



# Managing Media Work

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## PREFACE

by: Mark Deuze (January 11, 2010)

The Managing Media Work volume comprises work by 27 leading scholars in the fields of media management, media production, and media policy studies. Early in 2009 the various authors were asked to write original essays based on one key question: how they see their work contributing to a critical understanding of the management of media work. More specifically, it was suggested that this essay answer the question what media managers (and media workers in general) should know about their work, and how could or should it influence their work as they face increasingly complex issues regarding global, digital, and mobile media life (Deuze, 2011). The result is a distinctive book, offering a comprehensive view on the theory and practice of working in the media in the digital age, managing careers, projects and companies in the media, and preparing for a life either in such industries, or as a scholar of the media.

The idea for this book came from the research I did for Media Work, a book published by Polity Press (in 2007), which featured a review of the key issues facing and structuring the

experiences of professionals working in journalism, advertising, marketing communications, public relations, computer and video game development, and film and television production. For that book my colleagues, students and I interviewed over 600 media professionals in four countries (the United States, The Netherlands, South Africa, and New Zealand). I furthermore analyzed trade publications and weblogs by media practitioners in these countries, and studied the vast literature across disciplines as varied as economic geography, media studies, management and economics, organizational psychology, and cultural sociology where scholars talked with, discussed, or otherwise included media professionals and their production practices in research projects. When I finished chapters for *Media Work* on specific media professions, I asked experienced professionals working in such industries (who I knew personally, generally having met them during the course of working on the book) to read the drafts and tell me whether they recognized the picture I was painting of their industry and their workstyle. One recurring element in all these interviews and e-mail discussions with people inside the creative industries was a general concern about management. As numerous people told me: "sure, this is all pretty much on target; but who you should really be talking with, is management."

In short, the problem of contemporary media work, as felt and experienced by its practitioners, is management. This does not just reflect what Zygmunt Bauman has called "a perpetual casus belli" (2005: 55), as in the constant struggle between the cultural producer's craving of creative freedom and management's pressure to produce commercially viable and therefore market-oriented products. It is also not necessarily just a reflection of people complaining about those who govern their decisions, on whose livelihoods they depend. Given the increasingly global, networked, and unpredictable nature of the media industry, and the growing complexities of media work (determined in part by rapid technological developments),

the challenge to the future of media work seems to be a uniquely managerial one. Yet this challenge all too often seems to go unmet by the people put in place as managers. Management is seen here not in traditional terms - as in designing business models, contemplating finance and accounting mechanisms, structuring strategic partnerships - but more in humanistic terms: the management of talent (both of yourself and others), and the management of your individual career in the media. This gives unique focus to the *Managing Media Work* volume, and allows it to fill a gap in the current literature on media management and production.

Scholarship on the production side of media industries is relatively scarce (when considered next to content analysis and audience research), but growing as the prominence of media production in a worldwide "cultural economy" (Du Gay and Pryke, 2002) increases, next to global concerns about the changing nature of (media) work. Next to this dearth of knowledge about what actually goes on inside various companies and organizations, the literature that is available tends to discuss the management of creative industries largely in the context of business structures, general economics, and unique high-profile cases (generally focusing on big-name corporations or exceptional firms). One of the most problematic results from this curious phenomenon is that students who enter media industries may understand the impact this industry has on audiences and politics (as these are the dominant areas of media and communication research and teaching), but generally are not empowered to understand how and why the industry works the way it does, nor how contemporary worldwide social and technological changes and challenges – such as globalization, individualization, convergence and fragmentation – affect the everyday managerial and creative practices throughout the industry.

By explaining, contextualizing and thus understanding the changing nature of managing media work this book not only hopes to prepare media students to become competent media

practitioners, it also helps students to become critically competent citizens in what Roger Silverstone (2007) has called the contemporary “mediapolis”: society as a mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences of everyday life. This is a society where meaningful distinctions between public and private life, work time and non-work time, local and global, or lived and mediated reality are quickly fading. Furthermore, by focusing on the similarities of issues facing different professions and fields of cultural production, the volume acknowledges the likely boundaryless and portfolio career path of media and communication graduates, who will be moving from job to job, within and between converging multiple media organizations and networks. This reader will offer them a glimpse of their futures, and empower them to face it head-on.

