JOURNALISM & INSECURE WORK

Panel presented by the News Beats Project (www.newbeatsblog.com/)

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CONTEXT – NEW BEATS PROJECT

- In 2012, it was estimated that Australian journalism lost 10% of its workforce.

- New Beats Project established to explore what has happened to these journalists since redundancy.

- ARC Linkage and Discovery funded, partnerships with NLA, MEAA & ABC.

- Conducted three annual survey of journalists who took redundancies in 2012, 2013 and 2014, and a fourth to come in 2017.

- Internationalisation of the project with Canada and Netherlands, with the survey delivered in both those contexts.

CONTEXT — NEW BEATS PROJECT

- Also includes:

- 'Whole of life' interviews with journalists for the National Library of Australia.

- Radio shows with the ABC.

- A survey of regional and rural journalists in 2015.

- Qualitative interviews with select cohorts.

- More www.newbeatsblog.com @newbeatsproject

CONTEXT – NEW BEATS PROJECT

- At #ANZCA17, New Beats will address three distinct themes that have emerged from the project:

- Young Journalists and Redundancy

- Networking

- The Redundancy Experience

- More www.newbeatsblog.com @newbeatsproject

CAREER PATHS OR PAIN

YOUNG JOURNALISTS, NEWSROOM JOB CUTS & INSECURE WORK

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Dr Penny O'Donnell, University of Sydney, penny.odonnell@sydney.edu.au

Dr Merryn Sherwood, La Trobe University, m.sherwood@latrobe.edu.au

Dr Monika Winarnita, La Trobe University, m.winarnita@latrobe.edu.au

CONTEXT

- The digital transformation of Australian journalism is accelerating

- We do not lament 'the lost labour' of journalism (Compton & Benedetti, 2010); we want to understand if work like this will survive the demise of legacy news media and adapt to meet new demands, or, if not, what will replace it?

- It has to be said there has been a lot of wishful thinking about how journalism might be saved; instead we offer some empirical research.

WISHFUL THINKING

- The future is 'born digital'?

- Thanking Trump?

DID TRUMP SAVE JOURNALISM?

CHANGE IN JOURNALISM

- 'Practices of journalism have always been shaped by technology and this particular moment of change can be seen as a continuance of that development. However, in the current reality the economic and technological imperatives shaping the newsrooms are not translating into self-development, success and ambition in the minds of the journalists. Rather technological development is seen to increase job insecurity and lead to loss of control over journalistic content' (Nikunen, 2014, p. 884).
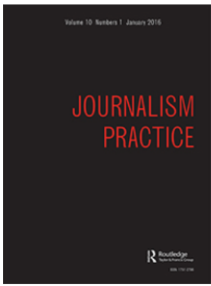
JOB CUTS FOR YOUNG & OLD

GENERATIONAL ADVANTAGE?

- This paper tests the claim that younger journalists as 'born digital' now enjoy a 'generational advantage' over older journalists in getting and retaining jobs in the industry.

- We talked to 10 younger journalists about their career expectations and trajectories in order to explore and assess whether they are experiencing more or less 'career pain' than older journalists?

RESEARCH PRECEDENTS

Where do journalists go after newsroom job cuts?

Penny O'Donnell, Lawrie Zion & Merryn Sherwood

Working for less: the aftermath for journalists made redundant in Australia between 2012 and 2014

Lawrie Zion, Andrew Dodd, Merryn Sherwood, Penny O'Donnell, Timothy Marjoribanks & Matthew Ricketson

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JOB LOSS FOR YOUNGER JOURNALISTS

Table 1 – Descriptive statistics of survey respondents, aged 35 and under at the time of 2014 survey.

Demographics

Variable	Value	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	11	57.8
	Male	8	42.2
Education Level	Year 10	0	0.0
	High School	1	5.2
	Advanced Diploma or TAFE	0	0.0
	Undergraduate Degree	14	73.7
	Postgraduate Degree	4	21.1
Journalism education*	None	1	5.2
	Cadetship	8	42.1
	Undergraduate Degree	15	79.0
	Postgraduate Degree	4	21.1
	Other	28	0..0
Age**	18-25	3	15.8
	26-30	7	36.8
	31-35	9	47.4

n=19
*Participants could select more than one option
**Denotes age at the time of the survey, rather than age at time of redundancy

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JOB LOSS FOR YOUNGER JOURNALISTS

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics of survey respondents, aged 35 and under at the time of 2014 survey.

