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Value Concepts In Training Programmes
For Media Practitioners

By

L P Medis
MEDIA WORKSHOP ON COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN SRI LANKA

Organised by

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VALUE CONCEPTS IN TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

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The number of conferences on Communication that have taken place in the recent past is staggering. Not a week or a month passed without a national, regional or international conference on some aspect of communication not to mention seminars, symposia and workshops. As long as communication problems persist conferences will continue to be held to ensure a meeting of minds and to facilitate the change of ideas, which will lead to the solution of such problems. In the context of the new World Information and Communication order Media Practitioners in our country and other developing countries should and will have to meet more often at national and regional levels to identify their roles and to establish functional parameters.

In Sri Lanka as a country where there are no restrictions to work in media we are yet to identify and agree on a common definition describing who is a media practitioner. This terminology is used in a plural sense in this essay to indicate all media persons working in Programme, Production and Engineering in Radio, Television and the Press. Yet we the media practitioners claim that we have the right to know and to comment or to produce programmes on all aspects of way of our life - Agriculture, Health, Economics, Politics, Administration and so on. But if we are to continue with this type of thinking it is vital to get ourselves professionally enriched and articulated. One of the considerations in doing so would be to design a professional training package to meet present and future needs and demands of the society.

Today our country and may developing countries are caught up in the rapidity of social change especially in technology, the new develops at an exponential rate. In industry methods of production and distribution succeed one another in quick succession and organisational structures are revamped time and again to fit changing methods or to meet changing conditions. Such changes constitute massive pressure on the communication fabric and media practitioner is forced to re-examine its nature and synthesise anew over and over again. With the environment changing and the habits of today potentially inadequate for tomorrow the need deepens in media persons for a pasture of flexibility and capability to make changes when appropriate.

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The need is stronger in the media structures and set-ups challenged by their 
broad constituencies to assume additional tasks and to adapt to the new. 
This situation demands the making if the media practitioner.

The good media practitioners are skilled members of an exacting profession 
trained to a high level. Goodwill is a poor substitute for professional competence 
in media work. Knowledge and understanding about a subject cannot overcome 
failures in communication. Inadequate professionalism can quite unwillingly 
reinforce a poor self image of the audience or may fail to spark innate abilities 
of the audience and neither the media practitioner nor the audience may ever 
be aware of the avoidable tragedy caused by professional incompetence. The 
key to professional quality is the quality of members of media practicing 
community as a whole and individually. In Sri Lanka the need to ensure the 
best utilisation of media resources, develop each individual's innate capacity 
and improve the professional status of media practitioners reinforce the 
argument in favour of specialised media training.

In our country and many other countries the presence within the profession 
of large numbers of media persons with inadequate education and little or no 
professional training prejudices the creditibility of the force of media 
practitioners as a professional body worthy of respect and consideration and 
leads to division within the profession particular groups of media practitioners 
perhaps graduated within profession working in prestige media organisations 
tend to dissociate themselves from the generality of the profession in an 
ttempt to make apparent their special claim to higher public recognition. 
The anomalous situation is not unknown whereby more prestige may be attached 
to an untrained media person because of the level of the organisation in 
which he is working than a trained person in another type of an organisation. 
However, at present the recognition is growing that specific media skills are 
important and cannot be acquired by simple exposure to the working situation 
through a process of professional osmosis.

The professional media practitioner resembles the elephant in one respect, 
he is difficult to describe but impossible to mistake. It is obvious however that 
the competent media practitioner of high reputation has attributes covering all 
three domains of Bloom's taxonomy, cognitive affective and psychomotor: 
his knowledge, attitudes and skills should match the demands of the job and 
all can be affected positively by suitable training.
The reputation of the media practitioner depends largely on the value of judgments of those whom he comes to professional contact, brother media practitioners, managers, employers, opinion leaders, and other members of society. He is good so far as he is judged to be good; objective criteria cannot be exhaustive in this regard. Nevertheless to be professionally competent the media practitioner must have knowledge of audience development, of the material to be conveyed and methods of conveying it, of the culture of the audience, which may not be of his own, and of some interest of his own. His skills must enable him to communicate, advise and guide his audience, administrate and manage his professional activities and respond sensitively to the recipient of his thoughts and messages, community and the culture with which he is involved. His attitudes should be positive without being aggressive so that his example is likely to be followed as he transmits explicitly and implicitly the national aims, ideals moral and social values. In essence a good media practitioner has self respect and professional pride. This is a challenge for all media practitioners in Sri Lanka.

In this regard what has been observed in Sri Lanka is that media Practitioners acquire specialists skills that they require incidentally as they practise their profession. In common professional training for media practitioners has been regarded as unnecessary until quite recently. In fact training was considered to be the Siberia for media practitioners (in certain media organisations). But with the march of time a certain value of judgement have been given with regard to training. The ever increasing density of information traffic in media institutions and technological avalanche in media generated demands on the equipment employed and the capability of the user to handle. Hence training became an energising force to articulate the media practitioners function in relation to defined job descriptions and expected functions.