The primary audience for this book consists of students in schools, departments, and programs in information science, journalism, advertising, games, film and television, and more broadly communication and media. The target reader is a student about to graduate or starting graduate school, looking towards either a career in media industries or a future as an academic studying the media production process. Some key educational markets include a growing number of creative industries and media management-related programs of study around the world. The book is also useful for general courses on media and society, media economics, or media and culture, and can be of particular value to vocational programs seeking to add context and background to the training of media practitioners. The primary market for the book is, given the geographic location of the authors and examples used, international (based on their country of residence and national identity, the authors in this book represent ten different nationalities).

The authors all offer overviews of their current and past work in the field of media management and production studies, and offer theoretical insight, critical discussion, as well as

practical advice for students and media professionals alike. The book will be of greatest value in courses where students are encouraged to design their career plans, develop business proposals, or otherwise engage in both individual as well as collective reflection on how they see their professional identity and social responsibility as media practitioners in the context of a rapidly evolving global cultural economy.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope this book will fill a void in the literature, inspire research questions and a renewed focus on (and respect for) the talent that makes up the creative industry workforce. This book completely relies on the brilliance of its contributors, all of which are scholars whose work I came to admire in the course of my career. In fact, I originally put together the potential contributors by making a list of people I consider myself a fan of first. I am humbled and deeply grateful for the enthusiasm, dedication, and inspiration of the authors featured in this volume.

Much thanks to the graduate students in my media work courses at Indiana University, who "road-tested" this volume and offered invaluable feedback. Furthermore, I like to thank Todd Armstrong and Nathan Davidson at Sage for supporting this project.

As always, I look forward to hearing any comments you, the reader, undoubtedly has.

# MANAGING MEDIA WORK

**By: Mark Deuze and Brian Steward**

**In: Mark Deuze (Ed.), *Managing Media Work. London (etc.): Sage.***

People spend more time with media than at any previous point in history. The number of media channels, forms, genres, devices, applications, and formats is proliferating - more media get produced every year. Yet at the same time, the news about the media as an industry is less than optimistic. Reports about massive lay-offs in all the creative industries - most notably film and television entertainment, journalism, digital game development, and advertising - are paramount. This suggests a fascinating paradox: as people engage with media in an increasingly immersive, always-on, almost instantaneous and interconnected way, the very people whose livelihoods and sense of professional identity depend on delivering content and experiences across such media seem to be at a loss on how to come up with survival strategies - both in terms of business models, effective regulatory practices (for example regarding copyrights and universal access provisions), and perhaps most specifically the organization of entrepreneurial working conditions that would support and sustain the creative process needed to meet the demands of a global market saturated with media. In this book, different fields of study regarding the media as a creative industry are brought together to articulate a new theorization and practical implementation of strategic management in recognition of the changing ways in which people use media in their lives - living a life not *with*, but rather: *in* media.

This book and research project combines work and insights from specifically three strands of research and teaching on the media: management and organization studies; cultural policy and economics; studies on labor and work. The project can therefore be seen as an attempt to connect three strands across these literatures, aiming to integrate theories of how media industries function in society; how media professionals manage their individual careers and professional identity in this context; and case-based work on how media industries manage creativity and innovation. The assumption is that the combination of these perspectives may help to articulate the gap (better yet: the bridge) between theory and practice in media management, media work, as well as media production (studies and practice). Our approach to managing media work flows from a couple of key considerations about the field of media management:

- media management tends to be under-explored and under-theorized (see especially the contribution of Bozena Mierzejewska for a critical articulation of this observation);
- most media management research does not look across boundaries between media professions, nor academic disciplines (see for example chapters by Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter, Tim Marjoribanks, and Annet Aris);
- the traditional tendency in much of the field has been to artificially maintain distinctions between management and creativity, which (with Chris Bilton) we find unhelpful;
- media management should take an integrative, holistic approach - something advocated by many, yet practiced by few.

