

2015

## Competencies for future newsrooms in Australia: a mid-career learning strategy for journalists

Padmanabhan Iyer  
*University of Wollongong*

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# Competencies for future newsrooms in Australia

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A mid-career learning strategy for  
journalists

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of a doctorate in journalism**

**University of Wollongong**

Padmanabhan Iyer, MA, MA (Hons), EMBA

**Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts**

**2015**

## **Thesis Certification**

I, Padmanabhan Iyer, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Journalism), in the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

(Signature)

Padmanabhan Iyer

31 March 2015

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study arose out of a desire to give something back to the newsroom, which has sustained and nurtured my enthusiasm for journalism for many decades and across continents. As a postgraduate in English literature with an interest in the art of writing, current affairs, people and places, I have been fascinated by the storytelling abilities of newsroom journalists and the magic that could be wrought upon their narratives through production processes that bring daily events to life for an ever-hungry and demanding set of people known as readers.

In my quest to discover what makes a newsroom journalist, I have been helped unstintingly by those within newsrooms – my colleagues, mentors and superiors. To them I am grateful. This study would not have been possible without the input from the newsroom practitioners who enthusiastically answered the survey questionnaire. I am indebted to the subject matter experts interviewed for this study who generously gave their valuable perspectives on newsroom issues: Helen Trinca, Graham Erbacher, Liz Bennett, Michael Gawenda, Christopher Warren, Jock Cheetham, Alan Knight and John Henningham.

This thesis owes its current form and substance to my supervisor, mentor and friendly-but-firm academic guardian Dr Eric Loo, without whose patient directions, abiding faith and encouraging cups of coffee, my flagging academic spirit would have given up any hope of overcoming the impasse that all too frequently confronts a researcher. My newsroom experience would have counted for very little without the guidance of his classroom wisdom. To have had the support of his sagacity, I am fortunate.

This study would never have been possible without the understanding and love from my wife Meeta, who had only recently gone through similar academic pains. My daughter Sumedha, a co-sufferer of the PhD condition, was ever encouraging and ready with text messages of hope. My self-belief always found reaffirmation from the cheerful words of my second daughter Shibani. To all three, the study is my tribute.

My thesis is also the result of the high expectations, hope and love placed in me by my parents, whose belief in the lifelong pursuit of knowledge forever urged me in my academic endeavors.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study addresses a practical need in Australian print newsrooms, which are being transformed from single platform to multi-platform news delivery centres. Convergence, or the co-existence of many technological platforms – such as print, online, mobile and tablet news publishing – in the same newsroom or publication environment, necessitates the development of newsroom capabilities at the individual and team levels. The concept of competency – which encompasses attributes, knowledge areas and skills – is useful in assessing the requirements for performance under changing circumstances.

This study notes the use of a competency-based framework for monitoring and developing performance in other professions, such as information technology, psychology, health services and teaching. Research indicates a gap in literature on the use of such a framework in the newsroom. This researcher's newsroom experience also indicates the desirability of using a competency framework in the newsroom environment or community of practice.

Newsrooms need to keep track of the competencies of their journalists to adapt to new technological developments affecting their performance requirements. This can be done by developing a competency framework, adapted from a generic framework, such as the one presented in this study of newsroom competencies. The study reveals the attributes, knowledge areas and skills that newsroom journalists at different functional levels require. It takes into account the tacit and explicit knowledge areas as well as the skills and attributes acquired in the newsroom, a community of practice where journalists perform news-related tasks, learn from each other and mentor or teach others during work.

This study uses three methods – content analysis of job advertisements, survey of newsroom practitioners and in-depth interviews with subject matter experts – to collect data relevant to a competencies framework for the Australian print newsroom that is rapidly becoming a convergent newsroom. The study aims to achieve both breadth and depth of discussion on newsroom competencies through the use of multiple methods.

The main findings of this study include the key role played by the community of practice for mid-career journalists in the development of their competencies. Implicit learning and tacit knowledge, two concepts explained in Chapter 3 on the

theoretical framework underpinning this study, play a significant role in the “education” of journalists in the newsroom. A distinction is made between learning by doing and learning in the classroom through explicit and documented forms of knowledge provided through educational institutions such as training centres and universities. The competency matrix, developed in a preliminary stage through a content analysis of job advertisements (discussed in Chapter 6), is a combination of these two different kinds of learning. Competency categories and competency dimensions emerge as the major findings at this stage and these are used in the construction of a competency model. The inputs from newsroom practitioners, obtained through a survey questionnaire on competencies are used to refine the competency model in Chapter 7. This chapter also outlines the many practical applications and uses of the model. In-depth interviews with subject matter experts further confirm the findings of the content analysis and the survey. The specific competency components at the various career stages of newsroom journalists are presented in a composite model at the end of Chapter 8.

This thesis concludes that newsrooms can benefit from a competencies framework because it can be adapted to various circumstances and needs, whether applied to individual journalists or entire newsrooms. If updated on a regular basis, a competency framework provides a compass for developing the newsroom’s performance into the future.



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# 1. PROLOGUE

This study examines the components of journalistic competencies in a changing newsroom context and suggests a methodology to develop them. It analyses the usefulness of the concept of competencies in the newsroom situation, with particular reference to the Australian print media newsroom, as it transforms itself into a multimedia, multi-platform environment.

This prologue explores the researcher's professional background and how it informs the thesis topic.

## Changing media landscape

Journalism is going through technological transformations that are affecting the way news is produced by journalists, distributed by news organisations and accessed by the audience. Digital media, powered by internet technology, have created new delivery platforms. New media such as news web sites, social media (Facebook, Twitter and other similar applications that connect people with each other without the intervention of mediators such as journalists), and news tailored for tablet devices and mobile phones have taken audiences away from old media – a term that denotes all the media that existed prior to the arrival of the internet in the 1990s. Declining audience has forced established media such as print, television, radio and video to incorporate aspects of new media in their news delivery platforms.

Convergent journalism – the adoption of cross-media platforms – appears to be a necessary defensive step for the survival of traditional<sup>1</sup> news organisations. Dwindling audience and revenue streams<sup>2</sup> is not good news for newspapers, now looking back with a sense of loss at the long spell of stability enjoyed by them until the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whether convergence of media platforms will give anew lease of life for traditional media is not yet clear but traditional newsrooms have begun to change the way they define, source, produce and deliver news.

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<sup>1</sup> “Traditional”, as defined by Saltzis and Dickinson (2007, pp. 217), refers to “analogue media, i.e. broadcasting and print media, and is used to distinguish them from digital media”.

<sup>2</sup> “Newspaper readership, circulation and advertising have continued to decline for more than five decades, along with the number of daily newspapers” (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2011, pp. 119).

The convergent newsroom is different from the traditional newsroom in important ways. The combination of written text with a few photographs was the staple content produced in the print media newsroom. The new media production platforms in the convergent newsroom add video and audio content to the traditional news fare. Another critical difference relates to news sourcing. Because audience feedback in the convergent newsroom is instantaneous, journalists interact more closely with their end-users than in a traditional newsroom (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2011, pp.73). Audiences react with comments, commentary and suggestions for news reports as news breaks online. The real-time engagement with the audience expands the scope of news. These two features of the convergent newsroom – the addition of video and audio, and interactivity with the audience – are creating new production routines, enabled by digital technology and constantly updated publishing software.

The immediate consequence for journalists is the urgent need to acquire new areas of knowledge and skills. These mainly relate to multimedia production platforms. For newsrooms, there is a corresponding need to equip journalists with new knowledge and skills. However, newsrooms are in an experimental stage as convergence is not yet a proven solution to the problem of traditional print media audiences migrating to internet-based news offerings in the market. It is unclear whether convergence would stem the decline in revenues arising from audience migration or if it is merely a transitional phase on the way to a complete abandonment of the traditional print platform and establishment of an online-only subscription-based platform for newspapers. As print newspapers adopt multimedia platforms, the crucial issue for news organisations is how to optimize the combination of old and new skills. In the absence of precedents, digital frontiers are being crossed in traditional newsrooms, leading to an evolution of journalistic capabilities. The walls dividing old and new worlds – in terms of teamwork – have already crumbled. The work for print and new media is not always done by different teams of journalists. Crossover and merging of teams is common. “Cross-media production involves a number of intertwining forms of co-operation and reproduction,” notes Erdal (2011, pp. 221).

