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Michael Huntsberger
Linfield College

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CREATIVITY, FREE EXPRESSION, AND PROFESSIONALISM: VALUE CONFLICTS IN U.S. COMMUNITY RADIO

Michael Huntsberger
Ph. D candidate
School of Journalism and Communication
University of Oregon

Abstract

This study investigates how the values of free expression and professionalism provide the basis for interpersonal and organizational conflict in U.S. community radio stations, and shape divergent approaches to audience service. Using qualitative methods, the project examines the motivations, expressions, and behaviors of producers and managers to establish how their values contribute to cooperation and dissent within these organizations. The study illustrates the delicate balance that exists between content-centered and audience-centered objectives, concluding that these core values have a pervasive effect on community radio's capacity to reach audiences and promote social change through the media.

Introduction

In the summer of 1999, Berkeley, California, was in turmoil. Thousands of citizens marched in the streets. Scholars, artists, and elected officials joined the protest. Activists decried infringements on civil liberties. Police and armed security guards clashed with the protestors. Confrontations boiled over into violence. Shots were fired (Oakland Tribune, 1999). These confrontations did not arise in response to war, bigotry, environmental degradation, or partisan politics: Ironically, the controversy involved the nonprofit Pacifica Foundation, licensee of five noncommercial radio stations dedicated to

serving the values of pacifism by promoting human communication and overcoming the barriers of ideology, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and class. This idealistic institution was torn apart by its own employees, volunteers, and supporters in a battle over labor relations, public service, and human expression. What happened?

Across a history that now spans sixty years, Pacifica has seen its share of disenchantment and disunion. While the events of 1999 were particularly intense, such controversies are not rare in locally controlled community radio services. Similar controversies have erupted from time to time at community stations throughout the U.S. (Walker, 1997). In spite of a robust and occasionally overwhelming zeal to provide a voice for citizens by 'democratizing communication on a community scale' (Delorme, in Girard 1991, ix-x), community radio's record for capturing a measurable listening audience is decidedly mixed, particularly in urban areas where stations compete with multiple commercial and public radio services (Giovannoni, 1999). This is significant because most community radio stations in the United States, including more than seventy Pacifica affiliates, depend on the donations of local listeners to provide a substantial portion of their operating revenues. Concurrently, many of these stations share Pacifica's aspiration to

> contribute to a lasting understanding between nations and between the individuals of all nations, races, creeds, and colors; to gather and disseminate information on the causes of conflict between any and all of such groups; and…promote the study of political and economic problems and of the causes of religious, philosophical, and racial antagonisms (Pacifica, 2004).

Such aspirations can hardly be achieved when the organization itself becomes the focus of conflict.

This study sought to gain insight into some of the ideological and practical issues facing American community radio. The research employed qualitative methods to investigate the attitudes and intentions expressed by community radio organizations and the people involved in them. Three stations in the U.S. Pacific Northwest were studied in detail, supplemented with additional data gathered from stations in other areas of the country. The study attempts to describe how people engaged in these organizations manifest their beliefs and values, and reveal how the interactions of values provide the basis for some of the challenges faced by these organizations. The research seeks to understand how the principles of participatory democracy, free expression, and audience service interact in the context of direct citizen engagement in programming and station operations; and, how these interactions affect the services these stations provide to their communities.

Background

Several scholars have previously investigated the role played by individual values in media organizations. Breed's ground breaking studies of social control in news enterprises found that content producers tend to follow predictable patterns of engagement, education, and socialization in media organizations (1955, p. 328-330). Content producers were motivated by a sense of mission, prestige, personal satisfaction, and other intangibles that reinforce group identity and conventional behavior, regardless

of their level of expertise or experience. Breed asserted that people in media organizations moved through fairly predictable stages of development and understanding, acquiring insight as they gained experience with the practices of media production, presentation, and audience engagement. Though underlying motivations remained consistent, the attitudes and beliefs of people engaged in media enterprises changed over time.

Media organizations on the whole evolve as well, taking on distinct cultural characteristics. In his research on the British Broadcasting Corporation, Burns documented a culture of professionalism, dominated by ever-higher standards and practices of investigation, reporting, production techniques, and innovation (1977, p. 126-132). Burns research echoed Breed's contention that experience and expertise contributed to the evolution of individual values: As experienced people advanced in the organization and newer people replaced them, the dynamic qualities of belief became a source of conflict.

