WORKPLACE LEARNING AMONG SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONALS:
A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED TELEVISION PRODUCERS
IN A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION

By

RAMACHANDRAN PONNAN

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor
of Philosophy

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Chairperson: Shamsuddin Ahmad, Ed.D.
Faculty: Educational Studies

The study describes the learning experiences of successful Television Producers in A Public Television Station (PTS). Specifically the study sought to determine how these professionals acquire knowledge and expertise at their workplace. Professionals are people with knowledge who offer special services for the orderly functioning of the society. TV producers are professionals in the television industry. These professionals need to continually learn to develop their expertise. How they learn, especially in the context of their ever changing busy workplace, is important to continuing professional education.

The study is guided by the following research questions. 1) How do successful TV producers learn and acquire expertise at their workplace? 2) What contextual factors shape learning among successful TV producers? 3) How do personal characteristics and attributes facilitate learning among successful TV producers?
Data were collected mainly through interviews using a semi-structured question guide, observation and document analysis. Nine producers were selected purposively using criteria-based selection. Copies of documents such as program reports, annual reports and minutes of meetings were gathered to corroborate information provided by the respondents. The researcher was guided by the constant comparative analysis method.

Three aspects of learning at the workplace emerged from the study. Successful producers acquire knowledge and expertise by, 1) The professional learning processes of formal and informal learning strategies. All respondents agreed to the importance of formal in-service training that they had to undergo when they are inducted into their profession. Benefits of such training are limited by resources, it is pertinent for producers to continuously seek learning opportunities on their own. 2) Learning through the understanding of broadcasting contexts, a distinct learning area emerging with the changing forms of broadcasting. Broadcasting contexts basically constitute the various stakeholders who occupy meaningful roles and even exert substantial influence on producers creating complex workplace procedures. 3) Learning through the development of personal characteristics and qualities imperative to learning among successful TV producers. These producers acquire the necessary attributes to learn from the workplace. Workplace learning emphasizes procedural knowledge of techniques and skills, and academic knowledge of facts and concepts. But learning has often overlooked dispositional knowledge of attitudes, values and interest that help professionals make well thought out decisions.
Three conclusions are drawn from the study. Firstly, producers took responsibility and used multiple strategies to learn from their unique workplace. Next, non-managerial producers paid cursory attention to acquiring expertise to operate in the emergent broadcasting contexts. And lastly, producers needed personal learning characteristics and attributes imperative to learning at their workplace.
PENGAMBANGAN DANGEA DI TEMPAT KERJA DI KALANGAN PROFESIONAL YANG BERJAYA: KAJIAN KES PENERBIT-PENERBIT TERPILIH DI SEBUAH STESEN TELEVISYEN AWAM

Oleh

RAMACHANDRAN PONNAN
November 2003

Pengerusi: Shamsuddin Ahmad, Ed.D.

Fakulti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian kes ini adalah bertujuan untuk menerangkan bagaimana pembelajaran dan perkembangan kepakaran berlaku di kalangan penerbit-penerbit televisyen yang berjaya di Sebuah Stesen Televisyen Awam (STA).

Kajian ini telah dipandu oleh tiga soalan kajian iaitu: 1) Bagaimana penerbit-penerbit TV yang berjaya belajar dan mencari kepakaran di tempat mereka berkerja? 2) Apakah faktor-faktor kontektual yang membentuk pembelajaran di kalangan penerbit TV yang berjaya? 3) Bagaimana ciri-ciri peribadi membantu pembelajaran di kalangan penerbit TV yang berjaya?