Of crucial importance here is our conceptualization of media management: as the management of companies *as well as* careers in the media. Particularly the latter part of this equation is largely absent from the literature in the field, as it tends to focus on either specific industries (journalism or Hollywood for example), specific aspects of businesses within these

industries (copyright enforcement, revenue models, product differentiation, concentration of ownership), or specific cases of company and firm projects (change management, workflow culture). We postulate that the addition of (individual or group) careers is of added value here because of two key reasons: first, the ongoing casualization and individualization of labor and working conditions of professionals throughout the creative industries; and second, a motivation based on pedagogy. In a media-saturated world where cultural production and consumption dominates everyday life, it is not surprising schools, departments, programs and courses in information science, communication, journalism, and media studies attract more students every year. In fact, such departments are among the largest units – whether it is in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, South-East Asia or Western Europe. The vast majority of undergraduate and graduate students majoring in these disciplines either want to work in media industries, manage media companies, or study and understand how the industry and its creative process work.

However, it proves to be difficult to adequately convey the complexity and dynamics of what it is like to work (anywhere) in the creative industries by a traditional teaching focus on the industry as the domain of corporations and companies, as particularly enforced by relying on the literature (which, as we have argued, has generally omitted the individual from its consideration of media management), and by delegating "real world" experience to the realm of industry through the encouragement of internships and apprenticeships within such organizations. We do not claim that this approach is wrong or that it should be reversed. We argue, however, that theoretically the work that companies and firms do actually has increasingly less to do with the lived experience of working in the media, and that the models for media management and managing careers in the media have changed considerably. In this essay, we seek to integrate the

work of the various authors and the fields they reference into a coherent framework for studying (and, hopefully, practicing) media management and media work.

### **The context of managing media work**

As a first step, we consider the evolving context within which media management takes place. Managing media work is necessarily made up of both material and immaterial factors, both of which must be considered in conjunction. In other words, a key approach to media management is focusing on the many resources (both human and nonhuman) that combine to form the source of all media action. By thinking in terms of such factors that make up the broad context within which media work takes place, we hope to shed light on both the distributed and hybrid nature of media work (Liz McFall). Media work does not simply involve the transfer of information (of books into treatments into screenplays into movies into franchises into...) , but is instead involved in complex networks of information and understanding, including that of competition, markets, organization and structure, industry standards, and the evolving media environment (Terry Flew, Tim Marjoribanks, Susan Christopherson).

What drives media management and media work in all the creative industries is a general shift in power away from professional content creators to users and owners. (Mark Deuze and Leopoldina Fortunati, Annet Aris, Chris Bilton, Lucy Küng, Marina Vujnovic and Dean Kruckeberg). Control over storytelling (including the authority over what kind of stories are told and how they are told), and resources (needed to creatively and effectively convey these stories) get whisked away from professionals and flow toward audiences and corporations, further emphasizing the hourglass structure of the industry (where a handful of corporations interact with hundreds of thousands small firms and individuals on a global scale). As more focus is placed on user-generated content and consumer involvement, and corporate media owners gain

control over their workforce (by increasingly focusing on either outsourcing production to loosely affiliated networks of professionals and firms, or abandoning production altogether in a bid to control the marketing and distribution of content produced elsewhere), the professionals in the middle of the spectrum are left with less jobs and less creative control over their work. In this way, work is being outsourced to both ends of the labor spectrum, leaving many media professionals alienated as exemplified by a constant and ongoing struggle for work and the loss of a direct sense of creative autonomy.

A second key factor influencing our understanding of what goes on across the industry is therefore an overall precarity in media work. These two factors color or shade any attempt to make sense of the management of careers and companies across the media. We emphasize the need to contextualize media management within a broader context and social architecture. This means taking into consideration every factor contributing to the organization of media companies and careers: content, processes, people, technology, and all other variables - not in the least including the implicit and unconscious aspects of organizational life such as beliefs, values, and emotions that can have a tremendous influence on planning and behavior (Liz McFall). Arguably the most powerful of these influences or factors that is to be considered in media managerial strategy is the role of technology (Philip Napoli, Lucy K ung, Marina Vujnovic and Dean Kruckeberg).

The plethora of technological innovations being developed and incorporated into society on a daily basis serves to supplement and undermine previous technologies. This shift presents media companies and individual professionals with the challenge of constant adaptation to the emergence of new technologies and the progressive abandonment of the old. In turn, the media as an industry (including its professionals) are at the forefront of supercharging the development

and demand for technological innovation. This is a fundamental stress point in any consideration of managing media work.

