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Issues in Managing Television Programming (with direct reference to the training of broadcasters)

Title: "PERSPECTIVES ON TRAINING IN BROADCASTING"
Submitted by: Dr Paul Seow

The changing face of broadcasting: Almost everything about broadcasting has changed, since I joined the broadcasting world some 30 years ago. There is virtually no area in broadcasting where the speed of change has not reshaped broadcasting. Many countries now have at least 20 channels. Some offer general entertainment, some news and information. An increasing number of them are specialist channels targeted at different interest groups with the audiences are split into niches representing different sectors of the market. With the advent of digital technology, computers have completely changed the face of broadcasting.

New technology has continually challenged broadcasters to invent new ways to achieve new and better results. It offers more and more sophisticated tools in every sphere of broadcasting. As a result a whole new set of skills has arrived to displace skills for equipment that is now obsolete. Broadcasters are not only able to do the same things much faster but they are able to do far more. Few broadcasters would admit, but it is a fact that many of the traditional training programs no longer serve a useful purpose. A quick cursory survey will confirm that training in broadcasting has not really taken any significant step forward. In relative terms, I suspect, it has perhaps taken a few steps backwards. The changing face of broadcasting has profoundly affected developments in the training of broadcasters. I believe it is time to take a serious look at our ability to cope with the changes by, not only developing new relevant training programs, but also by reconstructing our whole approach towards training in broadcasting.

The transformation of broadcasting as a global industry has also affected developments in broadcast training. It has increased spending, with the redistribution of audience share as well as industry revenues. It has completely overhauled the broadcast industry both in scale and scope, in form and in substance. The continuing pressure to change has forced the entire management structure of broadcasting to be reorganized the world over. Because broadcast training has traditionally not been integrated as part of the mainstream development of broadcasting activities, it has unwittingly been left aside in the wake of the new emerging priorities.

Then and now:
I got into broadcasting in the late 60s. Well into the 80s, broadcasting was still the exclusive preserve of the broadcaster. Broadcast professionals managed broadcasting. They were their own managers and administrators. This lasted for some two decades, supported by public funding and advertising fees. Professionalism was their totem pole, revered. At the turn of the 90s, in less than a decade the tide of change set in. Their totem pole was brought down. As professional practices in broadcasting became more complex, administrators had to be brought in to take over the administrative functions leaving broadcasters to concentrate on professional developments, while they participated as part of the management team. Professionals learnt to work with administrators. With the support of the administrative leadership, the new brand of leadership orchestrated a complete paradigm shift. It cleared up all professional excesses to put broadcasting on a higher gear, in preparation for the next stage of development - towards a privatized entity.
The baton was then passed on to another successor, this time, from the private sector. The emphasis took another new turn in favor of market forces. The paradigm shift made the industry more entrepreneurial. It took bold measures to bring broadcasting into the marketplace. This time it was not only the broadcasters who were affected but also the administrators to boot. They had to make the paradigm shift as well. So the wave of change continues to sweep.

The professional phase was generally product-driven. Professionals saw themselves as the legitimate sons and daughters of the profession. The professional favored evolution as a means of achieving the highest standards of program production. It saw training as a means to improve standards of professionalism through evolution.

The administrative phase on the other hand was driven by resource management and laid emphasis on performance measurement criteria and on systems. Administrators think of themselves as trustees. The training budget for broadcasting during this period increased. The training dollar was more evenly spread and shared with other sectors of broadcasting, including Production Services, Engineering, the Administration and the Finance divisions as well. Training was the means for the industry to navigate by. It helped to set broadcasting along its new direction. Its new destinations were, a changed mind-set, a new orientation, and a new perspective in preparation for more changes to come.

The third phase was the entrepreneurial phase. It was very sensitive to customer economics and was driven by opportunity - market-driven, if you will. Entrepreneurs generally saw themselves as the business brokers. Training was perceived as a cost center. Training must have lost some ground at this stage. Only essential training services were retained.

It seemed to me that these stages represented a cycle of events. The entrepreneurial stage exploited resources to harvest in profits. Resources, of course especially human resource was finite. Like any other resource it would have to be replenished if it was spent. HR must ensure that it was either willing to pay competitive salaries for the scarce availability of trained personnel from outside of the organizations, or help develop training facilities to provide a continuing supply for trained manpower.

