels, and of the Internet, is not only fragmenting audiences but now shifting the point of cultural control back to them, is open to argument. There seems little recognition so far of the extent to which the work of the cross-media journalists could change the ABC's historical relationship with its audiences.

Conclusion

An important argument of this paper, which emerges clearly from the case study and 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 digital technology 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 historical relationship of the ABC with the BBC (which also chose to implement cross-media practices in the regions) and the structure of the ABC (into separate output divisions of Radio, Television and most recently, New Media) both affected the way in which cross-media training is being implemented in the organisation.

The advent in the late twentieth century of lightweight, relatively inexpensive digital means of production, in combination with the kind of institutional structural changes described in this chapter, present both an opportunity and a threat. On the one hand, the always tenuous hold that media journalism has on professional status is threatened if 'anybody' can be a producer; on the other, there is an opportunity to engage the audience in ways that may give rise to new means of representation. Both opportunity and threat 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)’ (Bromley 1997, p.346).

Certainly, ABC television producers reacted to an organisational restructure (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. Deuze and Dimoudi (2002) for example, are much more optimistic about 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).

Against this must be set the empirical observation that ABC cross-media journalists and their managers are concerned about time management and overwork. This finding echoes those of Cottle (1999), that BBC multi-media news journalists suffer from work overload, as a direct consequence of cross-media production. Cottle argues there is also a consequent superficiality in their treatment of the news, a possibility yet to be explored in the research being undertaken in ABC regional radio, described in this chapter. The ABC cross-media journalists expressed anxiety about their professional identity, and experienced a challenge to their professional competence, through the rejection of their initial attempts to make video stories for the ABC’s digital TV channel Fly. The important point, however, and a point of difference from the BBC regional experience (rf. Ursell 2001), is that these ABC journalists were given additional advice and training. The organisation appears at this stage not to be demanding production at the cost of undermining the quality of their work. If this really is the case (and further investigation would be needed to establish it), 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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¹ The ABC is funded by the parliament, through a budget appropriation, on a triennial basis.

² 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.

³ Although there are people in ABC television, such as Simon Target and Richard Smith, who have used compact digital video to work alone shooting 'fly on the wall' documentary footage, and then with an editor to produce finished programs, such as Uni, Kings, The Academy (by Target) and Rumble in the Jungle by Smith. Smith was a producer while Target had been a camera operator.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/backyard>.

⁷ Most of the cross-media journalists had responsibility for the Web site of one other ABC radio station in their own region, as well as for their own station's site.

⁸ The ABC announced it would close down Fly and its other digital channel, ABC Kids, after failing to win additional funding from the Government, in its 2003 triennial budget bid.

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.

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.