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Radio Management Structure
And Problems Encountered In Personnel Management
In The Singapore Broadcasting Corporation

By

Sakuntala Gupta
Radio Broadcasting Management: Organisation and Personnel Development

Radio Management Structure and Problems Encountered in Personnel Management in the S'pore Broadcasting Corporation

Good morning and a warm welcome to all foreign visitors attending this workshop. Before going on to describe the management structure of Radio in the S'pore Broadcasting Corporation to which I belong, I'd like to spend a few minutes to give you some facts and figures about S'pore. This will enable us to better understand the place of radio and some of the problems encountered in personnel management in radio.

S'pore consists of the island of S'pore and some 58 islets within its territorial waters. The total land area, including the islets is 626 sq km. From these figures, it is quite apparent that we are indeed a small country .... smaller than some of the cities in your countries. S'pore has a population of 2.6 million with a growth rate of 1.3%.

There are three major ethnic groups: the Chinese constitute 75% of the population, the Malays 15% and the Indian just over 6%. Other minorities form the remaining 2.4% of the population. The sex ratio is 1036 males to every 1000 females, so female power has yet to catch on at least as far as statistics are concerned.

Because of our multi-racial composition, S'pore has four official languages, Malay, Chinese (Mandarin to be exact),
Tamil and English. Malay is the national language and English is the language of administration.

The general literacy rate, defined as the number of persons for every 100 persons aged ten years and above is estimated at 87.6%, with 93.3% literacy amongst males and 81.7% amongst females. So here again, the man appear to be slightly the wiser species than the ladies.

Next, religion. The people enjoy freedom of worship. The main religions are Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism.

Set against this general backdrop is the SBC, which became a statutory board in 1980, taking over the functioning of the former Radio and Television S’pore. Since this is a course on Radio Personnel Management, I shall confine this introduction to Radio, and not discuss our sister medium TV today.

A constant companion for more than one million S’poreans everyday, SBC Radio has been at the forefront of change. From five stations in 1985, Radio now has nine stations with a total of 153 staff.

A quick look now at the organisational structure in SBC’s Radio Division. The Radio Directorate comprises the Director, an Asst Director, a Senior Controller, and an executive officer. The Radio Division of SBC has nine services in all, four broadcasting in English, two in Mandarin, two in Malay and one in Tamil. Each service has a controller in charge of administ-
ration of the division. Under the Controller, is an executive producer presenter, and there are posts for a number of PPs in each service.

And what do the different services broadcast? First the English services: Radio 1 with a staff strength of 19 is an English service with information and entertainment type of programmes. It uses the chat-show format, and audience participation and News-on-the-Hour are part of its output. The Perfect 10 is a 24 hour contemporary hit station for the young and trendy with 10 producer presenters. Class 95, with a staff strength of 9 is an 18 hour station playing adult contemporary music. And Radio 5 is a classical music station broadcasting 18 hours a day. It puts out magazine and other types of programmes on the arts and culture.

Then there are the Mandarin services: Radio 3 is an information and entertainment channel with 31 staff members, and FM 93.3 a mandarin pop-music station - with 9 members.

There are 2 Malay Services: Radio 2 with 23 producer presenters, and taking on an information - entertainment kind of format, and Ria 98.7 is a Malay music station with 9 PPs.

Finally Tamil. There is 1 Tamil service R4 catering to Singapore’s Indian population - Staff strength 15.

What sort of programmes, you may ask does radio produce. Entertainment is the top priority with the nine stations combined devoting an average of 80% of airtime to such
programmes. Then, there are magazines, short items to be inserted into chat shows, dramas, quizzes, listener participation programmes using the telephone etc.

As in any other organisation, radio faces certain problems in the realm of personnel management.

High attrition rate in the English services and low attrition rate in the language services. The high turnover rate is due to the fact that once producers-presenters become well-known, jobs are easy to find outside — jobs which don’t require the long and odd hours or the kind of commitment which broadcasting requires. Working in radio, often eats into the social life of the young and after the initial glamour wears off, they look for less stressful jobs elsewhere. And these jobs are not hard to find for someone who has become something of a public figure on the air. Also there is a tendency for the English educated to leave for further studies, or to migrate. And so English radio constantly finds itself training new staff. Once they mature, a good number of them leave, and the whole cycle starts again.

Next, the low attrition rate for the Language services. It appears that jobs are not so easy to find for those in the language services... and so they stay on. Some can keep up with the times — others can’t.
And then comes the situation when we find ourselves saddled with people who are not versatile enough to cope with the changes of the times. So in the long run, programming suffers because of the lack of new blood.

Presentation style in broadcasting has changed in recent years. There are some older staff in all services who are not able to keep up with changing trends in presentation work and consequently their contribution to Radio is limited. As a result, the presentation standard is inconsistent.

Yet another problem is that with Radio and TV side by side, priority is very often given to TV, and suitable radio staff are often pulled in to do television work. So as a result, their work in radio suffers because of the greater attention given to TV.

Then there are problems in recruiting production staff particularly in the English and Chinese services. This is difficult because broadcasting requires specialised skills. Besides a good voice and diction, a broadcaster has to have a pleasant personality and good communication skills, and in a small country like S'pore with a small talent pool, suitable people are hard to find.

Another problem is that as a statutory body, Radio has been hitherto bound by government rules and regul-
ations. It has not had the autonomy to hire and fire. Besides, for a long time, SBC Radio has been the only national broadcasting station and there are perceptions in the audience's mind that we are just the mouthpiece of the government. And when competitors have sprung up, on Batam island and more recently in S'pore, audiences' curiosity has naturally been aroused and fragmented our listenership.

One important area in personnel management is the staff appraisal system. SBC has adopted Shell's HAIR quality system where staff's career paths are charted according to helicopter qualities, power of analysis, imagination and sense of reality. Staff's annual increments are decided according to a set of guidelines drawn up by management, and as in any other place, management and staff often don't see eye to eye about the monetary results of the appraisal.

In conclusion, I'd like to stress that altho' I have pointed out some of the problem areas in the realm of personnel management, SBC Radio is constantly re-examining and reviewing its programmes, promotional activities, and publicity strategies. The ability to change quickly according to the demands of the market
forces is seen as vital to our survival in an increasingly competitive area of mass communications. The management and staff in SBC are aware of these demands and are constantly reviewing and fine-tuning its on and off-air programme related activities.