For journalists and newsroom managers, the key problematic is the conspicuous absence of a framework that outlines the competencies required for the emerging patterns of work in a convergent newsroom. Traditional platforms of production exist concurrently with new platforms and, as journalists shift between the

two, varying expectations are raised about the capabilities required of journalists. “Ideas about the impact of new media went far ahead of the reality and, even now, research in this area is still occupied with scaling down expectations,” comments McQuail (2010, pp. 136). Journalists and news production staff seem to be missing link in the debate about the survival of the old and new media.

This thesis investigates the competencies required for a convergent newsroom and proposes a competencies model that can aid the professional development of journalists in a traditional newsroom in Australia. Its underlying assumption is that journalistic competencies must be identified before being developed. It audits in-use and emerging competencies. It concludes by proposing a competency framework that will guide newsrooms and journalists in their search for viable pathways of professional development.

### **Newsroom advantage: the researcher’s background**

This study of praxis and theory is the culmination of my three decades of work as a journalist in three countries, in India (six years at The Times of India in Mumbai), the UAE (four years in Dubai) and Australia (23 years at Fairfax and News Ltd), across different formats, such as broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, magazines and an online news site.

In an effort to ground my theoretical understanding of the news industry, I completed an MA (Hons) by research (University of Wollongong) on the four theories of the press as applied to the coverage of the Gulf War of 1991 in the Middle East and Australia) and an Executive MBA program (University of NSW) with a major in business strategy.

My recent role (until the middle of 2013) as the special projects editor of *The Australian* (a broadsheet newspaper in Sydney published by News Corp) involved working within the newsroom editorial processes. It provided me with a degree of autonomy in assigning news stories, commissioning freelance contributions and planning the content of the sections I edited. In my current role as letters editor at The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, I liaise with the editor and the deputy editor to closely follow the news agenda of the paper and maintain its adherence to the legal and ethical frameworks binding publications. These roles have helped me interact with newsroom journalists at various levels, familiarize myself with newsroom production

processes and attain a strong position within the newsroom as a participant and observer.

The thesis also draws from my constant contact with the learning, teaching and mentoring processes in journalism: I worked as a part-time lecturer at three journalism institutes in Mumbai and at the University of Wollongong for a few sessions (teaching courses in editing, feature writing and ethics) and until a year ago continued to work as a tutor and facilitator at News College – an internally managed journalism training department for News Corp’s 110 mastheads in the Asia-Pacific.

The professional development and education of a journalist has been a running theme in my professional life, having been a learner and a teacher in formal learning situations for the past three decades while continuing to work full-time as a journalist. This thesis is an organic extension of my theoretical inquiry into the practical aspects of news production and distribution in a convergent newsroom.

An informed interest in the unresolved (and often fraught) relationship between journalistic theory and practice<sup>3</sup> acts as a searchlight in this study. The view I have from within the newsroom is a significant advantage, although it does not present itself without the usual caveats.

It is also possible for practitioner to be influenced by subjective conclusions. However, awareness of these factors is a strong factor in minimizing their influence. It is important, however, to emphasise the advantage of observing newsroom processes as a practitioner.

Journalists tend to be interpretive in their quotidian working life, and it is a privilege to be privy to their interpretations. Observation often yields results that cannot be gained through other methods. “Observational data, especially participant observation, permit the evaluation researcher to understand a program or treatment to an extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews” (Patton, 2002, pp. 22-23).

A major advantage available to the practitioner-observer is one of access.

---

<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the skills-based approach in education demanded by news industry and the university curriculum insistence on a strong theory-based approach to journalism education, Martin Hirst (2010, pp. 87) observes: “In both Australia and New Zealand the key defining tension for some time has been between theory and practice.”

Journalists demand access to their news sources but are often themselves inaccessible. News organisations are no longer open to visitors due to security fears. They need to get an appointment with a journalist – which can be quite a feat, considering the busy working lives journalists lead – to gain entry into the closed environment where news is produced. As a practitioner, access to the newsroom community of practice is not a hurdle.

Discussing the role of the researcher's prior professional experience, Paterson and Zoellner (2010, pp. 98-99) note these advantages: "1) a means of understanding more readily the practices being observed; 2) easier access to conduct the research, as an 'insider'; 3) a means of encouraging greater disclosure from the media professionals whose practices are being examined; and 4) an increased amount of trust of the researcher not to disclose confidential (or proprietary) information."

Because of these advantages, major trends in the newsroom affecting journalists' capabilities become easily observable to an "insider". The impact of convergence technology on competencies in the newsroom is immediately apparent and changes in the production routine become evident. In an environment of constant change, it must also be noted that newsroom developments do not always find their way into journal articles and books. Considering the time lag between research and its publication, it is a privilege to not be solely dependent on the published observations of pure researchers.

Some competencies-related themes in Australian journalism that I note as a practitioner are:

1. The human resources function is noticeably underperformed in the newsroom. Performance reviews are seldom undertaken with any degree of consistency or regularity. From the editorial side, there is generally just one editor – the managing editor – in charge of ensuring hiring. Training takes place only when urgently required, as for example when new production software is introduced in the newsroom. Journalists' capabilities are not assessed or upgraded on a periodic basis. When cadet journalists are hired, they are graded on completion of years of training, as required by union agreements. The agreement grades journalists who have completed cadetship on a scale of 1 to 10, with J1 being the lowest level and the J10

the highest in the newsroom. Salaries and skill levels are correlated to grades and are stipulated by the journalists' union (MEAA). The skill levels were calibrated during the pre-internet days and are rarely tested in a formal manner by the union or by the news organisation for their presence.

2. Training is generally confined to teaching the use of new technology. It is minimal and consists of “how-to” lessons for using the latest software. An example of training given to journalists by news organisations was when Cybergraphics publishing software was introduced by Fairfax (the publisher of The Sydney Morning Herald, among other newspapers) and News Corp Australia (the publisher of The Australian, among other newspapers) in late 1990s. In 2014, News Corp Australia provided training to journalists ranging from two to four days when it introduced Eidos Methode convergence platform software for publishing. Work does not stop for learning to take place, with journalists attending the training sessions by rotation. Ongoing training on selected topics, such as managing conflict and legal issues affecting journalism, is provided online at News Corp Australia. Training is among the first few functions to be at the receiving end of budgetary cost-cutting.

3. External trainers or university courses are seldom used for training journalists. The journalists' union conducts skills-based two-day courses on an irregular basis on subjects such as the use of InDesign for journalists, but it is up to individual journalists to enrol.

4. Newsroom competencies – what journalists are capable of doing and are ready to do as individuals and as a team – are not tracked or documented. Information about competencies – who can do what – resides with key people in the newsroom and it is up to them to document it and make it available to others.

These observations are predominantly experiential, derived from this researcher's observations over 23 years in Australian newsrooms. They provide a basis for the formation of the research questions of this study.

## **Thesis structure**

The concept of competency will be introduced in the next chapter. It will be defined and its relevance for the newsroom explained. The research questions



addressed by this study, which relate to competencies in the newsroom, will be situated in their specific context of new media and their impact on traditional newsrooms.

The theoretical framework chapter will provide the structural backdrop for discussing the ways in which journalists acquire competencies and how they can be developed. It will address the issue of how journalists learn from each other within the community of professionals in the newsroom and how the process of learning is different from classroom learning in the university or in a training institute. The significance of learning by doing and situated learning as knowledge acquisition methodologies will be explored. This chapter will also function in part as a literature review of how competencies are acquired in a community of practice.

The literature review, which follows the outline of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, will inquire into competency-related and newsroom-related studies that have been undertaken so far and pinpoint the gap in the knowledge about newsroom learning strategies. Convergent media's increasing requirements of adaptive learning will be examined in the context of available literature on the future of the traditional newsroom.

The competency framework emerging from this study is the result of three methodologies. Their suitability, advantages and limitations will be analysed in the methodology chapter.

The findings from the content analysis, survey of journalists, and interviews with subject matter experts will be examined in the three chapters following the discussion on methodology. The competency framework will be presented as it emerges from these findings in each of the three chapters.

The conclusion will explain the implications of the findings, while outlining the contribution of this study.