Examining media enterprises in the 1980s, Bantz found that conflict in these organizations is normal, expected and even healthy. Individuals tended to adopt group norms even without any formal orientation or training. One of these norms was a healthy skepticism concerning any piece of information, whether it came from an informed private source, a government official, or a manager in the media organization. An equally important norm was a heightened sensitivity to conflict, both in society and in the media enterprise. These norms tended to exaggerate conflict and rendered efforts at resolution

more difficult. Bantz also uncovered fundamental value incompatibilities between creative and journalistic motivations (free expression, experimentation); professional motivations (accuracy, thoroughness, consistency); business motivations (speed, efficiency, service); and entertainment motivations (engagement, retention, loyalty). These organizational norms contributed to a culture 'in which conflict is necessary, ordinary, valuable, routine, and …legitimate' (1985, p. 228-239). As individuals become acculturated in the organization, norms become internalized as values, exhibited as an appreciation for accuracy, fairness, and respect for the organizational mission – qualities admired by media professionals.

While community radio organizations share many of these characteristics, their underlying ideology is substantially different from the enterprises studied by Breed, Burns, and Bantz. Lewis and Booth assert that these stations are characterized by commitments to citizen participation in programming and operations (especially by those who have been excluded from the mass media), local control, and public service missions (1990, p. 121). Similarly, Barlow asserts that the common characteristics of American community radio stations are involvement by the local community in program production, noncommercial status, and democratically governed operating practices and processes (1988, p. 81-83). In Barlow's view, noncommercial status insulates these stations from the challenges of the market, allowing them to 'develop alternatives to the dominant commercial broadcasting formats and structures'. The commonality in U.S. community radio stations can be found in 'the same broadly defined ideological orientation and … the same social constraints in their day-to-day operations. In addition

to community involvement, their ideology champions progressive politics, alternative cultures, and participatory democracy' (ibid).

While Barlow limits his description to licensed services operating under the rules and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission, Sakolsky takes issue with language prohibitions and other regulatory limitations imposed by the U.S. government: 'Many once-adventurous community radio broadcasters have toned down their oppositional elements and have consciously or unconsciously become engaged in self-censorship' (1992, p. 106). For Sakolsky, the authentic, oppositional ideology of community broadcasting is more typically found in low power, unlicensed 'free radio' services such as Zoom Black Magic Liberation Radio of Springfield, Illinois. Similarly, Atton has observed the ideological connection between new social movements and radical media that provide access to public communication for marginalized sectors of society (2002, p. 493).

For Kidd, community radio stations are part of the larger movement of alternative media that provide the 'unofficial opposition to mainstream media,' representing 'the third option [to government and commercial channels], of 'direct' democracy' (1999, p. 113 – 114). Hamilton asserts that these alternative media overcome the dominant producer/consumer paradigm of mass communication by lowering barriers to access, functioning without traditional organizational structures, integrating the realms of daily life, and educating the audience to engage media in a different manner (2000, p. 371). The belief that citizen-programmed radio could alter the relationship of producers and the

listeners lay at the core of the philosophy of Lewis Hill, the founder of Pacifica Radio. Eschewing the mass audience, Hill intended for Pacifica's programming to engage each listener on the basis of mutual intentionality: 'The audience was believed to consist of an individual…assumed to have an alertness, an intelligence, an interest, and an attention span commensurate with those of the persons preparing and airing the program' (1958, p. 9-10). Embracing this philosophy, former Pacifica volunteer Lorenzo Milam established several community radio stations around the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Milam was even more sanguine about the possibility that this novel kind of radio might change the prevailing producer-listener relationship, through programming

> which will try our ears…. The station will revive the art of early radio which was known as Local and Live…. It will take awhile…. It has to take some time for people to get used to the idea that the walls are down, and that the microphone sits here open as the sun, ready to be talked to (1986, p. 115-116).