I was in Indonesia just last month. The CEO of a large station there told me that he had already acquired a license to develop a training center to ease the shortage of trained manpower there. However, he was obliged to hold back his plans. He concluded that the task to develop training was beyond the scope of even a big broadcasting station. Getting suitable trainers, for example, was a problem. He was already considering the possibility of collaborating with academics and other training institutions. The project had now been put on hold. This illustrated not only the presence of a ready market for the training of broadcasters but more importantly, the need for training to escalate in scale and scope, if it was to be viable. It also pointed to the fact that training might be too costly for any single station to bear, if it should decide to go solo to develop its own training schemes to meet its own need. Training consortiums, working collectively with other stations for example, might provide a better chance for success.

In-house training:
Training in Broadcasting has all too often been overlooked, more often than not, through omission rather than commission. The fact stands that to-date, broadcast training is sadly still in the state of ad-hocracy. The status in training among broadcaster has remained static for quite some time now, with training often taking
the form of part-time or makeshift efforts. A greater part of the training in broadcasting has been no more than the age-old practice of apprenticeship (or on-the-job training) that goes back to 2100 BC when the Code of Hammurabi was instituted. The paradox then is this. While there is semblance of training, the methodology applied has been quite out of step with contemporary practices in training. A serious anachronism exists. Makeshift training programs also, have neither the scale nor scope, to cope with the increasing demand for newer skills. To be fair broadcasters by and large cannot be expected to have highly specialized training skills. Training belongs to another industry - the training institutes, polytechnics and so on. A lot of lip service has been paid but little achieved in terms developing on-going training programs by broadcasters. I see more tokenism (albeit unintentional) than serious efforts to develop training for the broadcast profession. Meanwhile the growth of specialized fields in broadcasting has created new demands for training. They have since overtaken our ability to cope with them. It is time for broadcasters to address these new emerging needs for training with a view of filling up the vacuum that presently exists.

A fragmented approach:
Professionals generally favor on-the-job training. Often on-the-job training is supplemented by some lecture sessions. The content in on-the-job training, as it stands is nothing more than an exposure to a random selection of events as they occur in the course of their daily work. It is a fragmented approach. Too much is left to chance. While it is convenient and serves immediate needs, often it leaves out big gaps of information. Each cohort of trainees may learn a different set of skills, depending upon what the broadcasting station is doing during that particular period of time. The random selection of activities is premised on chance rather than on a structured plan. As such, at the end of the on-the-job training stint, no cohort of trainees may have acquired a complete set of skills. If learning is carefully programmed, contents will have to be sequentially arranged. For example, before the trainee learns how to edit, he has to know the grammar for editing. Prerequisites and entry behaviors have to be established. In on-the-job training, activities for learning may not present themselves in any particular sequence that favors learning. A good training program not only specifies the exact body of knowledge the candidate has to acquire but also establishes the level of competence to be achieved (within a specific timeframe). Broadcasters will do well to work with professional trainers, such as the instructional technologist.

Initiatives taken by broadcasters:
A good training program virtually guarantees that learning takes place. What needs to be done, is for broadcasters to distill their years of valuable professional experience, arrange them sequentially so that prerequisites are first established, encapsulate these rudiments into a syllabus, and find ways and means to transfer this body of information successfully to the trainee. I believe it is time for broadcasters, especially those who have a say in the management of broadcasting, to address the issue of training seriously.

I recall a discussion at the AIBD on the need to establish a guild for broadcasters to promote, protect and regulate the profession making training its premier goal. Broadcasters in our region generally do not belong to any professional body that oversees professional practices. In the absence of such a guild, training has very much been left to each of the stations to manage on its own. Professional conduct demands that professionals accept a standard code of professional practice, through training.

At present when we are at the threshold of a burgeoning industry our priorities appear to have been overtaken by the appeal of its wide potential for business development. It has consumed so much time and effort that, regrettably, broadcasters may have overlooked that training in many ways, is the door to that...
potential. Training has to be rediscovered and seriously developed to catch up with the late start-up. It must have a place in the corporate vision and mission of broadcasting establishments.