Similar to the adaptation process to technological development is the challenge of adapting to the evolution of media content models. When new models emerge, the old models are always supplemented and sometimes displaced. The broad shift that society is experiencing is one from an emphasis on mass content to niche content, and now to participatory and user-generated content. Media products are becoming increasingly hybridized, and are thus difficult to place into categories that can be isolated and therefore effectively managed. Overall, however, communication is just as important of a function as content itself.

In relation to this increasing emphasis on participatory media, the third contextual influence on media strategy is consumers' relationship with the content. With technological advances facilitating the offering of niche products and an increased level of user-participation, the industry-driven construction of audiences is progressing from a mass of static objects that simply accept and take in the media into active co-creators and what industry observers and scholars variously label "Pro-Ams", "Amateurs", "producers", and "prosumers." Although this trend is supported by data showing a growing group of especially teenagers actively sharing, co-creating, up- and downloading content online, the audience seen as more or less passive consumers is just as much a figment of industry rhetoric as is the audience perceived as proactively producing media. Either way, this forces media managers and workers to rethink their process and practice when making content and designing user experiences.

The three contextual challenges that contribute to managing media work as discussed above are contributing to a different and much more unstable environment than perhaps in the past. Additionally, rising costs, declining revenue (especially from advertising), and increasing

competition require companies and individuals to adapt to working with scarce resources. We suggest that this leads to an increased focus on idiosyncratic creativity as a necessity to rise above the many challenges and win the ongoing competition for market demand. In short, more creativity and innovation on both the firm and individual level means more success and competitive advantage (Pablo Boczkowski, Bozena Mierzejewska, Mark Deuze and Leopoldina Fortunati).

### **Understanding media management: the macro level**

The overall goal of the project is to gain an understanding of the organizational management practices of media organizations. In order to accomplish this, one necessary step is to consider media relationships at the macro, meso, and micro levels (Tim Marjorbanks).

Managing media work can be viewed on these three levels as both separated and integrated.

At the macro level of media production industry regulations, technology, and competition are taken into consideration. The current major issue on the macro level of production is the shaping of new industries in today's New International Division of Cultural Labor (Toby Miller). In today's creative industries, all production is global and all labor is local. The global movement of companies into emerging markets, deploying dynamic outsourcing and offshoring techniques, and stimulating runaway production (in all corners of the globe and back) benefits new locations by providing periods of increased local labor and jobs (Alisa Perren, Keith Randle). However, this is only sustained as long as the incentive to work in the given locale lasts. After a brief period of increased employment and productivity, the jobs and opportunities move on to the next cheap place. This trend of runaway production affects job markets not only in Hollywood or necessarily just the film industry (which is suffering from the ongoing loss of employment in

traditional key markets), but also in communities and media disciplines all over the globe that are hit by this cycle of accelerating global production networks.

At the macro level, we are increasingly seeing two seemingly contradictory trends. First, new small media firms are forming at unusually high rates (Charles Davis, Eric Harvey). This would suggest a cycle of self-renewal while also implying a strong entrepreneurial spirit in the industry. ensuring innovation and the generation of new media firms. Second, we are also witnessing high levels of ownership concentration. At the same time, creative industries have to come to rely on the “Hollywood Model” as a way to organize their industries (Susan Christopherson). This vertical disintegration also involves outsourcing and downsizing, and has led to large pools of media workers leading precarious lifestyles. These workers, hired on short term or no term contracts can never quite be sure where their next paychecks are coming from. While some workers enjoy the freedom and sense of self-reliance this affords, others find the insecurity stifling, which leads to high rate of burn out (Rosalind Gill, Aphra Kerr).

Increasingly, in an effort to become known as creative cities, governments on both a local and state level will pass tax incentives to attract media companies. In a sort of policy hopscotch, local, regional and national governments compete with one another to put together the most attractive package. What the cities and regions involved tend to have in common is a crumbling industrial base they are scrambling to replace with the youthful energy and dynamic spending patterns that are expected of the creative industries, yet when next best deal comes along, media companies will follow. What they often leave in their wake is a new generation of media workers seduced into a precarious lifestyle by the lure of media life.