In the version of community radio pioneered by Hill and Milam, programming created by and for citizens subverts cultural, social, and political paradigms to promote genuine dialogue and understanding. Reflecting on this revision of the producer-listener relationship, one community radio program director wrote,

> the mantra of 'educating the audience' has driven many in community radio for years – the idea that our content is fine, what needs to change is the way listeners engage the radio listening experience. We have never really thought of ourselves as competing. We had the idea of community radio as being so special that we were in a different category (Reynolds, in Lewis and Booth1990, p. 123).

This sense of difference is a primary component of 'The Pacifica Paradox' identified by Lasar (2000, p. 105): 'Although these broadcasters believed in dialogue, they also wanted this dialogue to result in KPFA listeners reaching certain conclusions about crucial issues of the day.' In the present day, this ideological commitment to dialogue is manifested in the live, local, and public nature of community radio. As commercial and public radio have moved steadily to consolidate regional and national services, Sussman and Estes have found that 'community radio helps to maintain place identity and supports local civil society through critical citizen education and encouragement of active civic participation' (2005, 225).

These intentions have significant consequences for the practice of community radio. Attempting to recast the relationship between the programmer and the listener presents community broadcasters with a thorny dilemma: Is it feasible for a radio station to undertake a content-centered mission that reaches only a few individuals with alternative, even radical programming that is unavailable in its service area? Or, is a radio station obligated to undertake an audience-centered mission that reaches some measure of the general public, with programming that addresses the assessed needs and interests of the people under the station's signal? This study sought to explore the implications and consequences of this dilemma in more detail.

Methodology

The research first required an operational definition of a 'community radio organization.' Over the past fifty years, a wide range of self-identified organizations

have developed under a variety of authorities, including commercial companies, religious organizations, educational institutions, labor unions, state agencies, and indigenous peoples' groups (Girard, 1992). These organizations offer diverse approaches to organizing, operating, and programming a radio service. The membership of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, the largest organization of self-identified community radio stations in the U.S., includes over 175 members stations and agencies (NFCB, 2006). A few, including KQED, San Francisco, and WGBH, Boston, are professionally managed, major-market operations affiliated with National Public Radio. Many more, including KRCL, Salt Lake City, UT and KGNU, Boulder, CO, are programmed by local volunteers and managed by a core group of professionals. Still others, including KHEN-LP, Salida, CO, have only one employee, or none at all. While the five Pacifica stations and many Pacifica affiliates belong to the NFCB, the organization also includes rural stations that serve socially conservative audiences. Most NFCB stations are licensed to local, independent organizations, but some are licensed to school districts, some to student organizations, and others to sovereign Native nations.

While this diversity argues against designating a 'typical' community radio organization, these groups share some broad commonalities: 1) They operate as nonprofit, noncommercial organizations; 2) they are licensed stations, operating under the rules and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission; 3) they are licensed to organizations and/or institutions that are based in the communities served by their broadcast signals, and; 4) they engage local citizens as producers of regularly scheduled programs as a function of their stated missions. These characteristics constituted the

operational definition of a community radio organization, and were common to all of the research sites.

Using participant observation, document analysis, and in-depth interviewing methods at several sites and settings, the study investigated a complex web of motivations, behaviors, and relationships. The project sought evidence of some of the core values that underlie the practices of a small sample of community radio organizations, and observed how these values came into play in their operations and services. Between February and April of 2003, the researcher undertook qualitative studies at three community radio stations in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S (covering the states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho). One station was affiliated with the National Public Radio network (NPR), and one with Pacifica's national program service, while the remaining station's programming was locally produced in it is entirety. The NPR station had more than a dozen professional employees. In contrast, the local station had only five professionals on staff, and the Pacifica affiliate had none. Each station had more than 40 volunteers, and at each station volunteers produced the majority of regularly scheduled programs. At two stations, volunteer-produced programming represented over ninety percent of the schedule.

The researcher observed routine daily activities at each station. These activities included large and small group meetings, where professional and volunteer personnel engaged in discussions of station mission, goals, objectives and programming. A total of eight individuals (three professional managers; one paraprofessional manager; and four

volunteers, each with at least three years of experience) participated in in-depth interviews. In addition, the researcher examined a variety of documents from each station, including mission statements, job descriptions, training manuals, meeting minutes, in-house newsletters, listener guides, and online communications. These materials spoke directly to the organizational value of personal expression, audience service, and teamwork.