The submission of this study includes a DVD containing excerpts from the interviews with subject matter experts. The DVD presents an edited version of the major topics discussed by the researcher with the experts. It can be viewed as a standalone glimpse into the interview technique used by the researcher and the findings from the in-depth interviews.

The appendices to this study also include a text version of excerpts from in-depth interviews with the experts.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

*“It is now clear that it (internet) is as disruptive to today’s newspapers as Gutenberg’s invention of movable type was to the town criers, the journalists of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.”*

**- Philip Meyer (2008, pp. 32)**

The tension between old and new media underpins the traditional newsroom’s adoption of multimedia technologies. Making a note of the characteristics of new media will help us understand the evolution of new competencies in a technologically adaptive newsroom. This chapter provides the context for a study on newsroom competencies.

With the introduction of multimedia platforms in traditional newsrooms, new competencies are added to the older competencies. This chapter will explain the rationale behind the co-existence of old and new capabilities. It defines the components of competency and examines the advantages of a competency-based framework for today’s newsroom and for journalists.

The research questions will be posed in the context of a competencies-based approach to assessing a newsroom’s strengths and weaknesses. The existing classifications of skill sets in the newsroom and the role of universities, unions and organisations in the skills debate will be analysed. Newsroom competencies will be placed in the larger context of a journalist’s education through the university and in continuing professional development in the newsroom.

It is worthwhile noting that other professions such as information technology and healthcare are using competencies frameworks in assessing the performance of their staff. It will be instructive to examine the insights provided by them. One of the advantages in developing a framework for the newsroom will be the clarity it affords in viewing journalism as a profession, a topic revisited in Chapter 8 while discussing the findings of interviews with subject matter experts.

### **Old and new media newsrooms**

The term “new media” has the unintended implication of “old media” being replaced. However, old media have not perished. Print, radio and television – the old media – have continued to exist. There are doomsday predictions for the demise of

newspapers<sup>4</sup>, that their dominance is over and that the “industry would lose critical mass and collapse” (Meyer, 2008, pp. 32). However, they are adapting to change in their usual fashion:

“Media historians and scholars have noted that each medium builds and adapts to the one that precedes it. Radio was considered a threat to newspapers, television to its predecessors, cable was to unseat television, and now satellite and the Internet hover as technological unrest for their predecessors. All of these mediums co-exist in an intricate communication delivery system that has expanded choices for the public.” (Lawson-Borders, 2003, pp. 94)

But co-existence takes effort and is achieved by meeting the new media requirements through convergence, “the window of opportunity for traditional media to align itself with technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (ibid, pp. 91). An integrated newsroom facilitates the changeover of single-platform news delivery to multimedia news production and delivery. The processes of digitization and convergence are likely to be irreversible. “At the level of news production the current climate seems to suggest that convergence is more a case of evolution rather than revolution” (Saltzis & Dickinson, 2007, pp. 217).

Convergence can be technical, economic or regulatory (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006, pp. 239). The blurring of divisions between traditional media leads to technical convergence; economic convergence refers to “multiple but integrated platforms”; regulatory convergence is the application of a single media regulatory framework instead of separate laws concerning each of the media (ibid). Organisations can be seen as existing in one of five stages of convergence along a “continuum” (Dailey et al, 2005, pp. 153). “At the right end of the model is full convergence, the stage at which the partners co-operate in both gathering and disseminating the news. Their common goal is to use the strengths of the different media to tell the story in the most effective way” (ibid, pp. 154).

As a newsroom phenomenon, convergence is a developing story. It has far-reaching effects on newsroom staff:

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<sup>4</sup> Sally Young (2010, pp. 610-624) argues that although US newspaper industry is undergoing a severe decline, Australia faces different circumstances, having seen some degree of rationalization with the closure of evening newspapers about 20 years ago.

“Convergence in general and cross-media production in particular, occur in all areas of the news industry, and have implications for the majority of news workers. The phenomenon affects, for example, everyday news work conditions, journalistic hierarchies, the question of authorship and journalists’ control over their news stories, the development of public service broadcasting towards public service (multi)media.” (Erdal, 2011, pp. 214)

The implications for news workers arise in part from the nature of new media. New media engage with audiences as old media never could. Technological advances enable instant two-way communication. Hence new media are characterised by immediacy and interactivity (Karlsson & Stromback, 2010, pp. 2). Reaction from the audience is captured and often becomes part of the news package. It is not merely reactive content from consumers that makes news. Journalists also scan new media news sources. They routinely scan websites, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook pages of users in order to source news from them.

“Through social media, journalists are able not just to tap into popular movements, but also to communicate directly with them, keep up instantly with the competition and even arrange interviews.” (Copeland, 2011, pp. 100)

Interactivity leads to an expansion of available news sources, and a reversal of the top-down approach, in which the journalists determine the news agenda. News flows in both directions, from newsroom to consumers and from consumers to newsroom, blurring the distinction between the two and creating a class of consumers who are also producers of news.<sup>5</sup>

“Traditional journalism flows in one direction: from source to reporter to audience. The reporter asks a question, the source answers the question, the audience reads or hears the answer ... The interactivity of the web has brought an end to the one-way flow. Reporters are now answering questions from the audience. Politicians, businesspeople and celebrities are now speaking directly to the audience, without a reporter as an intermediary. And the audience is

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<sup>5</sup> Alvin Toffler (1980), in his book *The Third Wave: The Classic Study of Tomorrow*, coined the term *prosumer* to denote the proactive consumer whose participation helps improve products and services in the marketplace. The futurologist predicted the blurring and merging of the roles of producers and consumers. Bruns (2007) uses the term “producers”, as noted by Singer & Ashman (2009, pp. 4).

now demanding explanations, both from reporters and directly from sources. It is getting harder to tell who is the reporter, who is the source and who is in the audience” (Thornburg, 2011: 306).

Although the news sourced from” producers” is small, it may increase. New media have low barriers to entry – it is not financially impossible, compared with traditional media, to set up small-scale online operations and build up revenue streams or get eyeballs on the screen or both. Various classified and internet news site models are being experimented with on the small-is-sustainable model.

An example is Gumtree ([www.gumtree.com.au](http://www.gumtree.com.au)), a classified website for local communities in 76 cities in 11 countries founded in 2000. Other examples are [businessspectator.com.au](http://businessspectator.com.au), “a real-time, 24-hours-a-day business news and commentary website based in Australia”<sup>6</sup> founded in 2007, and [crikey.com.au](http://crikey.com.au), “a showcase for information that might otherwise remain suppressed”, which “reveals how the powerful operate behind the scenes” and which “sees its role as part of the so-called fourth estate that acts as a vital check and balance on the activities of government, the political system and the judiciary”.<sup>7</sup> Competition on the online news spectrum may increase with the greater availability of broadband internet<sup>8</sup>.

These new online media challenge each other as well as the existing traditional media. Rivalry for audience attention is increasing without news producers having to spend as much as they used to before the advent of digital media. Social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter – which, along with news websites, challenged the monopoly of audiences enjoyed by traditional media – are not more than 12 years old. Facebook, which was started in 2004, triggered the social networking phenomenon and claims to have 845 million active users by 2012 (Protalinski, 2012).

YouTube made it easy for users to post home-made amateur videos of

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<sup>6</sup> From [businessspectator.com.au](http://businessspectator.com.au)

<sup>7</sup> From [crikey.com.au](http://crikey.com.au)

<sup>8</sup> “What are now new technological devices — like tablets and smart TVs — will become the norm in the digital economy of 2020”, according to an Australian government report, Benefits of High-Speed Broadband for Australian Households, 2013.

themselves or their favourite subjects<sup>9</sup>. Twitter specializes in the shortest narrative that can claim to being “news”. Twitter postings are no longer than 140 characters<sup>10</sup>.

All three media are producing imitators and variants, which in turn are attracting audiences of their own<sup>11</sup>. Noting that “only a decade ago, 23 blogs existed on the internet” and now “the number is far more than 100 million and counting”, de Zuniga et al (2011, pp. 586) observe “the relationship of blogging and journalism has long been an uneasy one” and “scholars and practitioners have debated whether bloggers were, or could be, journalists, and whether journalists could or should also become bloggers” (ibid, pp. 588). This topic is analysed in Chapter 8.