Data diperolehi menerusi temuduga dengan soalan-soalan yang telah dirangka sebagai panduan. Sembilan orang penerbit ditemuduga yang memenuhi kriteria-kriteria yang dikenalpasti. Maklumat-maklumat tambahan diperolehi menerusi laporan tahunan rancangan, minit mesyuarat dan post-mortem rancangan. Pengkaji menganalisis data berpandukan metodologi “constant comparative analysis”

Hasil kajian aspek-aspek pembelajaran di tempat kerja, iaitu bagaimana penerbit yang berprestasi tinggi memperolehi maklumat atau mendapat ilmu adalah menerusi: 1) Strategi pembelajaran profesional iaitu formal dan bukan formal, 2) Pembelajaran melalui konteks kefahaman dalam bidang penyiaran, 3) Pembelajaran menerusi perkembangan ciri-ciri peribadi yang amat diperlukan oleh para penerbit TV yang berjaya.

Para penerbit sedar tentang keperluan mendalami sesuatu bidang itu berdasarkan pengalaman-pengalaman di tempat kerja. Kesimpulan dari kajian mendapati: 1) Penerbit bertanggungjawab dan berusaha menggunakan pelbagai strategi pembelajaran dan mendapatkan kepakaran di tempat kerja mereka yang unik. 2) Penerbit yang mahir dalam bidang penerbitan, tetapi tidak mempunyai tanggungjawab
pengurusan, kurang memberi perhatian atau mempelajari selok-belok dalam konteks Penyiaran. 3) Penerbit memerlukan sifat sifat keperibadian tersendiri untuk terus belajar dan membina kepakaran di tempat kerja.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for making it possible for me to complete this study. At this opportunity I express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Shamsuddin Ahmad (Chairman), Dr. Khairuddin Idris, and Professor Madya Dr. Saidin Teh, my supervisors, for their invaluable guidance and support throughout this project. I thank them also for their selfless advice during the entire course of the study irrespective of time or day.

My sincere thanks are also due to the Management of The Public Television Station (PTS), the Managing Director of Television, the management of PTS and all the TV producers who were respondents in this study. My appreciation is also due especially for Mr. Paul Soosay and Mr. Paarthasarathee Bangaru for their assistance with my final draft.

And finally, to my loving wife Sandra, my lovely boys Bobby and Thivagar, I owe them gratitude not only for their support during this course but for their much tested patience for the duration of my previous studies that have led to the successful completion of my graduate studies.

Ramachandran Ponnan
November, 2003
I certify that an Examination Committee met on 3rd November 2003 to conduct the final examination of Ramachandran Ponnan on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Workplace Learning among Successful Professionals: A Case Study of Selected Producers in a Public Television Station” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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Date: 09 APR 2004
DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any degree at UPM or other institutions.

RAMACHANDRAN PONNAN

Date: 04. 02.2004
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/NOTATIONS/GLOSSARY OF TERMS</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER

I  INTRODUCTION
   Learning Among Professionals 2
   TV Production as a Profession 3
The Context of the Study 4
   The Threshold of Change 9
   Television Program Development. 13
Broadcasting Contexts 15
   Organizational Stakeholders 15
   External Stakeholders 16
   Television Program Producers 18
   Program Planning in TV Broadcasting 19
The Need To Learn 25
   Learning in PTS 27
   Learning Challenges 29
Statement of Problem 32
Significance of the Study 34
Limitation of the Study 35
Definition of Terms 36

II  LITERATURE REVIEW
   Introduction 38
   Learning In Adulthood 38
   Characteristics of the Learner 40
   Attributes of the Learner 42
How Professionals Learn 44
   Cognitive Psychology 44
   Who is a Professional? 45
   Professional Learning Process 46
**IV Three Major Findings**

Rational for Categorization 135

The Professional Learning Processes 137

Formal Learning 138

Informal Learning 144

Learning Climate at the Workplace 162

Broadcasting Contexts 166

Professional Practice Contexts: Professionalism 167

Professional Practice Contexts: Workplace Practice 168

Internal Organizational Context:

- Organizational Process 169
- Internal Organizational Context:
  - Organizational Constraints 170
  - External Stakeholders’ Context: The Audience 172
  - External Stakeholders’ Context: The Sponsors 173