The station-based investigations were supplemented with additional qualitative data gathered at the 2003 Community Radio Conference in San Francisco, providing contact with 21 individuals associated with 12 stations across the West Coast, Midwest, Southeast, and New England. These individuals included professional station managers and program directors with multiple years of experience in large and small organizations; seasoned professional producers; and experienced and novice volunteer producers. Additionally, the author examined online text and graphic materials from 77 community radio stations around the United States, available through links on the NFCB web page to the organization's member stations.

Particular consideration was given to the manner in which individuals represented a station's mission through their words or behaviors. Where feasible, the subjects were probed to try to discover any historical components to these insights, and how conflicts between values might be experienced as part of the routine of providing a community radio service. Statements captured in interviews, written communications, and observed interactions between managers and volunteers provided the basis for assessing the values

of professionalism, especially as they relate to the conceptualization of a station's responsibility to provide a public service. Documents such as personnel policies and training materials provided another source for interpreting responsibilities, expectations, and attitudes towards professional standards and practices. Activities such as meetings and public events provided the opportunity to compare expected and observed behavior, especially as disagreements and conflicts arose. Stated organizational priorities were compared with observed routines and behaviors to discover if actions were consistent with or contradictory to the organization's intentions.

The raw data was captured in field notes and audio recordings. Using textual analysis techniques, the notes were examined for indications of significant or recurring elements of vocabulary, statements in context, patterns of behavior, and qualities and degrees of social interaction. Blocks of data were coded, categorized, and organized into tables to find correlations between beliefs and behaviors, and other descriptive qualities of community radio involvement, including organizational roles, and months or years of experience. This process revealed common patterns of understanding and experience, grounded in a wide range of values, including respect for diversity, social service, justice, accuracy, loyalty, leadership, understanding, compassion, consistency, reliability, and experimentation. The coded statements consistently pointed to three core values that were operationalized in terms that emerged from these patterns:

- **Creativity:** Statements and practices that prioritize artistic engagement, experimentation, and originality in problem solving, originality in form and content.

- **Free expression:** Statements and practices that prioritize diverse ways of being and knowing, respect for dissident opinions, and autonomy (particularly with respect to content decisions).

- **Professionalism:** Statements and practices that prioritize behavioral norms, including leadership, punctuality, accuracy, technical proficiency, conformity; and a commitment to public service.

The variables provided the basis for a typology that describes how these core values contribute to instances of cooperation and conflict in community radio organizations.

Findings

In a group discussion at the Community Radio Conference, the researcher opened with a general inquiry about the difference between community radio and its commercial counterpart. A young producer with less than two years experience responded immediately: 'In community radio, we have freedom from format.' [i] 'Yeah,' said another, more experienced volunteer producer, 'we have freedom from the clock.' 'It's the freedom to allow them to play whatever they want to say,' added another. An older, more experienced news producer expressed the insight in more traditional journalistic terms: 'We have more freedom from editorial constraints.' Consistently, new volunteers and professional program producers alike framed their understanding of community radio's mission in terms of freedom of expression. Mission statements, gathered from community radio stations around the U. S., underscored how some organizations place a high value on personal empowerment and free expression, articulated as the intention 'to promote the expression of ideas without close creative control or commercial consideration;' or, to 'promote pluralistic community expression [and] freedom of the press.' Community radio stations endeavor to carry out a 'mission of using radio to

empower individuals;' and to provide 'a forum for [the] discussion of public issues….

facilitation of community expression…. [to] challenge the cultural and intellectual

assumptions of our listeners' (NFCB, 2006). This language reflects the sort of

adventurous, risk-taking aspirations described by Barlow, Sakolsky, and others. In

contrast to these written assertions, few of the management personnel encountered during

the study revealed a strong orientation to free expression. The research indicates that the

belief in free expression provides a primary ideological motivation for individuals who

are relatively new to community radio enterprises, and remains strongest for those

individuals who have an interest in preserving their autonomy in content decisions.