Competitive forces, consequently, are gathering from new digital directions and in increasing numbers. Whether all the small challengers will one day fell the giants of traditional media is yet to be seen, but audience fragmentation – the phenomenon of new media splintering the audience share of all media – works against new as well as old media. One might argue that although media choices are multiplying for users who are busy multitasking and flitting from one medium to another,<sup>12</sup> users do not have the privilege of unlimited time in a day for their favourite media.

As competition is ever present, adaptation is a continuous process for the old media, which need to follow their audiences and create a presence in new media space. Old newsrooms need to learn new tricks in order to retain their traditional customer base and acquire new generations of audiences. They will have to mimic the media behaviour of their audiences and learn to multitask and produce content across many platforms. Hence the urgency for multiplatform production. Hence the need for journalists in traditional newsroom to learn to abandon narrow specialization and become multi-taskers.

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<sup>9</sup> “Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos.” (www.youtube.com)

<sup>10</sup> “Each Tweet is 140 characters long, but don’t let the small size fool you—you can discover a lot in a little space.” (twitter.com, accessed 7 April 2012)

<sup>11</sup> Wikipedia lists more than 200 major active social networking sites (excluding dating sites).

<sup>12</sup> The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism study of blogs, Twitter and YouTube found that attention spans are brief across all three social media platforms. “Just as news consumers don’t stay long on any website, social media doesn’t stay long on any one story”. (2010, pp. 2)

Other skills that newsroom journalists will have to learn include team work<sup>13</sup>, navigating through new media (which is media-specific and more a technological skill than an interpersonal skill), problem solving (such as being able to resolve minor computer glitches or simple software coding issues), new media design and the ability to handle photographs, video and audio (once again a technological skill). Adaptability, ability to manage time effectively, initiative and readiness to resolve issues quickly and a general ability to deal with all aspects of media (writing and editing all forms of texts including words and visuals) stand out as must-have skills<sup>14</sup>.

Reporters will have to use Twitter and Facebook and adopt a multimedia profile. To engage with a fragmented audience, they will need a presence in all the spheres where audiences exist. Editors (and sub-editors and other production staff in the newsroom) have to move with ease across texts – words, sound or pictures. Convergent media are an aggregate of all the media elements of traditional and new media – at least as many of the media as could possibly be combined.

Multimedia production involves an aggregate of all the skills that single media require – such as internet audio streaming, video shooting, editing and presentation, web layout or the ability to work with content management systems to load content on the web pages – as well as the traditional media skills that have been valued over time.

Therefore, the skills that need to be developed in a convergent newsroom are multi-layered – they can be generic and over-arching or media specific, technical and specialized. It is possible to list the new skills that need to be developed in the convergent newsroom, analyse them for the presence of sub-skills or synthesize them as skill sets, categorise them as basic or optional, formal (provided through higher education) or informal (absorbed through on-the-job group dynamics in the newsroom), or single them out as evolutionary or disruptive and revolutionary. The skills expectations in a newsroom can be studied in the light of changes brought about

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<sup>13</sup> “Many journalism programs have revised curricula to incorporate more cross-platform skills in core courses”. (Wenger & Owens, 2012, pp 19)

<sup>14</sup> A study by Carpenter (2009, pp 296) on preparing journalists for change notes that “online news media employers want people with broad backgrounds, not just people trained in one specific area”.

by digital media within it. It is obvious, for instance, that a single journalist does not require the ability to collectively handle all the tasks. “The multi-skilled journalist should know writing and editing across media, interviewing, photography, video creation and editing, public speaking, creating simple graphics, and creating interactive elements and should have some technical knowledge of how to use wired or wireless networking to post or send material remotely” (Wilkinson et al, 2009, pp. 7). “Naturally, no one can be expected to master all of these skill sets, but a modern journalist can reasonably be expected to excel in two or more according to training, experience, inclination, desire and natural ability” (ibid, pp. 7).

From the above analysis, one may deduce that a skills-centric perspective has distinct advantages for a newsroom facing competitive challenges. It puts the journalist rather than the task in the centre. A new dynamic emerges from this perspective in which the newsroom can see new possibilities, new solutions and new ways of coping with market forces. A newsroom that is mapped out in terms of its capabilities is aware of its strengths and limitations. To such a newsroom, planning for the future becomes easier.

### **The competency dimension**

The concept of competency has been widely used in connection with workplace performance. Spencer and Spencer (1993, pp. 9) define competency as an “underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation”. As an underlying characteristic, a competency is “a fairly deep and enduring part of a person’s personality and can predict behavior in a wide variety of situations and job tasks” (ibid, pp. 9). “Criterion-referenced” is an indication of a measure against a specific standard.

This definition of competency has five types of characteristics: motives (thinking about or wanting action); traits (“consistent responses to situations or information”); self-concept (attitudes, values or self-image); knowledge (information “in specific content areas”); and, skill (“the ability to perform a certain physical or mental task”) (ibid, pp. 9-11).

“Skill”, therefore, becomes an aspect of competency. It is merely the ability to



act without the desire to act or the knowledge with which to act or the consistency of performance or the self-image that brings an idea to fruition.

Hanneke C. Frese also stresses performance at a predictable level of quality: “A competency describes a combination of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that an individual or an organization is competent at, that is, the ability to deliver; perform (a set of) tasks with relative ease and with a high level of predictability in terms of quality and timeliness” (Hayton & McEvoy, 2006, pp. 495). Competencies, by this definition, apply to both organisations and individuals.

Competencies are important because they “help to communicate what an organization or individual stands for or what the expectation is” (ibid, pp. 495). At any given time, a snapshot of the competencies in the newsroom if graphically presented can provide important clues about its collective ability (or even the shortage in ability) to face the immediate future.

When applied to individuals, an audit of competencies reveals what capabilities they have and how they will perform in a given situation. According to Bartram (2005), a competency is a “multidimensional construct” that “determines an individual’s capability to perform to a predetermined standard” (quoted in Jeffrey & Brunton, 2010, pp. 202). An individual’s performance in news creation and production can be seen as a collection of competencies. A group of individuals in the newsroom producing a product thus becomes a cluster of competencies.

The newsroom, when viewed as a cluster of competencies, becomes a people-oriented newsroom. A model can be constructed that shows the competencies of individuals at a glance. A similar model for a newsroom becomes a map or a compass that can have a directive or guiding influence in product planning or new product launching.

It is clear that a competency-based framework is useful in the newsroom. But it has not evolved in journalism practice or in theoretical studies for historical reasons.

1. Traditional newsrooms are productivity-oriented rather than people-oriented. “The emergence of a factory model of news – combined with the demands for a high story count, for profit, and for cost-efficient use of sophisticated equipment

– has directed the news organisation toward evaluating newswork in productivity terms” (Bantz et al, 1980, pp. 62). Content-related tasks are performed with the express purpose of getting the product out – either publishing or broadcasting the content on time. Newsroom routines are deadline-driven. A deadline is a constant reminder of the product-orientation. Laurily Keir Epstein’s study on the routinisation of news observes that news organisations “are subject to the same constraints faced by other organisations: routines, bureaucracy, structure” and that they do not “escape constraints confronted by other organisations” (1979, pp. 21).

2. The newsroom structure is not competency-based as much as deadline-based or task-based. People who do similar tasks with similar or same deadlines are seated together. Thus, traditional newsrooms are spatially divided into sections or “desks” – reporting, sub-editing, magazine staff, business, sports, arts, features, opinion, city, and so on. Staff working in the same section face the same pressures of deadline, news or feature writing tasks, sourcing of news, interpersonal challenges, and news cycles (the interval in which news is generated). A similarity of task-based characteristics binds them as a group.

“Most newsroom operations can be divided into ‘outside’ work and ‘inside’ work” (Kolodzy, 2006, pp. 31). Outside work is newsgathering by reporters and inside work is production work. In a traditional, single production platform newsroom (such as print), competencies are grouped together on the pathway of “news stories” or news reports. A quick look at the newsroom shows the pathway for news stories, where they originate (with reporters), where they are discussed (around the news editor’s desk), where they are edited (at the subbing desk) and where they are embedded in pages (at the layout desk).