Employment situation at time of redundancy

Variable	Value	Frequency	%
Employment Status	Full-time	15	79.0
	Part-time	4	21.0
Annual Income	Under 20,000	0	0.0
	20,001 to 40,000	2	10.5
	40,001 to 60,000	6	31.5
	60,001 to 80,0000	9	47.4
	80,001 to 100,000	2	10.5
Employer	Fairfax	6	31.5
	News Corporation	6	31.5
	Channel 9	1	5.2
	Channel 10	1	5.2
	Other	5	26.2
Redundancy Type	Voluntary	12	63.1
	Involuntary	7	36.8

n=19

JOB LOSS FOR YOUNGER JOURNALISTS

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics of survey respondents, aged 35 and under at the time of 2014 survey.

Current work at time of 2014 survey

Variable	Value	Frequency	%
Current Work	Journalism	8	42.1
	Journalism and other work	8	42.1
	Not journalism	1	5.2
	Looking for work	1	5.2
	Taking a break	1	5.2
Annual Income*	Under 20,000	0	0.0
	20,001 to 40,000	2	11.8
	40,001 to 60,000	6	35.3
	60,001 to 80,0000	7	41.2
	80,001 to 100,000	1	6.2
	100,001+	1	5.8

n=19

*n=17 –did not track income of those who were not in work.

CAREER PRECARITY NOT PATHWAYS

- One of the key elements of this second stage of the study was to track younger journalists' career expectations and trajectories.

- The main findings in this area, so far, give pause for thought.

- Our interviewees told us they hadn't expected to enter journalism as a life-long career option, weren't particularly surprised at the increasing precarity of their work, and didn't necessarily expect to work in journalism for a long time

'I think, early on, when I was at the local newspaper, I saw people in production laid off, and they'd worked for 30 and 40 years some of them for that newspaper; worked for them when they were rolling out the newspaper in the backrooms. Once I saw that, I saw that it was a pretty unforgiving industry, and there was going to be lots of upheaval and this was just going to be the reality of it. I think I was already seeing it, but it's a different experience once you go through it yourself.

When I speak to colleagues now who are facing that sort of pressure for the first time, or facing that realisation, I try and talk to them about it, and say you're going to feel some emotions here and it's not going to be pleasant.

But, the reality is, when you're below the line – they make a line, and when you're below it, you're gone and when you're above it, you're safe, and really, nothing you do has too much effect on that. It's a numbers game and often we can never see it, and we don't really understand our own worth anyway. You need to be prepared for the powerlessness of that whole situation' (Interviewee 1).

CAREER PRECARITY NOT PATHWAYS

- Participants also did not seem particularly concerned with the precarious nature of their work.

- Only two were in full-time roles within legacy news organisations – a news desk editor and a radio producer.

- Most noted their current work was "freelance."

- Some women, who were mothers, noted that they preferred casualised work to fit with their childcare duties.

- Others liked the flexibility, and that it was less stressful than a newsroom.

CAREER PRECARITY NOT PATHWAYS

I know I'm going to be swimming against the tide here but I am so much happier. I know there's a lot of journalists who aren't happy about taking redundancy and see it as the fall of journalism and a personal kind of tragedy. I'm lucky. I see it as it was my perfect way out. I'm thrilled to be working for myself. Every day I think I'm so lucky, so lucky. I love it. Sometimes I wonder why I didn't leave sooner. (Interviewee 2).

I found the demand of being a freelance digital journalist to be far, far lighter than the demands of working in a newsroom. Working in a newsroom was one of the most intense and stressful experiences of my life. And working for myself and having a freelance career is just so much lighter and easier and less stressful than working in a newsroom. (Interviewee 5).

YOUNG JOURNALISTS – DIGITAL NATIVES?

- One of the key aims of this study was to explore the premise that younger journalists are better suited to digital work.

- In our cohort of 10, only one was in a social media role, one was a freelance video and multimedia producer.

- The majority were working as writers or editors, either freelance or within news organisations.