The new genre:
Notwithstanding my comments, I know of outstanding broadcasters (many of them expatriates) who have successfully made their way into broadcast training. They have started as stringers or free-lance trainers, on a part-time basis. Some have got together to establish training consortiums and consultancies. This is a healthy sign. In a way, these are the milestones that mark the emergence of an embryonic existence of training in broadcasting from among the ranks of the broadcasters themselves. They are the new genre of broadcasters - the broadcast trainer. Basically, these broadcasters have picked up training skills through trial and error. Some have made training their new career. I have worked with many of these independent trainers from UK, the USA and Australia. I have involved local counterparts to work in tandem with them in training programs. The local counterparts find no difficulty to serve side by side with these foreign consultants, often doing the same job. There is however a slight hitch. Broadcasting establishments in our region are very conservative. They are not yet ready to release the local counterparts by sponsoring them and giving them recognition as pioneering trailblazers - the broadcast trainer. It is too early to say if such a development will take root in our region. Hopefully it will take place sooner than later. It is time that broadcasters recognize and accept responsibility for the growth of their own profession. Broadcasting establishments must be willing to help professionals expand the scope of their responsibilities by allowing them to move further on, into the field, as broadcast trainers.

Foreign consultancies can be very useful. The industry must enrich its own experience and practices. It has to be recognized countries in our region are consumers of technology. The countries of origin for these technologies will therefore have had a head start in the use of the newly developed technology. The countries that adopt these new technologies later will do well to learn from their experiences by importing trainers from the countries that have successfully exploited the application and utilization of these new technologies. Consultancies are a means of tapping this rich source of experience. I look forward to the day when outstanding broadcasters in our region will emulate their expatriate counterparts to establish themselves as broadcast trainers and get together to set up their own training consultancies. Good consultancies can bring about savings in the long run. It can accelerate the pace in the transfer of technology (in relation to both hardware and management skills).

I have colleagues from broadcasting who are presently teaching in the Schools of Communication in universities and polytechnics. They belong to this rare emerging breed. They are our pioneers spearheading the growth of the new genre in broadcasting profession - the broadcast trainer. I know it is not easy for them. The lure for the growing dollar in a fast growing broadcast industry is itself a disincentive for broadcasters to venture into the field of training.

Broadcasting companies are already competing for trained staff. The practice of poaching of staff is now quite common. Poaching bypasses the need to source out for trainers. It can meet an immediate need if the price is right, but it is generally a short-term remedy. Training is likely to yield a more durable solution in the long term. I would urge broadcasting establishments to help build up a cohort of broadcast trainers from among their own ranks.
One small step for the establishment but a giant step for the broadcaster:
To switch over from a broadcaster to become a trainer, is a giant step few successful broadcasters are willing to take. They have to venture into a completely new territory. Not all of them may succeed. Training is often perceived as, an interruption to the development of a broadcaster's career, rather than as a natural progression. Often training appears to take him away from the practice of broadcasting. The longer his stint as a trainer, the longer will he have to be away from his practice - his field of specialization (his bread and butter) and the more out of touch he is likely to become. Meanwhile, someone else has to do his job in his absence, while he serves as a trainer. If his replacement is inadequate, he may get back his old job. If his substitute can manage just as well or better, he may well find himself out of a job. To go into training therefore has its attenuating risk. It is not a popular move. It may need institutional incentives, to encourage broadcasters with an interest in training to cross over to take up the challenge to serve as a broadcast trainer. A dilemma develops, the better the broadcaster, the more secure is he in his job, and the less is the reason why he should want to take that risk. This may mean that training will have to settle with the less competent professionals as trainers. A conscious effort has to be made by broadcasters themselves to invest in training, allowing the more able members of their ranks to move up the ladder to undertake training as a recognized built-in progression in their career development plans.

Networking:
Broadcasting requires people with multi-disciplinary skills - the engineer, the producer, people from the theatre arts, artists dealing with visual arts, writers to produce scripts, journalists, political scientists, newscasters, anchorpersons, actors, the sound man - and so the list goes on. All of them have their own special roles in broadcasting. The scope in broadcasting has grown so much that it has spilled over extending its parameters across new boundaries. Collaboration with other institutions is not only a natural extension- it is a necessity.

Let me give you an example. At one of the training sessions conducted by a consultant at SBC (Singapore Broadcasting Corporation), he asked the group, "To what industry does SBC belong?" and "What is its primary product?" It turned out that the TV industry was not about broadcasting but about the leisure industry. From its client's or viewer's perspective, broadcasting was competing for his leisure hours. It was not just a matter of watching TV programs. Television viewing was only one of the many options he had, to make use of his leisure hours. Once identified it seemed obvious that television from the viewer's perspective was indeed about how he should spend his leisure.