### **Understanding media management: the meso level**

The meso level of production looks into the organizational methods, culture, strategies, and policies that shape media production. Of particular concern on this level is the organizational management technique incorporated by media companies. In a time of increasing precariousness across the creative industries, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation has managed to rise above most effects, making for an interesting target of observation. In looking at the style that has enabled this corporation to prevail in a time of failure, one will find a hands-off approach to management in which there is little communication between separate factions (Tim Marjoribanks). This is indicative of the flexible and individualized trend that is successful on the meso level of production, where large corporations are not considered as a whole, but as the wide variety of small cells of which they are composed. Indeed, the analogy to the loose organization of terrorist cells (that can suddenly spring into action but lay dormant for large swaths of time) is somewhat appropriate for considering the meandering networks of small companies competing around the world for projectized work, generally financed through large corporate parents or holding firms (Aphra Kerr, Alisa Perren, Sean Nixon).

At the meso level, content has taken on a new identity. If, in the past content was considered king, now it is safe to say content is *kings* (Annet Aris). We live in an age of remix and remixability, where consumers in this convergence culture are no longer considered to be "just" consumers. Content today takes on a wide variety of shapes and sizes, none of which look much like the old days of linear value chains premised on the creation of specific content for specific channels using specific formats, as content is now:

- content à-la-carte (made on demand, for niches or even individuals, customizable and editable);

- content everywhere (adapted for multiple formats, distributed across many channels);
- content for free (where content is an excuse for the commoditization of experiences);
- user-generated content (including practices of open-sourcing and crowdsourcing, and a decentering of content co-creation via online social networks);
- global content (as content gets localized around the world);
- content about content (the fastest growing sector of content creation, including any and all advertising, marketing communications and promotions, importantly including the notion of self-branding of media companies, work groups, and individuals largely through spec-work).

One key development in the field of media management is the increasing interdependency between the creative and managerial roles within media industries (Chris Bilton). In recent history, many changes have led to the devaluing of content as the core asset or unique selling point for the creative industries. Technological, economic, social, and cultural changes have, instead, facilitated a rapid rise of a rather weightless global market based on access to more or less unique services and experiences - a shift from a "things to own" to a "things to do" economy. The relation of this trend to that of the evolving association between management and creativity is that the traditional (and often preferred) model of creative production - where individual artists are seen to create distinct, one-of-a-kind works - seems to be waning. Instead, a more complex model is developing in which individual creativity must be incorporated and embedded into large-scale networked production of all kinds of assets and deliverables, including but most definitely not limited to content. This growing bond between creativity and management as caused by a gradual devaluing of cultural content can be attributed to several trends.

The first of these trends is a shift in the function of media in society. In today's culture, more attention is focused on the delivery of the content than on the raw content itself. In a media economy where more and more focus is placed on conversation and co-creation, as opposed to simple consumption, media users are seen as more interested in the experiences and services that they can gain than the content itself. This general shift in media use has served to devalue the process of content creation (Mark Deuze and Leopoldina Fortunati, Annet Aris).

A second trend contributing to the devaluing of central content is the recent re-emphasis on craft as an integral part of production (Chris Bilton, Toby Miller). The increased complexity of production due to technological advancements and global production networks has led to a newly developed labor force of craftspeople and those with highly specialized work skills, distributed all over the world (yet concentrated in specific regions). While the artists create the ideas, it requires another substantial workforce to craft the raw content into final, marketable products and experiences.

A third important trend is a change in society's outlook on media products. Regarding products previously viewed as unique and individual pieces of art, there is now a growing awareness of the role of consumers in shaping and co-creating content value-added. As mentioned before, this makes a consideration of the user as competitor-colleague central to the analysis and practice of managing media work.

### **Understanding media management: the micro level**

The micro is the smallest level of managing media work, on which we consider the interactions and relationships that make up a company as a generally loosely integrated collective of collaborating individuals, or an individual's approach to her career. A key insight here relates to the construction of professional identity for media workers. Traditionally, and

following from the primacy of content as an individual artists' providence, this has been the identity of a "soloist" (Annet Aris). However, in an age of remix and convergence culture, crossmedia and multiplatform integration, bringing together the work of others in a meaningful and creative way seems not just a valuable, but increasingly crucial skill (Jane Singer, Chris Hackley and Amy Tiwsakul). In other words, capitalizing on the hybrid nature of contemporary cultural production - by synthesizing the work of colleagues, consumers, and companies - can be considered the foundation of a new sense of professional identity.