YOUNG JOURNALISTS — GENDER

- *They weren't industry changes that made me unhappy. I think it was just I just felt quite disillusioned. After I had my first child I came back to work and wasn't treated the same way I'd say. I had gone from being a senior journalist to being asked to write pic stories, glorified captions and kind of felt like they treated me like I'd had a lobotomy some days. I just felt quite undervalued. Yes, so I had already formed thoughts of an alternative career.*

- *So there were a lot of young female journalists in the newsroom as I was leaving. That had changed a lot. But not many of them were mums, no…There was one job I got asked to do and it was in the country and I remember saying to the photographer - the pictorial editor sorry "I can go to this job with a photographer but I have to be back by 5:00 to pick up my daughter from child care" and he said "that's not our problem. That's your problem."*

- *That was the kind of attitude that I kind of started to find when I went back after having kids that they didn't care about what was going on in your family life. All that mattered was getting the job done. (Interviewee 2).*

CONCLUSION: YOUNG JOURNALISTS & REDUNDANCY

- They have not all moved into social and digital media roles

- Most work in precarious work, using skills they developed pre-redundancy (i.e. writing)

- Clear reasons for why they did not want to return to a newsroom

- *Offers a counterpoint to existing research.*

- *Points to the need to study who is still left in newsrooms.*

J-NETWORKS
IN THE AFTERMATH OF REDUNDANCY

Professor Tim Marjoribanks, Professor Lawrie Zion, Dr Merryn Sherwood, La Trobe University

RESEARCH CONTEXT

- Redundancy and threat of redundancy are central both to contemporary experience of journalists and to media organisation practice

- Journalism careers are precarious and uncertain rather than stable and long term

- What role for networks?

CENTRAL QUESTIONS

- How do journalists whose positions have been made redundant use their networks after job loss?

- How relevant are networks to journalists who lose their jobs through redundancies?

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

- 'Employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker' (Kalleberg, 2009: 2)

- Impacts both those who experience job loss and those who retain their jobs

- Diverse forms of emergent employment, including entrepreneurial journalism

- Influenced by organisational context, technology and political economy

PRECARITY AND REDUNDANCY

- Impacts of precarity and redundancy experienced by individuals, organisations, industry and society

- Redundancy as organisational strategy involving power

- Has ongoing impacts on individuals and communities beyond the 'fateful moment' (Giddens, 1991)

- Understand redundancy as an event that has temporal, ongoing and contested dimensions, rather than being confined to a single moment

NETWORKS

- Social and professional relationships with others that are developed over time

- Can operate pre-, during, and post- employment

- Forms of support in a period of employment related trauma

- A means of seeking and potentially finding new employment and career opportunities

- Strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973)

- Access to networks is not enough, need appropriate structural conditions in place also (Lindsay, 2010)

METHODS

- Three surveys: 2014, 2015, 2016

- 2014 survey samples journalists who lost jobs in 2012, 2013, 2014, and is base line

- Purposive and snowball sampling

- For 2014 survey, n = 225

- Closed and open ended questions

- 'Do you network or have contact with former colleagues? If so, please tell us about the extent and importance of your current contact with former colleagues.'

SAMPLE 2014

- Female 42.2%, Male 57.8%
- Voluntary redundancy   76.9%
- Aged 41+   85.3%
- 25 years+ experience   50%+
- Majority worked in large, legacy media companies, and mostly for newspapers.

FREQUENCY OF NETWORKING

- Frequent contact: 28%
- Some contact: 56%
- Limited contact: 16%

- 'I'm still in regular contact with my former colleagues because I deal with them in a professional capacity, almost on a daily basis. We catch up for a drink or a coffee regularly' (Frequent)
- 'I have made contact with a few colleagues, but I really only have contact with one former colleague on a regular basis' (Limited)

REASONS FOR NETWORKING, 2014

- Social (65%) or work (35%)

- 'Yes, social contact a few times each month. My circle is a little narrow, 5-10 people but I am looking forward to seeing a wider circle of ex-colleagues. My best friends are mainly journalists and photographers I worked with.' (Social)

- 'I still keep in touch with former co-workers and journalists as well as PR contacts from my time at the magazine. This has been the basis of many of the contracts I have picked up as well as other work that I have been recommended for or referred for. Without this network I would have struggled post-redundancy.' (Work)

SUPERNETWORKERS

- 24 participants mobilised networks for work and social reasons, and did so frequently. They are supernetworkers.