However it is important to mention here that no training programme can function in a vacuum. Therefore training for media practitioners demands certain notions and thoughts that is appreciated for guidance in the formulation of training programmes. These notions or concepts can help to get the vision required by a media practitioner. At the same time it can help the media practitioners to function as responsible individuals of our society.

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In some countries from a social and moral point of view there are certain guiding documents which indicate value concepts in the organisation and implementation of training programmes for media practitioners. In the US the motion picture production code of Motion picture association of America, code of ethics or cannon of journalism of American society of newspaper editors and code of ethics of the International Labour Press of the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial organisations are certainly providing some thoughts that would help in the training for media practitioners. In India more close to us the Press Council act and Memorandum of Association and Rules and Regulations of Press Trust of India are two important documents that set value concepts in a way creating an atmosphere for purposeful training for media practitioners.

In our country the indications or guidance for the consideration of value concepts for training have been shown in three major documents. They are:

1. Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation - 1966

The objectives of constitution of these acts are stipulated in these documents and they can be considered to be a pathway to media practitioners to consider and identify our own values in organising training for media practitioners. The Press Council Law of 1973 says that its purposes are

a) To ensure the freedom of the press in Sri Lanka, to prevent abuses of that freedom, and so safeguard the character of the Sri Lanka press in accordance with the highest professional standards.

b) To ensure that newspapers shall be free to publish as news true statements of facts, and any comments based upon true statements of facts.

c) To ensure on the part of newspapers and journalists the maintenance of high standards of journalistic ethics and foster a due sense of both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

d) To improve methods of recruitment, education, welfare and training in the profession of journalism.

e) To promote a proper functional relation among all sections engaged in the production of publication of newspapers, and the establishment of common services for the supply and dissemination of the news may from time to time appear to be desirable.
f) To undertake research into the use and needs of the press, to keep under review developments likely to restrict the supply of information of public interest and importance and developments on the Sri Lanka press which may tend towards concentration or monopoly, and to suggest appropriate remedial measures thereto.

and

g) To advise the Government on any matter pertaining to the regulation and conduct of newspapers.

The SLBC act of 1966 indicates that it intends

a) To carry on a broadcasting service within Ceylon and from time to time develop, extend and improve that service in the public interest.

b) That the programmes maintain a proper balance in their subject matter and a high general standard of quality.

and

c) That any news given in the programmes (in whatever form) is presented with the accuracy and impartiality and with due regard to the public interest.

The SLRC act of 1982 stressing the functions, powers and duties of the Corporation says that its aims are:

a) To carry on a television broadcasting service within Sri Lanka and to promote and develop that service and maintain a high standards in programming in the public interest.

b) To register persons engaged in the production of television programmes for broadcasting.

c) To exercise supervision and control over television programmes broadcast by the corporation.

d) To exercise supervision and control over foreign and other television crews, producing television programmes for export.

e) To exercise supervision and control over the use of video cassettes and the production of programme material on such cassettes for export.

and

f) To exercise and perform such powers and duties in relation to television broadcasting as are conferred or imposed on it by or under this act.
In addition the rules and regulations governing the issue of a licence for the establishment and maintenance of a private Broadcasting /or/and Television station in Sri Lanka made under section 44 (4) of the SLBC act, Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation code of advertising standards and practise, Copy code and the Programme Code are giving useful information that shows certain value concepts which could be utilised for the purpose of formulating media practitioners training.

In the absence of professionally accepted uniformed source of information of value concepts with Sri Lankan identity it may perhaps be important to use documented material available in the attempt to design appropriate training plans.

Media practitioner basically must not only be an expert of his job but also a multi purpose worker. The role of the media practitioner in these circumstances becomes much more complex and more professionally rewarding. In relation to our society in my thinking he must deal at once with two important functions: On one hand he must conserve what is of continuing value in traditional and current society and assist in transmitting the heritage; on the other hand he must seek to prepare individuals for a new society, the precise form which cannot be determined in advance. It may be felt that such a responsibility must be the corporate understanding of more than one type of person and should not be given as a burden to the media practitioner alone.

The media practitioner in Sri Lanka frequently finds himself in a dilemma attempting to reconcile the often conflicting demands made upon him by the state, community, opinion leaders and so on, nor must be forgotten that media practitioner is himself a member of the society at large if not always a member of the community in which he works. Media practitioners like all other individuals play multiple roles; they are not only media practitioners but also parents, taxpayers and members of various smaller associations and interest groups sometimes it may be noted that these roles are in conflict; what the individual demands as a media practitioner or parent may not be what he wishes to pay for as a taxpayer.
This situation demands the need for value concepts oriented training. Value concepts in training is therefore a significant feature in the training of media practitioners and that indicates the purpose why and what for training. In Sri Lanka at present there are four major areas that should be taken in to consideration in the organisation of training for media practitioners from a value concept point of view if media training is to be fortified.