Closely associated with the value of free expression, both producers and managers

expressed the belief that community radio offers a more creative approach to

broadcasting. 'Community radio – it's definitely artistic,' announced one of the young

producers at the conference gathering. A similar insight was shared in an entirely

different context by a program host, who invited the researcher to visit during his

regularly scheduled air shift: 'I like putting the records together myself. That's the fun

part of it.'[ii] Though he came to the studio with a plan for his program, he almost always

varied from that plan and preferred a more extemporaneous approach to programming,

based on his experience of more than eight years on the air: 'I'm perfectly capable of

bulling ahead on my own, moving from song to song. That's the part I really enjoy. I

never really know how it's going to turn out.' Like most producers, the informant

worked alone in the control room during his program, underscoring the degree of

autonomy he enjoyed in his position.

Program directors serve as the interface between the audience and the unique and original approaches of producers, and they understand that creativity in programming gives community radio its diverse and distinctive sound. At the same time, the program director has to 'represent the listener', said one informant.[iii] 'We're not just programming it from inside our own heads. We're sharing something we know, but not browbeating people with our tastes.'[iv] The balance between creative programming and service to a broad, public audience emerges in the same station's mission statement as the intent to provide 'innovative, diverse, quality programming which strives to reflect and serve the needs of the community.' This statement provides evidence of the competing interests that coexist in community radio programming: The first emphasizes the creative and expressive interests of content creators and managers, while the second emphasizes the responsibility to understand, interpret, and respond to the information and entertainment needs of the audience. While a large majority of the program producers encountered in this study worked in voluntary capacities, the program directors were among the smaller group of community radio professionals who receive monetary compensation for the efforts. The researcher had the opportunity to attend meetings of professional and volunteer personnel at two stations, and observed similar interchanges with management with regard to the intent of programming. As volunteer producers articulated their interest in challenging listeners with innovative and diverse program structures and elements, professional managers were far more likely to express their orientation to public service. 'We have to be conscious of who's out there,' said one station manager in a fairly heated exchange with an outspoken volunteer who was concerned about possible changes in

programming. The manager continued, 'We have a responsibility to the listeners. It's our job to connect the listener to what we're putting on the air.' At another meeting, the manager of another station articulated these concerns in similar terms: 'Our measure of success is how we serve our listeners. We have a responsibility to the audience.'[v] In both of these instances, the professional managers sat together on one side of the meeting room, while the volunteers sat together in large groups, opposite the managers. The physical arrangement of space provided a powerful metaphor for the divergence of the ideological and professional motivations of the individuals involved in these community radio organizations, where small groups of salaried managers work side by side with a much larger group of highly engaged producers, ranging from novices to thoroughly experienced volunteers and professionals.

Over the following weeks, the same pair of organizations faced substantial budget reductions, brought about by the protracted and general economic downturn of the previous eighteen months. Each station faced the loss of tens of thousands of dollars, threatening programs, jobs, and even the continued existence of one station. In both cases, the response to these circumstances involved difficult meetings where survival strategies were laid on the table for discussion. The staff and volunteers involved were deeply experienced, some having been engaged with the station for two decades or more. The managers tried to engage everyone in the decision making process in some manner. The agenda was clear, the need immediate, and the goal of continued survival apparently obvious. Even so, some station personnel could not see the relevance of the situation to the particular circumstances. In the context of an emergency meeting, one experienced volunteer said, 'A lot of this stuff I can't relate to. What are we doing here?'[vi] In the

midst of the same discussion of costs and services, another producer wanted to re-focus the debate to matters of the station's mission: 'Let's talk about diversity and creativity in programming.' Trying to navigate this contentious environment, the station manager responded, 'We're not an advocacy group. We need to find some efficiency.' As before, without prompting, the gathering arranged itself into two groups, with professional managers on one side of the room, opposed by volunteer producers on the other.

Analysis

While all of the people in these organizations were motivated to some degree by the content-driven philosophy articulated in their stations' mission statements, the research of Breed, Burns and Bantz demonstrates how different levels of experience and expertise lead to divergent attitudes about the relationship of the personal expression and professionalism in respect to the delivery of services to the audience. The wide range of attitudes and experiences in the community radio environment appears to exaggerate these divergences. Less experienced individuals may be more idealistic about challenging the audience, while more seasoned individuals recognize the need to engage the audience on more familiar terms. This research indicates that these divergent approaches are shaped by common and prevalent motivations that shape each individual's engagement in community radio:

- **Training -** formal processes of structured education, allowing the person to learn and perform in a particular function or role.