- 'I am deeply engaged in a network of former colleagues. They have provided enormous support and we have assisted each other with work tips, emotional support and of course, gossip. However, it will never replace the 'village' feel of a newsroom. I both enjoy and at times, endure, the isolation of the freelance life.'

- 'I talk all the time to former colleagues and they are a major part of my social network. I also employ some of them occasionally in contract or freelance roles.'

Networks with work and outside work

- 'I see very few of my former colleagues; mostly the ones who have been good friends. I still cannot bring myself to re-enter [my former workplace], as the wounds of the recent past are yet to completely heal. But I am making contact with those former colleagues who form the ever-growing [media organisation name] diaspora. Strength in unity, in experience, in shared memories.'

- As well as individual networks, collective networks organised around former workplace

CHANGES OVER TIME, 2014-2016

- Frequency of contact – 28% (2014) to 45 % (2016) In 2016 52% said they had infrequent contact and just 2% said they had no contact

- Work connection fluctuates: 40.09% (2014) to 48.65% (2015) to 33.62% (2016)

- Increases in face to face contact from 36.49% (2014) to 52.25% (2015) to 82.76% (2016)

- Social media contact increases from 20.72% (2014) to 24.23% (2015) to 25.86% (2016)

EMPIRICAL CONCLUSIONS

- In a precarious work environment where much work is part time or freelance, networks come into play not just in securing full time employment, but for managing and developing future opportunities.

- The extent to which participants cited social reasons for networking affirms the strength of long term collegial links developed over time in workplaces. Also evident through importance of face to face networks.

CONCEPTUAL CONCLUSIONS

- Networks are important in both social and professional contexts

- Networks need to be analysed in terms of purpose over time, and that purpose may change

- Strong ties and weak ties are both important resources that can be developed and maintained

- The roles and purposes of networks are influenced by the context, in this case, a particular segment of an industry that is undergoing profound transformation

QUESTIONS

- Is the extent of contact something specific to a group who had ridden the wave of profound change from journalism as a stable profession to one of constant disruption?

- Might this kind of contact be expected in other professional groups?

REDUNDANCY EXPERIENCES

Matthew Ricketson & Andrew Dodd

PRIMARY RESPONSES TO REDUNDANCY

Negative Total: 89	Positive Total: 66	Relieved Total: 47	Ambivalent Total: 19
(40.27%)	(29.86%)	(21.26%)	(8.59%)
			(100%) =221

MAJOR NEGATIVE CATEGORIES

The redundancy experience was so emotionally wrenching

22 responses

Because I felt my work was devalued

12 responses

Because of the insensitivity of management

10 responses

Because of poor management (handling of the process)

10 responses

Negative:

"I had many promises of freelance work before I left, but as soon as I walked out the door those promises evaporated. Freelance World, I discovered, was a wasteland. It was very disheartening."

MAJOR POSITIVE CATEGORIES

The redundancy came at the right time

16 responses

The redundancy came with a good payout

13 responses

I had done everything I wanted to do in journalism

12 responses

Because I managed to secure work elsewhere

9 responses

Positive

"I was ecstatic. It was good to leave. I received four months pay which gave me plenty of time to look for work. It took very little time to find a lot of freelance work, which paid me much better for my time and gave me flexibility. I never looked back."

MAJOR RELIEVED CATEGORIES

Because the work was no longer fulfilling

14 responses

Hollowing out of the newsroom

9 responses

Poor management

9 responses

The industry was dying

8 responses

Relieved

"Initially it was a relief. Shrinking staff sizes, the constant threat of workplace changes and redundancy and low morale had made the workplace quite stressful. But there was also a slight sense of loss of identity going from a fairly high-profile job to casual work with low status and no authority. And there was the day-to-day stress of uncertainty workwise, and of course a massively decreased salary."

Ambivalent

"I had asked for redundancy and was pleased when it was granted. The package was generous and I felt I had been fairly done by. However, despite that, emotionally I felt challenged by being 'made' redundant. My employer of 12 years said officially that I wasn't required any more, that they didn't value me enough to keep me. It was what I wanted and had lobbied for but it was still an emotional wrench".