The four areas are:-

1. Basic media skill development - Aimed at making up for deficiencies in earlier education.
2. Technical and Vocational Training - Aimed at developing totality of man/woman.
3. Cultural and Social Education - Aimed at developing totality of society.

Infact to be a journalist is a basic value concept. In this regard it is important to remember what Sir William David (who headed the British Royal Press Commission) has said on the press. In this report he indicates that:

a) There are two problems of outstanding importance to the quality of the press: the problem of recruitment and training; and the problem of formulating and making effective high standards of professional conduct (para 620)

b) The more complex the matters which the journalist communicates to the public become, the more essential it is that the journalist should be a man of keen intelligence and sound education. Unless he has some knowledge and understanding of the subject on which he is working, he can hardly report it accurately. He cannot obtain the information he needs or assess the reliability of the information he is given. If he lacks the background which makes an event, a speech or a discovery significant, he cannot make it significant or even intelligible to his readers; and being unable to make his subject itself interesting, he will tend to fall back on the trivialities incidental to it (para 621)

c) It is important that the journalist should have a general education but this is not enough, he needs a full knowledge of History and English than his schooling will have given him, the knowledge of the process of central and local Government and of the Courts and at least a grounding of Economics. His level of education needs to be higher than that of the mass of his readers and as the general level rises, so should his (para 622)

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d) It is no doubt that vocational training in journalism can be acquired only on the job but there is a clear distinction between learning to be a journalist and acquiring the degree of general education which it is necessary to have; and this cannot adequately be done on the job (para 626)

e) In our view, it is of the greatest importance that the problem of combining Technical and Academic study both for the young entrants and for the graduates should be faced (para 628)

In Sri Lanka training of media practitioners was a subject that was in the air for a long period. It is difficult to say that there were firm and continuous training programmes conducted to strengthen and upgrade knowledge and skills of media practitioners in our country. From time to time in service training programmes have been conducted for the benefit of press journalists by their establishments. SLBC was having its own need based training for its own members of staff. Sri Lanka Television Training Institute from 1984 have been organising short term and long term training for television persons mainly working at SLRC and in the industry in general. Academic institutions like the university was also conducting graduate and post graduate theoretical training programmes on media. In the recent past universities have been organising courses for media practitioners who work in media establishments and in media fields but with no guarantee for continuation.

In my thinking training of media persons is necessary on adult education activity. Therefore it is important to recognise the social education value component in that exercise. Methods and techniques will have to be given a priority or methodological considerations are vital. It could be both pedagogical or andragogical but at the same time it should be stressed that it is technological as well. By practise and from communication and educational point of view technology is the extension of both pedagogy and andragogy in my thinking. Yet in format and technically technology embraces latest technological media developments where media practitioners are expected to depend on the improvement of their knowledge understanding and skill in the art of use of media. In Technology technology is the master. Information transmitted through technological innovations like DSB, Teletex and other means can and will educate and train media practitioners directly and indirectly.

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Media practitioners training when operationalised on value concepts can persuade media practitioners to agree that team approach is important in media. This team approach in fact is a vital value concept that should go into minds and hearts of all members of the media community. It is necessary to create the environment needed to establish principles of team work in all training situations by utilising techniques like role play, group exercises etc., as it will help them when they start their actual work in media organisations.

A value concepts centered training package envisaged to improve the output of media persons is an immediate felt need in our country at present. Perhaps it could be arranged as indicated below:

1. Pre-placement training - Orientation on media subjects; job functions and roles.

2. Links, attachments and short term training courses. There is a particular need to organise and conduct integrated in service courses as part of continuing or life long education of the media practitioners, the concept might be explored of an media college for training of high level and key level media persons on a national basis.

3. Curriculum based long term institutionalised training. At present this gap is conspicuous and it has created disparities in the profession.

4. Training management and administration. In addition to in service provision, special courses in management and administration might be organised on a national basis for proper media management as media management require specific attitudes and aptitudes. Media management is necessarily a specific task.

5. On going applied research in relation to curriculum development, job development, pre placement and in service training and professional growth.

Such a package may eventually help to gain recognition and to bridge the gap between grades of professionalization. At the same time it can help to structure the training programme. A structured situation in media training is a necessary ingredient in our country as there is a need to plan and implement media training based on demands and expectations of the profession. Moreover well described and ascertained value concepts in training for media practitioners in Sri Lanka in the future should help them for:

- Better job performance
- Professional growth and promotion

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Better salaries and professional status
- For furtherance of knowledge and skills
  and
- Prestige in the work they do

It is needless to mention that we are in a period of consolidation as far as media is concerned in our country. From an oral society we have entered a media society. In a media society the requirements of training of media practitioners are many. At the same time new trends, problems and challenges are emerging with the expanding horizon of media. Such problems and challenges require urgent constructive structures and solutions.
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