Personal Learning Imperatives of Producers 174

- Nature of Thinking: The Realization to Perform 174
- The Nature of Thinking: Achievement Minded 175
- Attributes for Learning: Consistency at Learning 176
- Attributes for Learning: Persevere 178
- Attributes of learning: Responsive to Tasks 179

Summary of the Chapter 181

- Summary of Findings 182
- The Emergent Concept of Workplace Learning 185
- The Case 188

**V SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS** 190

Summary 190

Conclusions And Discussions 195

- Responsibility to Learn 195
- Multiple Strategies of Learning 199
- Learning Climate 203
- Producers Took Initiative to Learn . . . 190
- Successful Producers Require Additional Expertise . . . 204
- The Contextual Factors 205
- Producers Need Enduring Attributes . . . 209

Implications for Theory and Practice 218

- Recommendations for Further Research 221
## APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Revised Interview Guide</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Tabulation of Themes and Descriptions and their Corresponding Line Numbers.</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Preliminary Categories and Themes during Analysis</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Audit Trail</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Observations Chart of Respondents’ Learning Activities</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Documents and Records sighted for Analysis</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Informed Positioned Subjects</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Informed Consent Forms</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>280</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

xv
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Table 1**: PTS’s source of program and air-time distribution
- **Table 2**: The list of respondents with pseudonyms and their corresponding selection criteria.
- **Table 3**: Respondents and their role at the workplace
- **Table 4**: Findings tabulated into categories and sub-categories
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stakeholders influencing program planning</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Workplace learning model central to contextual influence by Cseh, Marsick and Watkins (1999).</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conceptual framework at the inception of the study</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:</td>
<td>Constant comparative method of data analysis model</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Concept of workplace learning among successful TV producers at PTS</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

ABU: Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union.

AIBD: Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development.

ASTRO: All Asia-Satellite Television and Radio Operator

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation, Headquartered in London

DW: Duestch Wella, A German International Production and Television Broadcast Station.

e-mas: PTS’s audience survey and marketing agency

IBC: International Broadcasting Centre in Kuala Lumpur

ITM: Institute Teknologi MARA (MARA Institute of Technology) now Universiti Teknologi MARA

NHK: Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Japanese Public Radio and Television Broadcaster

PTS: A Public Television Station

PTSTI: Public Television Station Training Institute

UNDP: United Nations Development Program
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction, the context of the study, developments in television production practices, statement of problem, purpose and research questions, significance of the study and the definition of terms. This is a study of how successful TV producers in a Public Television Station (PTS) learn and acquire expertise at their workplace.

The work of professionals is important for the way they define and execute their work. They are knowledgeable and lead the society to assume that, as professionals they would continue to learn throughout their working life. In the major professions, such as medicine (Meyer, 1975) and law (Vernon, 1983) and in other minor professions such as librarianship (Stone, 1986), professionals have acknowledged their commitment to continuing professional education. The increasing attention accorded to continuing education not only manifest itself as a necessity among the respective professional bodies but has also been misinterpreted as “... because they can meet a re-licensure requirement” (Houle, 1980, p. 266). On the contrary, Parson (1977) recognizes professionals as people with special services to offer for the smooth and orderly functioning of the society.

In that respect, Television Producers are professionals who need to be adequately equipped with knowledge, expertise and be socialized professionally to provide the distinct services expected of them. Learning in the profession among
Among producers is important, to help them realize that continued learning is their responsibility that their improved knowledge and performance provide higher quality services to their audience. The means to such realization and an understanding of the producers’ work is to reach the ends of effective practice. How professionals learn and acquire expertise has not been explicit to researchers, and it is unclear how knowledge can be effectively fostered among professionals through education (Benner, 1984; Isenberg, 1984).

**Learning Among Professionals**

When the goal of learning among professionals is to improve practice and excel in what they do, they do not stop at formal education. Managers have been known to seldom use rational methods (Isenberg, 1984) and expert nurses have been known to adopt unplanned clinical practices (Benner, 1984). Cervero (1988) contends that professionals learn by using a repertoire of practical knowledge gained through prior experiences. Experience is used to solve problems in the unknown areas of knowledge, hence developing higher level expertise over time.