These clusters offer an insight into how competencies have historically been developed. They testify to the role played by team-work – the collegiality of peer groups – in the training of individual journalists during news production. Within the competency clusters, a hierarchy of competencies prevails, with those working on the front few pages working together and those writing important news stories being assigned special areas of work.

Competencies are thus spatially arranged inside the traditional newsroom in a fashion similar to the nesting of news stories in a newspaper, with the most important clearly visible and occupying a central position.

“Traditionally, newspaper and other newsrooms have been very hierarchically organized, almost in military fashion, with an editor or news director, exerting powerful control over the news operation, followed by other officers in the chain of command. The internet is changing this significantly, as more newsrooms become flatter in their structure, especially in online editions.”

(Pavlik, 2000, pp. 233-234)

It is noteworthy that a news story goes back and forth through a hierarchy of competencies, getting refined and closer to the finished product at each stage. While a story idea does not necessarily originate from a high level of decision-making, it is discussed and approved at higher levels than the writer's. This is not to belittle the writer's input or to categorise writing as a non-core skill. Competencies other than writing play a key role as well before the news writing skill asserts itself. After the news story is written, it again travels up the hierarchy for a while before being approved and prioritised. The approval process may involve some editing and rewriting.

It should be noted that writing and editing skills are performed throughout the story's journey in the newsroom. Thereafter, it is deadline-bound and goes down the hierarchy in the newsroom, before being placed on the page, micro-edited and headlined. The following diagrammatic presentation of the traditional newsroom is based on the news factory model (Bantz et al, 1980, pp. 52-58).

#### *A story's journey through competency clusters*

*Story idea originates (skill – originate idea)*



*Story idea is discussed, approved (skill – managing people, news)*



*Story idea is converted to news story (skill – interviewing, writing)*



*News story is approved (skill – editing, rewriting)*



*Story is placed on page (skill – assign news priority, page design)*



*Story is micro-edited and headlined (skill – time management, editing)*



*Page containing story is approved, sent to press (skill – task and time managing)*

Digital media are ushering in an era of change through their main characteristics – immediacy as well as interactivity. The process described above – which applies to a daily print newspaper publication cycle – begins to change in a 24/7 digital newsroom news cycle. Dupagne and Garrison, in their study of the experimental convergence operations at Tampa News Center, observe: “Convergence, as anyone in education knows, has implications for the next generation of journalists. The impact of convergence will cut at the heart of organisational charts, budgets, and even personnel” (2007, pp. 251).

Multimedia demand urgent decisions. “Newsroom organization and management aim to co-ordinate the so-called inside and outside work. In operations that are trying to be convergent, that co-ordination is tricky because inside and outside work is changing” (Kolodzy, 2006, pp. 31).

### **Research questions**

Competencies are thus central to media work – whether in a traditional or in a convergent newsroom. Paradoxically, very little is known about newsroom competencies except that they exist in an implicit manner in the form of know-how. They have not been listed, analysed, debated, refined or questioned. Absence of documentation has created a gap in our knowledge about them.

This thesis asks fundamental questions about newsroom competencies:

*RQ1: How can traditional newsrooms transforming into converging newsrooms benefit from a competencies model in preparing for the immediate future?*

*RQ2: What are the competencies required for a journalist in a traditional print newsroom that is being transformed into a convergent newsroom in Australia?*

*RQ3: How can competencies be developed for a journalist in a transforming newsroom in Australia?*

The questions aim to look at the competencies base of traditional print newsrooms in Australia that are now becoming convergent newsrooms. The assumption is that the trend towards convergence is sweeping traditional media worldwide, and that Australia is joining this trend. “Australian newspaper companies are diversifying and have interests in a wide range of new and old media,” observes Young in a study (2010). Considering more than 90 per cent of newspapers in Australia are owned by two organisations (Tiffen, 2010), Fairfax and News Corp, and both are embracing convergence, it is reasonable to assume the traditional newsroom in its pre-digital state is being replaced by various levels of convergence. The metropolitan dailies are in the forefront, judging by their websites. Among the newspapers yet to feel the pressure of convergence are suburban community newspapers and remote-area newspapers. Since the majority of newsroom journalists in Australia work in the metro dailies, it can be assumed that they represent the more significant trend – that journalism is adapting to the competitive pressure brought on by new media. Hence the research questions address the needs of Australia’s metropolitan journalists to acquire new competencies while continuing to modify and develop the old ones.

The first question arises from the need for a framework for understanding performance and auditing it in a professional context such as the newsroom. Such a framework exists in other professions in the form of a competency model. This study is an inquiry into the usefulness of the competency framework in the convergent newsroom.

The second question demands an investigation of the context in which

performance in the convergent newsroom occurs. It demands a detailed analysis of the competencies that will meet the media needs in a transformational stage. On the face of it, the question will be answered by building an inventory of competencies in the newsroom. It requires a study of the competencies required in the multimedia context. Answering the question prepares the ground for the journalist's transition to the future. It may be rephrased as, what competencies will a newsroom journalist require in order to face the media challenges of the immediate future? Or, what will be the profile of the professional journalist of the future?

The third research question may be understood as asking, how can this profile be achieved? It is an examination of the educational and training needs of the journalist. This question could be answered by recommending a specific solution, such as a university curriculum or a training course or a combination of both. However, it is entirely possible – and it is the working assumption advanced in this study – that a sufficient presentation of the competencies in a changing newsroom will in itself become the answer. Viewed in this way, this question becomes: Can a presentation of the competencies be used in order to inform and educate the journalist?

The three questions are not only interlocked, they may be demanding a single, detailed answer. This answer may be a competencies model for the newsroom or a competencies compass or guide that takes the form of a detailed statement and a graphic presentation of the competencies model for the newsroom. Even though a competencies framework is not being used in newsrooms, journalists' skills are acknowledged and specific skills are mentioned as requirements in a document that is used as a reference point for grading or progression within the newsroom.

### **In-use newsroom skills framework**

Before a competencies model can be built or recommended for newsroom journalists, it is important to examine the skills framework being used.

Journalism skills are defined in a document posted by the journalists' union, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), on its website, [www.alliance.org.au](http://www.alliance.org.au). The document assumes two years of cadetship for "journalists,

artists & photographers” when skills are built up. This three-fold group progresses through two bands and 10 grades in the newsroom: Band 1 covers Grade 1 to 4 and Band 2 from Grade 5 to 10.

The document recommends for Journalists Grade 1: “A member who has passed the higher school certificate or its equivalent and satisfactorily completed a two-year journalism cadetship; or, a member who holds a non-media tertiary degree and is undertaking regular training in practical journalism cadetship shall be classified at least as journalists grade 1”. As for general characteristics: “A journalists Grade 1 has completed the basic educational requirement for entry to journalism and is acquiring basic skills and experience by undertaking routine reporting assignments under direction and/or by undertaking appropriate practical training. He or she may from time to time require guidance from supervisors or senior journalists on matters such as news gathering techniques and sources, news judgment and writing style. With this type of guidance, and under direction, the journalist Grade 1 is capable of competently preparing news reports for publication.”

The document also lists competencies, but under a different classification as “skills and tasks”, for each grade of journalist. For Grade 1:

“Indicative skills and tasks may include: Carry out routine research, news gathering and reporting assignments; prepare and write general news reports; prepare and write other items; assist more senior journalists; able to work to deadlines; display basic news sense; developing keyboard and editorial computer system skills; developing shorthand; understand newsroom and production processes and requirements; developing basic understanding of media law issues.”

The primary purpose of the document is to “grade” journalists – to create expectations of what they can do for employers; and of what they can expect from employers as remuneration and working conditions. This document is still the operative guideline for both employers and journalists.

The advantage with the document is that it lists a number of competencies, even if they are grouped as “skills and tasks”. Many basic categories of competencies are identified as necessary skills for each grade of journalist. As it is still a working framework, it provides the first set of categories of competencies that can be considered useful for any study.