Media workers and managers today have moved away from the old notion of value chains and towards a more flexible, overlapping set of skills and competences, where individuals can no longer afford to concentrate on their own silo (Chris Bilton). Today's media worker, to survive, has to have a working knowledge of more than her immediate duties. To function effectively within a value network, she must also understand the roles of those around her and how they fit together. These are the types of skills which most likely will pay off when the value networks mature and move on (generally grounding in "know-who" rather than "know-how" types of considerations) to the next projectized enterprise. The paradox here is that while such advice seems empowering, it at the same time inevitably leads to greater precarity in the lives of the professionals involved.

Considering the changing nature of content on the meso level of media management and the devaluation of content creation as a core corporate practice on the macro level, one may wonder what remains to be done at the micro level of media work for the individual professional or tiny firm to survive. We assume a shift in professional identity formation from content creation as a soloist to the remixed performance of a superstar DJ (Chris Bilton, Annet Aris). The unique talent of the DJ is the creation of what can be described as meta-ideas: ideas that support

the production and transmission of other ideas. By finding, editing, and remixing multiple strands of information and ideas, the DJ provides a platform for creativity and innovation crucial to survival in today's convergent industry and marketplace. Second, the DJ is a superstar largely based on her performance - both "live" as at work (on stage), as well as in-between projects (shows, concerts) in the maintenance of a cult of personality by regularly updating (and upgrading) of her image through for example online social networks and personal websites (Chris Hackley and Amy Tiwsakul, Charles Davis, Alisa Perren, Jane Singer). This manufacturing and performing of superstardom - of an *authentic talent* - is, in other words, not only telling a story about (and perhaps showing) being good at something. It is also about carefully cultivating and producing that image of being good.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

At the present time research of the media industry in all its facets as discussed above tends to make four mistakes in their assessments, which we package in the following four statements:

- opportunities for talent, excellence, success, and new sources of revenue automatically increase due to everything that is happening;
- everything we hold dear about the nature of creative work and the identity of the artist is going down the drain;
- we are witnessing an time of epic transformation;
- things change only gradually, if at all.

Rather than stepping into these traps, we advocate a more nuanced and grounded approach by looking across boundaries and disciplines, attempting to integrate new perspectives into today's style of managing media work. To better understand organizational practice, we look at the

forces shaping today's media landscape - which necessarily include the political economy of new media, the individual and networked sources of creativity and innovation, and the enabling role of policymakers on the local, national, and international level (Terry Flew, Philip Napoli, Toby Miller).

An important question when considering the current practice and future of managing media work is, why we still talk about firms, companies and organizations in an era that seems to celebrate looseness and non-commitment (Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter). The framing of this questions suggests the answer lies in looking at media management differently - which is what we have aimed for in this admittedly brief, less than comprehensive, introductory essay. The recent history of managing media work suggests that media firms and scholars have gone through three phases of asking questions about the future of the media industry (questions and answers which, of course, exist side by side, do not replace that what came before, and can even occur more or less simultaneously within the same corporation or holding company):

- how can we create and maintain the perfect digital/multimedia corporation of the (near) future?
- how can we effectively separate the mature business of offline production and the emerging business of online?
- how can we carefully build integrated functionalities, knowledge-sharing practices, and creative synergies across media companies and between media professionals (we employ or subcontract to)?

We suggest a new focus for media management research and teaching, considering what may be the new networks emerging throughout the creative industries, not necessarily tied to specific companies, products or places, that define new and evolving constellations of skillsets, practices,

and beliefs that could provide a roadmap through the morass of the contemporary creative industries. Added to that, we suggest that this focus should include an emphasis on the role of the individual in negotiating these waters: as a soloist, a superstar DJ, a global networker, a form of self-programmable labor, and a critical student of her own role and professional identity.

Our essay has as its goal to outline the framework for this particular search. As it is also an indirect critique of the existing literatures in the field of management and organization studies, we hope to inspire a more comprehensive approach to the study of managing media work. In other words: this essay is intended as a meta-idea.

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