- **Confirmation -** informal processes of social and cultural adaptation experienced by the person; 'learning by listening and walking around'.

- **Consideration** - monetary and in-kind payments for services.

- **Gratification** - non-monetary, intangible fulfillment and satisfaction derived from an activity.

- **Promotion** - desire to advance to a higher position or goal; and

- **Media awareness** - A sense of place in the broader media market.

These motivations emerge with different degrees of emphasis across categories of participation in the informants to the study. For example, salaried fundraising personnel were consistently excited by the prospect of monetary recognition, in the form of donations to the station from listeners (consideration). While some volunteers shared this excitement, they expressed more enthusiasm for the listeners' recognition of the organization's noncommercial status (gratification). Similarly, while some producers possessed formal education in audio production (training), others had gathered most of their knowledge through informal contact with other volunteers in the context of station routines (confirmation). Volunteers regularly articulated an outspoken opposition to commercial radio (media awareness), while professionals regularly measured their organization's success in terms of Arbitron reports and other audience research (promotion). These opposing motivations contributed to individualized ideological interpretations and expressions of the station's mission, goals and objectives.

The analysis demonstrates how the values of creativity, free expression, and professionalism exist in dynamic relationships in community radio organizations, conditioned by circumstances, character, and understanding. For example, when a new volunteer at one of the sample stations learns programming techniques, the mentor (an
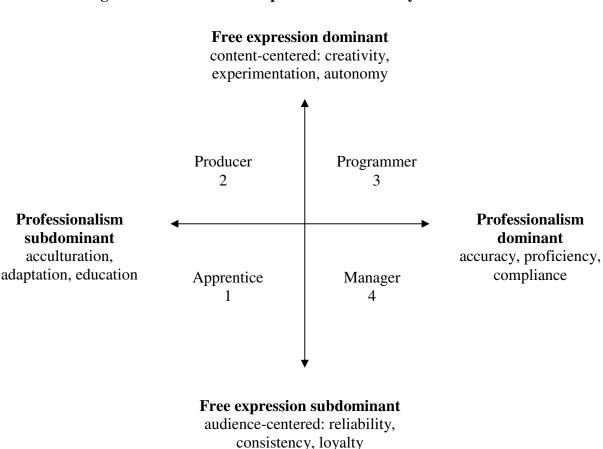
experienced employee) encourages the trainee to be creative, authentic, and technically precise. From the mentor's perspective these three values are equally meaningful or *dominant* in their capacity to contribute to appropriate performance. For the mentor, these values are also *complementary,* reinforcing each other to support the development of the citizen-producer. From the volunteer's position, these same values assume importance, in part, because they are being communicated *from a position of expertise and authority.* The volunteer must also be concerned with conforming to these expectations and learning new skills. For the volunteer, adaptability may be the dominant value: Authenticity and precision become *subdominant* values until the volunteer gains enough experience to negotiate these responsibilities comfortably.

Values often don't work together so neatly, particularly when knowledgeable, passionate, and experienced people are engaged on issues of program development and public service. In these circumstances, conflict can emerge. Within this project, each of the three stations observed was experiencing financial difficulties, requiring the station managers to make difficult decisions about the division of resources. In rendering such decisions, a manager was most concerned with efficiency, fairness and sustainability. Citizen-producers shared these concerns, but they were more sensitive to issues of disclosure and respect.

When the individuals are articulate and passionate about their values, these value tangles become intense, especially when they involve core issues of risk, autonomy, security, and mission. Such conditions, particularly as they arise around content

decisions, provide fertile ground for conflict. Figure 1 projects a typology of this

relationship of free expression and professionalism, as expressed in the statements,

behaviors, organizational objectives, and understandings of duties and responsibilities

observed and documented during the project. The typology illustrates the structure of the

value conflicts that arise in these community radio organizations, described across four

value-centered classifications of ideology and behavior.