The document is contextually describing a traditional newsroom in a stable and relatively unchanging economic environment for the media. It is out of date in some important aspects:

1. It does not take technological advances into account. It exists in a pre-digital universe.

“So far we have been monomedia-oriented with newspapers, radio, television, etc. each in its own pigeonhole, but this way of thinking will become increasingly outdated and replaced by the multimedia mindset. This does not only mean mastering the skills of various media but is a fundamentally different paradigm of working and thinking.”  
(Nordenstreng, 2008, pp. 39)

2. It does not acknowledge the need for newsrooms to change and hence competencies such as flexibility and adaptability are not given prominence. The newsroom is viewed as static, not dynamic. There is no presumption of competition or rivalry changing the work setting for journalists.
3. It is largely task-oriented and presumes the newsroom to be a product-oriented engine-room where journalists are useful because they can perform tasks related to the product.
4. There is no underlying concept of competency or competency development. There is an assumption that journalists, given a sufficient number of years in the newsroom, will automatically progress to advanced tasks and be graded higher with experience (which denotes years in the newsroom and hence advanced skills).
5. Individual journalists have no way of knowing what competencies they have or need. Grading guarantees minimum pay for the grade but does not guarantee a minimum set of competencies. The “skills and tasks” listed is a guideline rather than a guarantee.
6. Newsrooms have no way of knowing what competencies they have or need.
7. Journalists’ competencies arising out of education are not taken into account. The union document does not seem to have a view about



journalism courses – whether or not they provide any beginner level competencies for journalists.

8. Considering that the system of cadetship is largely in disuse, the document's assumed progression of journalists from cadetship to Grade 10 is out of date. Hence the skills attributed to these levels are largely out of alignment even in a traditional newsroom setting. In a convergent setting, these skill sets are seriously misaligned.

Of the four stakeholders in the competencies debate – the individual journalist, the journalists' union, the employer and the university – the grading document represents just one. The employer's input is not known. Performance reviews are conducted in some organisations, but rarely on a consistent or transparent basis, in this researcher's 20 years of newsroom experience with Fairfax and News Corp newspapers. The university's role in the "skills and tasks" debate is knowable, but seldom factored in by the news organisation or the union in any criteria for selection of journalists at the beginner's level.

### **Education of journalists**

Journalists at entry level are presumed to have some competencies provided by the university, whatever their degree. Their language skills, writing skills, and the ability to research facts, analyse and synthesize them are honed at the university. Journalism graduates can probably claim to be equipped with more newsroom-ready competencies than others, but industry may insist the knowledge and familiarity with practice acquired at the university are theoretical and not proven by performance.

Noting it as a tension between theory and practice, Hirst (2010, pp. 87) observes that industry expectations are different from academic approaches to journalism education:

"One of the basic fault lines is the old chestnut of "editor knows best" when it comes to assessing the skills and competencies of young journalism graduates and their fitness for a life in the newsroom, versus the academic demands of the wider university community." (ibid)

Industry and university are the two faces of the practice versus theory confrontation, which debates whether 1) intending journalists need more practical training or more theoretical frameworks leading to an understanding of why they do what they do; 2) journalism training is best received from educationists and trainers or best gained on-the-job from teams of journalists in the newsroom; 3) theory or practice has the upper hand in the making of a journalist; and 4) journalism school academics should gain practical experience from time to time in the newsroom or whether journalists should take time off work for mid-career university courses.

At the heart of these queries is the dichotomy between industry and university, between journalism practitioners and journalism academics. They show the divergence between two modes of learning – one informed by reflection and the other by acquiring know-how in the community of practice, a concept discussed in the literature review, chapter 4 of this study. One favours activity-based learning and the other sees value in abstract ideas and the development of philosophical underpinnings that contribute to the individual's thought processes rather than merely the ability to do a task.

“This is reflected in UNESCO's (1997) international standard classification of education that distinguishes between general education, which is mainly designed to lead participants to a deeper understanding of a subject or group of subjects, and ‘vocational or technical education’, which is mainly designed to lead participants to acquire the practical skills, know-how, and understanding necessary for employment in a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades.” (Moodie, 2002, pp. 250)

This thesis will argue the need for a combination of both modes to develop competencies. Although competency is largely a workplace concept, in the sense that it relates to performance up to a predetermined standard (usually set by the workplace as acceptable), its intellectual foundations are established by university-style education.

Of the five characteristics of competency described earlier in this chapter (motives, traits, self-image, knowledge and skills), at least the first four are founded in a good education, whether theoretical or practical. Journalism courses offered by universities around the world are keen to bestow the fifth characteristic, skills, upon

students in an effort to make them job-ready. Journalism education faculties at universities are known to take a view on whether to court employers or not.

“The Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University is famed for its use of New York City as a laboratory for training students to become working journalists. But the university president challenged this teaching approach by contending that such ‘skills’ training is ‘clearly insufficient in this new world and within the setting of a great university’. He wants, he said, ‘a more reflective, more comprehensive education’ to be offered by the school, one that is ‘more intellectually based’. Skills training, he said, should be left to the workplace.” (Mencher, 2002, pp. 102)

The ivory tower view dictates that the curriculum should be independent of job market fluctuations. This means avoiding the skills bandwagon and showing no hurry in updating the curriculum to reflect the latest trend in the newsrooms. The market-friendly curriculum, on the other hand, believes in competency-based education, updating the contents frequently and adopting the latest technology in a simulated newsroom.

“The Bachelor of Communication (Media) degree at RMIT University has been in existence for 30 years. It has offered students both an academic education in humanities and communication fields and a professional education in practical television and radio production. However, until recently, there have been virtually no links between the academic and production components of the degree. Concerns about this educationally schizophrenic structure, combined with a realization of significant changes in the media production industries, prompted a comprehensive review of the degree. The degree that emerged from the review has an emphasis on process-based learning and network literacy. Every student has a blog, which is a fully public networked document used in core subjects and all year levels. Video and audio are incorporated into blogs and students are encouraged to produce academic texts that include all forms of media.” (Berkeley, 2009, pp. 185)

Both views have, however, taken the digital changeover on board and adapted the curriculum content to reflect the broad trends in journalism such as interactivity, immediacy, multimedia use, 24/7 updates on news platforms, a wider spread of knowledge base rather than depth knowledge in a small number of content areas. But

they differ in their emphasis on skills acquisition in the classroom. The “high road” favours less practice and more reflection. The practice-focused curriculum prepares students for core journalistic activities – writing quickly and accurately, editing, production routines prior to publication or broadcast and familiarity with the ways in which new media are integrated into the newsroom.

### **Concept of competency in other professions**

Both outlooks have to contend with newsroom conviction that it is best placed to provide and nurture competencies through on-the-job training – that is, learning by doing, learning from others and learning from the context of work.

This belief is not confined to journalism practice. Other professions – such as nursing and health services, teaching, information technology and psychology – are not exempt from a bias towards contextual learning.<sup>15</sup> But they differ from journalism in an important respect: they have taken great strides in adopting a competency-based approach at the workplace. Competency is a central concept in how the work is managed and how the future course of work is charted. The argument for nursing education, for example, is articulated thus:

“Schools of nursing must consider the best way to prepare graduates for a rapidly changing practice setting as employers seek a workforce that is efficient, productive, cost effective, and capable of providing quality care. One effective method to determine the five rights (assuring the right nurse with the right preparation for the right patient in the right setting at the right cost) is through the use of core competency statements to illustrate the varying proficiencies and contributions of nurses.” (Eichelberger & Hewlett, 1999, pp. 204)

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<sup>15</sup> Evidence of the decreasing hegemony of the “research paradigm of knowledge for its own sake” can be found “in awards and degrees that have a more instrumental focus; in the increased numbers of professional doctorates and masters; in the emergence of work-based degrees with a strong in situ component. The unification of the ‘practical’ and ‘theoretical’ parts of the higher education sector has led to the emergence of whole faculties and fields of knowledge that were formerly outside of the ambit of university: catering, nursing, hotel management, health, tourism and leisure studies.” (Symes et al, 2000, pp. 573-574)

Journalism is not alone in facing the challenge of disruptive technological and contextual change. Teaching (online learning v face-to-face teaching), banking (online transactions), healthcare (ehealth and online DIY help), retail (web retailing), financial services (online help services), information technology (new devices such as mobile devices and new systems that make existing systems obsolete quickly) are among the many sectors that are adapting to the proliferation of new technologies. No single solution exists for incumbent technologies. Their obsolescence is inevitable, given the continuing advancements in technology. But professionals working in those sectors have had to adapt – by modifying the way they do things and by doing new things.

