

New Beats

A STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISTS WHO BECAME REDUNDANT DURING OR SINCE 2012

OVERVIEW

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Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia
Annual Conference, UTS, Sydney, 25-27 November 2014

Overview

- New Beats background
- What happens to the journalists?
- What happens to journalism?
- What does this tell us about forced career change more broadly?
- Examining these questions over the next three to four years

Our plan

- Cohort now 2012-2014 – 84% from newspapers, but as we've progressed more from broadcast and magazines, including Network 10
- Surveys (preliminary findings of 2014 survey today)
- Asked a mix of baseline and open-ended questions
- More than 200 completed responses so far
- National Library of Australia – 60 “whole of life” interviews
- Radio docos
- Website – www.newbeatsblog.com
- Conference bringing together related projects such as the “Laid Off” study of journalists in the UK

Future involvement of participants

- Participants willing to be part of:
- Future surveys 96%
- National Library of Australia interviews 74%
- RN docos 67%
- Willing to be approached to be part of public aspects of the project 72%

An interdisciplinary contribution

- Project grounded in journalism and media research, but also engaging with management, sociology, political science and other disciplines
- Theoretical, empirical and methodological interdisciplinary contribution

Institutional and regulatory contexts of redundancy

Lived experiences of redundancy

Implications for other employment contexts beyond journalism

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THE REDUNDANCY EXPERIENCE

Matthew Ricketson (UC) & Andrew Dodd (Swinburne)

Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia
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QUESTION 14

Please tell us about the experience of becoming redundant including any emotional or practical issues encountered?

Ratio of responses

Two thirds negative...One third positive

Some welcomed redundancy

“I was the happiest that I could be. It was a blessing in disguise.”

“All positive. It was a VOLUNTARY redundancy that I really wanted...glad to have had the opportunity to pocket some extra cash when I left.”

Shocking

“Like being shot in the face. Surprising, depressing and alarming”

“It was truly a shock, almost as shocking as finding out I had breast cancer.”

Many miss the newsroom

“No more daily talk with colleagues (the best and brightest in the industry bar none) no more jokes, no more camaraderie. Rather like a death in the family after a long and painful illness, really.”

Identity – Journalism is more than a job

“I fretted and became depressed over that loss of identity, over the loss of that newsroom environment and the relationships that were part of it...we grieved for the gouging of our profession as much as the end of our personal relationship with the paper.”

Management was despised

“I had come to either resent or loathe the indolent, self absorbed fools in the company at the management and editorial level”

“It was a horror story...we had been told by Kim Williams that digital was the future and news was in our DNA etc etc and that on the web desk we had the safest jobs in the building. Then we didn't...”

Financial matters matter

“I had been preparing for a long time to leave the company. Redundancy made it easier. However I am now fully employed and working quite a bit harder – for about half the money.”

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Dr Penny O'Donnell (USyd) and Merryn Sherwood (LaTrobe)

Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia
Annual Conference, UTS, Sydney, 25-27 November 2014

Context

- 2013 New Beats pilot survey of 95 journalists made redundant in 2012 massive job cuts at Fairfax, News Corp.
- Two standout characteristics of cohort:
 - average age was 49 years old (40% = 50+);
 - average duration working in journalism was 25 years.
- Three findings:
 - Forced career change means trauma and difficulties (i.e. lower pay/status, less stable jobs, loss of professional identity);
 - Relatively better post-job loss experiences than UK journalists (Nel, 2010);
 - Overall adverse implications for news quality, professional identity.

2014 SURVEY RESULTS

What happens next? Some preliminary findings

2014 Survey (N=202)

- 202 participants, 56% male, 44% female
- 84% aged 41+ years, with 52% aged 41-55 years
- 62% had worked in journalism for 16-35 years
- 78% working FT when made redundant
- 79% took voluntary redundancy
- 77% earning between \$80-140K at time of job loss.

Current work situation

Variable	Value	Frequency	Percentage
Employed?	Work in journalism	64	31.7
	Work in journalism + other	63	30.7
	Work outside journalism	45	22.3
	Looking for work	14	6.9
	Retired	9	4.5
	Taking a break	8	4.0
	N=202		

Working in journalism (N = 126)

- Of those working in journalism 33% = FT jobs, 12% = PT
- 23% = freelancing, 11% = self-employed, 8% = contract
- 65% earning less than \$80K, 18% earning \$80-100K
- 48% MEAA members (compared to 73% pre-job loss).

Working but not journalism (N = 45)

- SUMMARY: Those working outside journalism have significantly more job security and higher incomes:
- Of those working outside journalism 51% = FT jobs, 4% = PT
- 3% = freelancing, 16% = self-employed, 16% = contract
- 58% earning \$80-140K
- 24% MEAA members (compared to 73% pre-job loss).

HOW ARE THEY COPING?

Complicated process, conflicting emotions

- Redundancy experience?
 - Horrible 22%, Bad 12%, Satisfactory, 44%, Good, 22%
- MEAA support during redundancy?
 - Yes 45%, No 54%
- Digital training or reskilling post-job loss?
 - Employer-funded 23%, self-funded 8%, no re-skilling 69%
- Networking?
 - Frequent 49%, Some 37%, Little 12%

FEELINGS ABOUT JOURNALISM?

How do you feel about journalism today?

Variable	Value	Frequency	Percentage
Journalism today?	In a state of change	70	35.9
	Standards are slipping	55	28.2
	Losing credibility	37	19.0
	In serious trouble	24	12.3
	Good journalism still happening	23	11.8
	Journalism is needed	23	11.8
	Love the industry	17	8.7

N=195 (multiple feelings)

Conclusion

- Overall, job loss has adverse implications for the journalistic workforce, employment security, income levels, and professional identity.
- Particular concerns for the future of young journalists:
 - *“I believe there is a core group of very dedicated and bright young journalists pushing up through newsrooms and I hope that they are able to continue to make a living at it.”*
 - *“I fear journalism as I knew it is under threat. I still think there's great journalism being produced, but much of what I read and watch is second rate. I think young reporters are as enthusiastic and as smart as they ever were. But who leads and mentors them? And how many have well-paid, secure and permanent jobs?”*