Figure 1: Value relationships in U.S. community radio stations

Free expression dominant
content-centered: creativity,
experimentation, autonomy

Producer
2

Programmer
3

**Professionalism
subdominant**
acculturation,
adaptation, education

**Professionalism
dominant**
accuracy, proficiency,
compliance

Apprentice
1

Manager
4

Free expression subdominant
audience-centered: reliability,
consistency, loyalty

In the apprentice quadrant (1), the individual is new to the organization, its

expectations, and her responsibilities. The apprentice focuses on preparation, training,

and learning to navigate the station environment. Activities are generally limited,

structured, and supervised (as in a formal training program). In this quadrant, the primary

concerns are building fundamental skills and adapting to new circumstances. Free

expression and professionalism are both subdominant values.

In the producer quadrant (2), the individual has enough background and

experience to navigate specific circumstances, with a limited degree of guidance.

Initiatives may be creative, ambitious, and idealistic, with less concern for craft and

market conventions. Expressing enthusiasm for experimentation, and disdain for rigid

formats and content restrictions, citizen-producers are generally located in this quadrant.

Free expression is the dominant value.

In the programmer quadrant (3), the individual possesses a substantial amount of

preparation and experience to navigate creative, editorial and technical concerns with

minimal guidance. Equal attention is given to creative, craft, and market conventions and

organizational goals, and autonomy is emphasized. Program directors and other paid

professionals directly involved with content production are generally located in this

quadrant. Free expression and professionalism are dominant and complementary values.

In the manager quadrant (4), the individual has a substantial amount of

preparation and experience to navigate administrative and strategic concerns with

minimal guidance. These concerns may also involve creative, editorial, or technical

responsibilities. Initiatives focus on organizational goals and market conventions. Station

managers and those involved with financial concerns are generally located in this quadrant. Professionalism is the dominant value.

Conclusions

The scope of this study was limited by time, distance and availability. Additional research will be required to add detail to the model, to confirm if this model can be applied to similar stations, and to determine if these insights are relevant to situations of conflict and crisis in community radio more generally.

The issues explored in this study are not unique to contemporary community radio in the U.S. As radio gained popular prominence in the first decades of the 20th century, Adorno criticized the audience-centered paradigm for succumbing to market forces and commodifying human expression (1991, p. 31-34). Exposed primarily to commercial broadcasting services, American citizens have long experienced the act of radio listening as one of consumerism. McChesney observes,

> The propriety of private control for selfish purposes of society's productive
> resources is generally unassailable… the sanitized and accepted version of
> capitalism is one of free and equal individuals voluntarily entering into exchange
> in the marketplace. Challengers to the efficacy of the marketplace in broadcasting
> drew the raised eyebrows of the dominant culture as malcontent 'special
> interests,' incapable of meeting the public's needs in the marketplace (1994, p.
> 264).

The audience-centered paradigm has propelled American radio to create and satisfy audience demands for entertainment programming and individual choice. While the collateral restrictions of a regulated broadcasting environment render this freedom of choice an illusion, for the vast majority of listeners in the U.S., the market describes the nature of broadcasting services and guides their choices.

Notwithstanding the efforts of Hill, Milam and thousands who have followed them, the relationship between the American listener and radio broadcast programming remains much as it was when Cantril (1935) performed some of the first serious research into listener behaviors and habits:

> The listener may respond in any way he pleases.…He feels no compulsion to laugh at stale jokes, to applaud a bad actor, or to cheer the platitudes of a politician.… He can flatly and impolitely disagree, and comment as much as he likes.…If he has no emotions to express, he can use the sound issuing from his loudspeaker merely as a background for some more interesting activity. He does not hesitate to shove the radio performer out to the very periphery of consciousness, or to pay attention to him only when he pleases.…He can even turn the program off abruptly (and often does) when it loses its appeal (1935, p. 11).

Similarly, Lazersfeld observed that a program

> must not alienate its listeners, and hence caters to the prejudices of its audience.… Add to this the nightmare of all broadcasters, that the listener is free to tune in to competing stations whenever he pleases, and you have a picture of radio as a

stupendous technical achievement with a strongly conservative tendency in social matters (in Lewis and Booth 1990, p. 45).