What about the product it sold? The broadcasters had only one answer, "Programs!" That had to be it! As it turned out the product it was selling was not programs but airtime. That was what broadcast stations sell. That was where their profits were derived. Programs were the attractions or packages offered by broadcasters to sell airtime. So, it was quite possible for a broadcast station to produce no programs at all, and yet be profitable. A station may air programs from any source, without having to produce a single program. I believe reexamining premises is useful for broadcast training as well. Perspectives of broadcasters would have to expand beyond their customary limits. We need to look outside our own broadcasting station for opportunities for collaboration.

Collaborating:
I believe collaboration is the key to training development. I see an imminent need for broadcasters to work in collaboration with instructional technologists and with academics. Harness the experience of the broadcaster together with the experience of the professional trainer or academic. Make sure they pull in the same direction. Develop new synergies. Catalyze the training program and give broadcasters a good kick-start.
The advantages through collaboration are obvious:

a. The focus is on solving problems through team action - working in partnership or through mergers.
b. Collaboration allows the broadcaster to admit fresh ideas from professional trainers, giving a fresh approach and offering more options. It prevents inbreeding. Social control and self-discipline through collaboration allow broadcasters to participate and take responsibilities for development within a wider framework of expertise.
c. Dialogue is created across the spectrum of broadcast specializations within the establishment so that training is in consonance with the imperatives set by each area of specialization. It often cuts across red tape creating a more open environment and helps coordinate functions afresh.
d. It eases broadcasters from having to take on the responsibilities as curriculum developers, an area they are not too familiar with and allows them to dedicate their attention in their particular areas of specialization, broadcasting.

Training, alongside manpower planning and a strongly focused corporate vision, are the keys in human resource development.

For training to be meaningful it is necessary for the level of training materials to be raised a few rungs above utilitarian requirements. There must be room for innovation, experimentation and improvements so that the trainee may perform at optimum level rather than just a level of sufficiency.

Managing human resources:
Training is part of human resource development. Some organizations make a distinction between Human Resource Development (HRD) and Human Resource Management (HRM). The distinction is academic. What we need to agree to is, for training to be managed as an essential corporate division, taking full responsibility for its unique and specialized role in manpower development, in broadcasting. It needs more than just the support from broadcasters. It needs the support of both the management and its HR division. Since broadcasters form the core in the broadcast industry, HRD has to recast its policies and introduce innovative procedures to help develop and nurture the training division. HRD in broadcasting is a pioneering field. There is no precedence to go by. To postpone the issue may allow the shortfall in training to be further aggravated.

Expressed in its simplest form, the vision of HRD, for training is, people building and its mission building people. The advantage of establishing a training division is more than just to increase capacity for the training of broadcasters. It is to help the corporation itself to become a learning organization. Training programs in areas like management, financial management or organizational skills are readily available in the marketplace. The training of broadcasters however, is not. This means that TV stations having to provide broadcast training is obliged to first encourage the competent broadcasters it employs to take that big step to serve as trainers. The HR division will have to establish its own strategies to achieve this.

Prospects in retrospect:
Broadcasters had themselves long recognized the importance of training. More than 30 years ago broadcasters within our region established a joint training institute, the AIBD (Asia-Pacific Institute of
Broadcast Development) in Kuala Lumpur. It was established as an adjunct, to quickly train manpower at a time when the region was establishing TV stations. Provisions of Z-day to 3-week courses served well. Today, such Band-Aid programs would no longer be able to meet the challenges for training.

Training had always been costly. The AIBD once conducted a questionnaire survey of training needs from among its members. The number of the variety of courses requested for, from the responses received, was staggering. It was simply impractical for the AIBD to meet every one of the requests. Imagine the number of trainers it would have to engage for each of the areas listed. It would cost too much. A set of criteria had to be introduced to manage supply and demand.

The AIBD would only consider developing a course if there were enough candidates from among its members to make up a good-sized class and if there was a continuing interest for such a course. Provision for training would have to be carefully rationalized. To incur expenses to develop a course for a single run was really not good investment policy. It was not viable unless there was economy of scale and scope. Collaboration - sharing the cost to develop and conduct training programs among stations could provide that economy of scale and scope to service the collective needs of broadcasters in the region. It is a means for cost sharing.

Dato Abdullah Muhamad, then the Director of the AIBD, at one time considered the need for the AIBD to make a transition from a training institute to become an academy. This he observed was contingent upon of the collective will of broadcasters themselves. Only they could to bring it about.