Newsrooms can adapt frameworks from other sectors of work. Competencies-based frameworks have been used to assess performance in many professions, including professional psychology (Chu et al, 2012; Rodolfa et al, 2005), nursing (Eichelberger & Hewlett, 1999; Axley, 2008; Competency standards developed by Australian Nursing Federation, 2005); librarians (Pfister, 1982; Ramkey, 2012); midwives (Pincombe et al, 2007); pharmaceutical medical writing (Clemow, 2011); public health professionals (Calhoun et al, 2005); IT (Microsoft education competency wheel, 2012); physicians (Campbell et al, 2010); finance professionals (Scott, 1998); human resources professionals (Gorsline, 1996) and engineers (Ranade et al, 2010; Kasser et al, 2013), among other professionals. Models have been developed in these sectors to indicate the requirement of specific competencies for specific roles in professionals so that they can achieve pre-set standards of performance.

Microsoft's education program, for instance, has developed a competencies wheel to define its education success factors. The wheel places six core competencies in an inner wheel with other, related, competencies radiating out of them. "Nurses have used competency standards as their professional framework since the late 1980s," according to a document on competency standards prepared by the Australian Nursing Federation project.

"In the nursing profession, competency standards are used for example by:

- Nurses as the professional framework against which to measure their own performance and prepare a professional document plan so that competence is maintained and enhanced;
- Nurse regulatory authorities in each state and territory to determine the eligibility of people applying for a licence to practice as a nurse and to assess nurses required to demonstrate continuing competence;
- Education providers in both the higher education and vocational settings as the framework for course development purposes; and
- Employers for position description and performance assessment purposes.” (*Competency standards for nurses in general practice*, 2005, pp. 10)

A similar competencies framework will be a useful document for journalists in the newsroom as well as for the education of journalists through university and mid-career training programs. (Mid-career in this study includes all journalists with more than a year of experience in the newsroom.) It will hopefully meet similar goals as those outlined above; it will be a frame of reference for journalists, regulatory authorities, education providers and for employers.

A further use for a competencies framework will be as a document that helps define journalism as a profession. Journalism’s professional values are under increasing pressure<sup>16</sup> from organisational values and from the new media that have ushered in a process of democratization (an issue discussed in the next chapter), enabling those who are not trained as journalists to practise a form of journalism through their blogs or websites. The identification and refinement of competencies through educational programs will add another dimension that defines journalism as a profession.

The competencies framework is useful when analyzing what constitutes a mid-career education for journalists because the context and the situation in which journalism is practised are contributors of not merely skills, but also attributes and,

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<sup>16</sup> A study conducted by Hollifield et al (2001, pp. 113) shows that “journalism programs need to include instruction on organizational literacy – that is, instruction about how to succeed within organizations in which professional skills are no longer sufficient in the face of industry expectations that journalists will need to conform to certain personality, performance, and work-habit standards, if they wish to succeed”.

more importantly, knowledge. This aspect of workplace learning is analysed in the next chapter, which outlines the theoretical framework to this study.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will inquire into the foundations of knowledge creation in the journalism production setting. Available literature on workplace learning, situated learning, communities of practice and organisational learning will shed light on the processes involved in learning in the newsroom. The concepts of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) and explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994) – how they operate at the workplace and how they can be interchanged with some effort – are examined as they have a direct impact on the formation of competencies in the newsroom. The place of reflection in the learning cycle is analysed to gain an understanding on how tacit knowledge can be made explicit.

Other useful theoretical frameworks that explain newsroom workflow structures and how they affect journalists include media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979), routinisation of newsroom tasks (Tuchman, 1973) and the nature of new media. Studies on the cultural aspects of the newsroom, which can limit or foster the formation of competencies, are also examined in this chapter.

#### **Doing without knowing**

The distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge is useful in explaining how performance is correlated to learning or knowledge formation at workplaces such as the newsroom.

“ ‘Explicit’ or codified knowledge refers to knowledge that is transmittable in formal, systematic language. On the other hand, ‘tacit’ knowledge has a personal quality, which makes it hard to formalize and communicate. Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement in a specific context.” (Nonaka, 1994, pp. 16)

Tacit knowledge is when “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1966, pp. 4). It can be seen in action when we do something intuitively, without being able to describe our action. An oft-quoted example is knowing how to ride a bicycle. In management, tacit knowledge as a concept has been applied to workplace situations to identify the extent of it and to harness it for organisational use.

“One important point to note here is that an individual can acquire tacit knowledge without language. Apprentices work with their mentors and learn craftsmanship not through language but by observation, imitation, and



practice. In a business setting, on-the-job training uses the same principle. The key to acquiring tacit knowledge is experience. Without some form of shared experience, it is extremely difficult for people to share each others' thinking processes." (Nonaka, 1994, pp. 19)

Nonaka, developing the theme that "organizational knowledge is created through a continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge" (1994, pp. 14), argues that "while new knowledge is developed by individuals, organizations play a critical role in articulating and amplifying that knowledge". He identifies four modes of knowledge conversion. Tacit knowledge is created through socialisation (from another's tacit knowledge) and through internalization (from explicit knowledge). Explicit knowledge is created from tacit knowledge through externalization (for example, through meaningful dialogue) and through combination from pre-existing explicit knowledge (as when existing information is reconfigured through recontextualising). His typology demonstrates that tacit knowledge need not be locked in a silent state. It can be converted into explicit knowledge, albeit with sustained effort from individuals and teams to bring reflection and dialogue to bear upon their practice.

Nonaka also identifies three enabling conditions for knowledge creation: creativity arising out of a sense of crisis; redundancy of information due to the existence of more information than required in a context; and, requisite variety, which refers to the diversity of information channels being constructed by the organisation.

Applying these concepts to the newsroom undergoing a period of technological challenges, it becomes clear how knowledge may be created out of creativity arising from crisis and overlapping layers of information existing within editorial teams working on different channels of production. Nonaka's identification of middle managers (and not a directive-style top management or an entrepreneurial bottom-up management) as being the most effective in knowledge creation also suits changing newsrooms.

Technical knowledge can be technical or cognitive (Smith, 2001, pp. 314).

"Technical tacit knowledge is demonstrated when people master a specific body of knowledge or use skills like those gradually developed by master craftsmen. Cognitive tacit knowledge incorporates implicit mental models and perceptions that are so ingrained they are taken for granted" (ibid, pp. 314).

A vast pool of tacit and practical knowledge exists in organisations.

“However, many organizations need to improve how they acquire and share tacit and explicit knowledge” (ibid, pp. 319).

Implicit learning occurs because it is independent of intention. In examining the phenomenon of implicit learning, Reber concludes that

“a) implicit learning produces a tacit knowledge base that is abstract and representative of the structure of the environment; b) such knowledge is optimally acquired independently of conscious efforts to learn; and c) it can be used implicitly to solve problems and make accurate decisions about novel stimulus circumstances” (1989, pp. 219).

Reber identifies implicit learning as an unconscious process that yields abstract knowledge. “Implicit knowledge results from the induction of an abstract representation of the structure that the stimulus environment displays, and this knowledge is acquired in the absence of conscious, reflective strategies to learn” (ibid).

Tacit knowledge, concludes Reber, is not available to consciousness. “Specifically, knowledge acquired from implicit learning procedures is knowledge that, in some raw fashion, is always ahead of the capability of its possessor to explicate it” (Reber, 1989, pp. 229). Therefore, “implicitly acquired epistemic contents of mind are always richer and more sophisticated than what can be explicated”.

Reber describes “intuition” as a conceptual gain for cognitive psychology from an understanding of implicit processes. “Intuition is a perfectly normal and common mental state/process that is the end product of an implicit learning experience” (ibid, pp. 232). Intuition “operates to assist an individual to make choices and to engage in particular classes of action” (ibid, pp. 233).

“To have an intuitive sense of what is right and proper, to have a vague feeling of the goal of an extended process of thought, to ‘get to the point’ without really being able to verbalize what it is that one has gotten, is to have gone through an implicit learning experience and have built up the requisite representative knowledge base to allow for such judgment” (ibid, pp. 233).