This 'strongly conservative tendency' has conditioned the American listening experience for decades, and it continues to stand as the fundamental challenge to content-driven radio. While community stations encourage producers to explore the boundaries of free expression and creativity, in practice American listeners are just as likely to push back. U.S. audiences have long been conditioned to accept their confining yet comfortable role as consumers of entertainment and advertising in the media marketplace. These expectations lie at the core of American listening habits. While the intention may be to redefine the medium, community radio stations exist in the same environment as their market driven counterparts, offering the same services – music and information content. And even those stations that embrace the most radical approach to community radio must operate within the constraints and conventions imposed by regulatory forces and the technologies of production, transmission, and reception.

And so it appears that community radio faces a fundamental paradox, described by Salter (1980) as the conflict between the values of the citizen-producers and the values of an audience of consumers:

> Producers are drawn from the audience. They program in concert with what they feel are audience needs and aspirations. They fail as organizers if they remain insiders to the audience relationship and continue to share the audience view of

circumstances and potentiality. They also fail if they get cut off from the needs

and aspirations of the audience as their audiences understand them (1980, p. 113).

This project reveals another iteration the value conflict articulated by Salter: Program

directors and station managers were more likely to articulate the values of

professionalism, while the values of free expression and creativity were emphasized by

producers.

Driven by the passions of the individuals involved, value conflicts in community

radio can become much more than in-house squabbles. They can bubble over into angry

schisms that destabilize and threaten the viability of community radio organizations, as

happened within Pacifica. Value conflicts are nothing unusual in media organizations:

The historic trend towards consolidation in the commercial radio industry demonstrates

the extent to which the values of capitalism and entertainment have overwhelmed the

values of journalism and free expression in the business of broadcasting.

But community radio aspires to be something different, directly providing citizens

with the tools of radio to promote communication, understanding and tolerance. Lacking

the financial resources of commercial media, community radio is sustained by the

vigorous passions of its producers, managers, and listeners to achieve this goal. Yet these

passions are also capable of obscuring community radio's idealistic mission. Unlike

commercial enterprises, it is not possible for a community radio station to achieve a

financial advantage over opposing ideological interests: Disagreements are overcome

through processes of debate and compromise. Such processes can be lengthy, complex

and labor-intensive, drawing attention and energy away from the organization's challenges to serve an audience and survive in the media marketplace. At the same time, the financial well being of a community radio station depends on the consistent and successful representation the station's mission, goals, and values to its contributing listeners. For this reason, value conflicts can be especially troubling for stations that are facing financial hardship

The people who create and sustain American community radio hold their values deeply and tenaciously, sometimes out of proportion to the general public's engagement of the ideals of civic engagement, pluralism and democracy. If passion drives the mission of these organizations, then it's important for them to understand how value clashes can threaten a station's mission and services. Conversely, it is perhaps even more important to understand how these powerful motivations can be marshaled to create a positive climate that promotes social change through the media.

The process of assessing value relationships provides the basis for a consistent description of the nature of American community radio and its capacity to provide citizen-driven, audience-centered content to a station's listeners. These value relationships provide some insight into the community radio station's ability to meet the challenges or market competition, while pursuing opportunities to create innovative and imaginative programs than can attract an audience and serve the station's mission. Value relationships also provide a basis for developing strategies to successfully negotiate incidences of conflict. As Bantz suggests, such conflicts are a necessary and beneficial

fact of media enterprises, ultimately making a positive contribution to the station's ability

to offer programming that serves the station's mission, while being attractive, engaging,

and relevant to the listeners' daily lives. These value relationships exemplify the delicate

balance that must be maintained in American community radio between content-centered

and audience-centered objectives, if stations are to continue their mission of service.

Endnotes

[i] Preceding and subsequent quotations from field notes and audio recordings, San Francisco CA, 19 – 22 March 2003.
[ii] Preceding and subsequent quotations from field notes, Eugene, OR, 24 March 24 2003.
[iii] Field notes, Eugene OR, 14 February 2003.
[iv] Preceding and subsequent quotations from field notes, Eugene OR, 24 March 2003
[v] Field notes, Eugene, OR, 19 February 2003
[vi] Preceding and subsequent quotations come from field notes, Eugene OR, 17 April 2003.

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