From institute to academy:
The primary source for recruitment of broadcasters had always come from the tertiary institutions of learning - universities or polytechnics. The candidates could come from any faculty, law, political science, history, engineering, arts, social science, communication science, or the performing arts. Those recruited for broadcasting often had to make a cold start when they joined broadcasting without training experience in broadcasting. But what if broadcasters and the academics were willing to collaborate? The synergy generated would certainly be of mutual benefit to both sides - to the academics and to the broadcasting profession itself. The idea of an academy where the academia and broadcasting can work together would be a good area to explore.

The academia and the industry:
What is exciting is the fact that training in broadcasting has also developed outside of the broadcasting profession. There exists already a wealth of resources and experience in the field of training. Many tertiary institutions of learning offer courses in broadcasting. Generally, these courses form part of their efforts to provide first hand experience in managing media especially in areas like political science, the performing arts, journalism the social and communication sciences. The commonly held view makes claim that, the approach of tertiary institutions differs from that of the practitioner's because they are too theoretical. On the other hand, the practitioner's approach is perceived as inadequate, with an emphasis on meeting utilitarian needs. So, little attention is paid to theoretical premises and ideals. I assume these are only half-truths. In truth, they are complementary. A good training program must have both elements, a good theoretical understanding (rational cognition) as well as a high order of proficiency in a wide repertoire of skills (psychomotor competence).
I come from the ranks of the broadcaster. I have served on the advisory committees for communication studies in at least three tertiary institutions. I have learnt to place much confidence in the quality of their staff and their communication programs. These establishments already have well-trained personnel able to distil the content from the practice of broadcasting in the industry, synthesize the content to form a curriculum, and offer credible courses which are certifiable. Many of the textbooks on production techniques for example, have been written by academics for use in colleges and as broadcasting has benefited from the universities rather than by practitioners, managerial and organizational expertise of the administrator and the entrepreneur, it now needs to admit the academic into its ranks. I believe the results will be just as compelling.

One more observation! It was the vogue in the 60's and 70's for American universities to establish teaching television studios. But to upgrade the facilities with every new generation of equipment was quite another matter. Even the broadcast industries themselves, have found the cost of upgrading and updating their equipment to be prohibitive. In the early 90s I encountered an interesting development in the USA. I found the industry providing back-to-back training programs. Since academic institutions could not afford to acquire expensive new generation equipment, it was left to industries with such equipment to get best mileage from their investment of new generation equipment, by offering training programs. This reduced the idle time of their expensive machines and helped to maximize their investment. Fees or salaries to employ experts able to operate the sophisticated equipment were also costly. So, their contracts for services required the experts to carry out training as part of their duties. This helped them justify the high cost of the new equipment.

As the demand for training escalates, I see this as a possible model of development for our region. It is more likely for the industry to be equipped with state-of-the-art equipment than the academia. Collaboration therefore has its advantages. With skilled teachers/trainers for the universities and polytechnics and state-of-the-art equipment from the industry, there seems to be a lot of potential and synergy, not yet exploited. Also, faculty members from the academia may need to update their own repertoire of skills through an internship program within the industry, familiarizing themselves with state of the art technology and practices in broadcasting.

I believe, training is at its best when it is geared to meet future needs. The ability for training to keep pace with developments in the industry is possibly no longer an option but a prerequisite. Radical as this may sound, it has to be the vision of any self-respecting training program - to get the best by collaborating with other agencies and cut down unnecessary spending.

Spin off:
Experienced broadcast trainers often find innovative ways to solve problems to meet their training needs. Besides taking on training responsibilities per se, there is no reason why R and D cannot be one of the functions of the broadcast trainer. It is far safer to experiment within a training situation than in a real situation where unsuccessful experiments may not be tolerated. R and D within the training division will help trainers to keep abreast of developments in the industry. R and D can be that valuable link between training and practice. Trainers need to take joint responsibilities together with their counterparts in the industry to help it grow.
Conclusion:
For change to succeed it has to be managed. Training is a powerful and efficient agent to help broadcasters engineer change. Training succeeds best when it is self-directed with authority and autonomy to regulate its activities. To ensure a high level of relevance to the practice of broadcasting, it has to be conceived within the larger framework of the corporate vision and mission of the broadcast organization. To neglect training now is to compromise the future.