Two forms of gaining professional knowledge uncovered by Schon (1984; 1987) are to foster technical knowledge and practical knowledge among practitioners. Professionals learn academic knowledge or technical rationality from institutions formally. Then they immerse in their practice to acquire procedural knowledge or practical knowledge, and continue to enrich themselves with workplace experiences. TV producers need help to integrate their technical knowledge and practical experiences to think and reflect-in-action, to improve their practice. While producers improve their skills through the construction of their own repertoire of experiences,
they also need to be aware of the expanding contextual knowledge of their profession both within their workplace and outside of their practice.

**TV Production as a Profession**

When television was inaugurated in Malaysia, producers were made up of expatriates and those who learned from the expatriates. Producers were sent to overseas stations to acquire practical knowledge. There were no institutions of formal learning in the craft of television production in Malaysia yet. The Public Television Station Training Institution (PTSTI) had practitioners for lecturers. According to Houle (1980), such lecturers often lectured on subjects of their own choosing to audience they did not know. Formal education in TV production was first introduced by the Mass Communications Department of University Science Malaysia. Subsequently University Malaya and University Technology MARA and the National University introduced TV production curricula through their media and communications departments.

Graduates equipped with academic knowledge for TV production or technical knowledge found employment with PTS as producers. When other private TV stations and private production houses came into the broadcasting scene, graduates from local universities and overseas also found employment as producers and other broadcast related professions in these TV Stations. These graduates of broadcasting were schooled in the “knowledge that” or technical rationality. As producers, they applied their knowledge at their workplace by gaining practical experience and using such experiences to solve new problems at work. Thus effecting continuous professional learning to practice at the workplace (Harris, 1998).
However, TV producers need to continually move beyond their current state of knowledge and competence. Informal ways of learning have become imminent owing to the state of learning prevailing at the workplace. Producers’ devise their personal ways of learning from the experiences they engage in at the workplace. The Public Television Station as the workplace presents unique learning opportunities for producers’ professional development.

The Context of the Study

A cabinet paper on the 15th of March 1960 set the framework for the introduction of television to the then Federation of Malaya. G.F. Brickendon from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was seconded under UNESCO’s funding to the Television Department, to oversee television programming, production and the administrative aspects of the organization (Aziz, 1987). Television broadcasting began with the broad goals of informing, educating and entertaining the masses.

But television was to adopt more meaningful roles of reengineering and socializing the masses soon after the May 13th riots in 1969. According to the Tun Sambanthan Report (Aziz, 1987), radio and television broadcasting was proposed to be reorganized into a Public Radio and Television Station, under the Department of Broadcasting. Among its major roles were, the report said, “to . . . play a more positive role in the planning and implementation of policies, and periodically to ensure that the dissemination of information to the masses of the overall government of the country has been effective” (p.222).
When PTS’s services began to characterize itself as a public broadcaster, and satisfied with its role as a Government propagation media that reached its people, it was soon learned that PTS was losing its audience to neighboring Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and the Thai Television Channels. This was spelt out in the Minister of Information’s memorandum to the government on the 29th January 1974. The organization’s needs were then expanded to include being able to produce competitive and quality programs to recapture its rightful audience, hence the challenge to program makers in PTS. As a result, color television went on air on the 28th of December 1974. And the first call on television then was for all TV personnel to improve their capability and commitment to producing the best quality programs. Producers were guided by a new set of organizational goals, which have not changed much to date. These goals are:

- To explain and provide widespread and in-depth coverage on government policies and programs so that they would be fully understood by the people;
- To stimulate interest and promote the way of thinking of the people in line with government policies and aspirations;
- To stimulate national unity through the use of the Malay language among the people;
- To develop civic consciousness and promote the development of Malaysian arts and culture;
- To provide suitable materials for general information, education and entertainment purposes.