“Intuition” is very close to journalists’ conception of “news sense”, the ability to decide on what is news without being able to verbalize what it constitutes. News sense is developed in the newsroom, which can be viewed as a community of practice in which knowledge co-exists with practice. Work, learning and innovation have to be seen as “learning-in-working”, a composite structure that promotes “the fluid evolution of learning through practice” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, pp. 41). Learning can be seen as a bridge between work and innovation. Learning cycles at the workplace seldom follow pathways set by the organisation. A gap develops between espoused practice or canonical practice (how the organisation thinks practice should be like) and actual practice. “It is the actual practices, however, that determine the success or failure of organizations” (ibid, pp. 41).

The distinction between actual practice and espoused practice is also made by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), who distinguishes between *modus operandi* (mode of work) and *opus operatum* (work in its finished state). In Bourdieu’s conceptualization, the finished view is more like a map whereas the work as it unfolds is the real road. Mistaking the map for the actual road can lead to huge gaps between expectations and outcomes. Organisations often mistakenly believe their abstract view of work, their descriptions of work in manuals and workflow documents, is exactly how work is done. This can lead to “misrecognition”, in Bourdieu’s view.

“Nonetheless, in the corporation’s eyes practices that deviate from the canonical are, by definition, deviant practices. Through a reliance on canonical descriptions (even to the extent of overlooking their own non-canonical improvisations), managers develop a conceptual outlook that cannot comprehend the importance of non-canonical practices. People are typically viewed as performing their jobs according to formal job descriptions, despite the fact that daily evidence points to the contrary (Suchman, 1987). They are held accountable to the map, not the road conditions” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, pp. 42).

Non-canonical practice, or practice as it actually happens, has to be understood in order to understand work. “Abstractions detached from practice distort or obscure intricacies of that practice. Without a clear understanding of those

intricacies and the role they play, the practice itself cannot be well understood, engendered (through training), or enhanced (through innovation)” (ibid, pp. 40).

Canonical accounts – documents that present work in an abstracted fashion in training manuals and company guidelines – miss out the categories that are essential to getting work done. These categories are narration, collaboration and social construction. Narration can refer to the stories that practitioners tell each other about work during informal contexts or they may be “war stories” or boastful narratives about practitioners’ achievements. Stories “act as repositories of accumulated wisdom” (ibid, pp. 45). Collaboration occurs when practitioners reach out to other community members to solve problems on a day-to-day basis.

Organisations tend to view work “individually” (ibid, pp. 46) and do not acknowledge collaboration in the description of work. Social construction is a meaning building exercise that is not restricted to any context but occurs as an inference or as a declarative knowledge statement between practitioners. A shared understanding is built out of “bountiful conflicting and confusing data” (ibid, pp. 46). Stories told by a member of a community of practice are “highly situated” and relate to particular contexts and situations. The telling of these stories also aids in identity formation, establishing the member’s sense of belonging in the community (ibid, pp. 47).

“Workplace learning is best understood, then in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed. The central issue in learning is *becoming* a practitioner not learning *about* practice. This approach draws attention away from abstract knowledge and cranial practices and situates it in the practices and communities in which knowledge takes on significance” (ibid, pp. 48, emphasis in original text).

Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as becoming an insider. Their concept of legitimate peripheral participation or LPP involves learning to function in a community, whether it be a community of workers or classmates. The new community member participates from a legitimate and peripheral position in the community and learns to speak its language and behave in appropriate ways to the extent of learning to tell the right stories at the right time.

Given the ability of people to learn within their work environment, their situated contexts, “attempts to strip away context should be examined with caution”

(Brown & Duguid, 1991, pp. 49). Isolating knowledge from practice does not find favour with learning theorists who see learning as social construction.

“The theories of learning implicated in the documentation and training view learning from the abstract stance of pedagogy. Training is thought of as the transmission of explicit, abstract knowledge from the head of someone who knows to the head of someone who does not in surroundings that specifically exclude the complexities of practice and the communities of practitioners. The setting for learning is simply assumed not to matter” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, pp. 47).

The concepts discussed above – tacit knowledge, situated learning and communities of practice – may be applied to the newsroom. On-the-job learning takes on a new meaning if it is seen as implicit learning, a normal process in workplace situations. Journalists learn from each other and from the group as a whole during work. The work context becomes a learning resource. Legitimate peripheral participation enables community members to continually learn while doing the work. Knowledge formation is thus a continuous process.

Knowledge – both tacit and explicit – leads to competency formation, which enables performance. Competencies are being formed, used and developed whether or not there is a conscious and deliberate effort to do so. Learning by doing is part of newsroom work. It has both conscious and unconscious elements, the conscious part involving the use of explicit knowledge and its production through a process of externalisation of learning. The unconscious part of learning is transmitted to others through socialisation. The newsroom is not just a community of practice. It is also a self-learning, self-adapting and self-enabling community. The theoretical concepts described above represent the newsroom as a dynamic and learning community in action, where performance leads to further competency formation and development.

## **Two kinds of knowledge**

Tacit and explicit knowledge are explained by Michael Eraut (2000, pp. 113), who also views knowledge as consisting of two components. Codified knowledge, also referred to as “public knowledge or propositional knowledge”, is “given status by

incorporation into educational programs, examinations and courses”. Skilled behaviour is described in it, but it does not include skills or knowing how. Personal knowledge, the other component, is what people bring to their performance.

“This incorporates codified knowledge in its personalised form, together with procedural knowledge and process knowledge, experiential knowledge and impressions in episodic memory. Skills are part of this knowledge, thus allowing representations of competence, capability or expertise in which the use of skills and propositional knowledge are closely integrated” (Eraut, 2000, pp. 114).

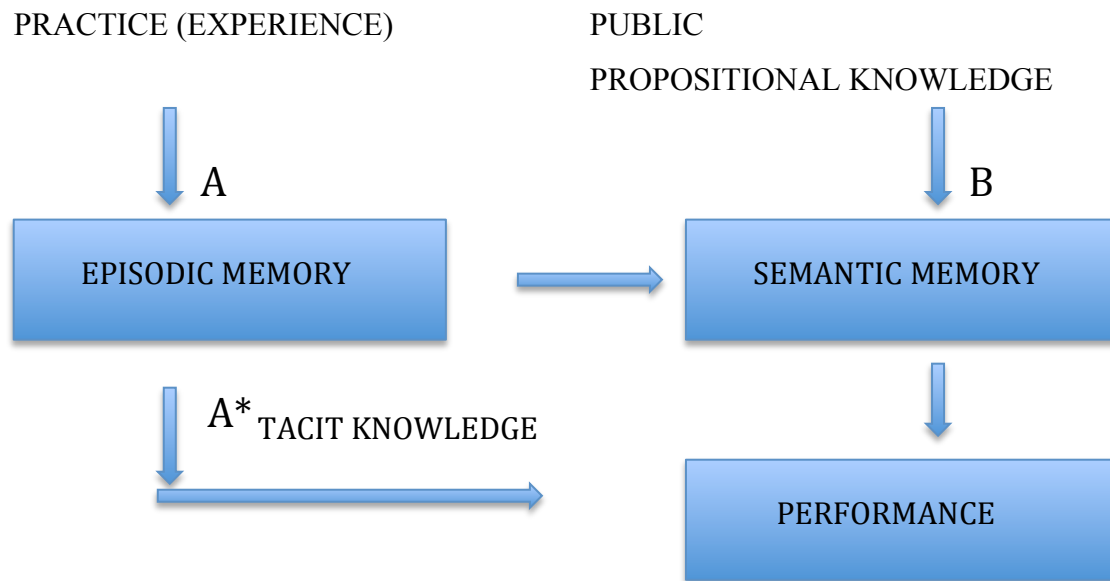
Personal knowledge may be explicit or implicit.

Learning, which is defined as a process of knowledge acquisition, can be formal or non-formal. Formal learning is usually characterised by one or many of these characteristics: a prescribed framework, an organised learning package, the presence of a trainer or teacher, the award of a certificate or an externally specified outcome. It may produce propositional and personal knowledge. Non-formal knowledge may also produce both propositional and personal knowledge.

Eraut explains how knowledge goes through memory and becomes performance. Memory is conceptually divided into episodic memory “for specific, personally experienced events” and semantic memory “for generalised knowledge that transcends particular episodes” (ibid, pp. 116). Public propositional knowledge is unlocked from semantic memory during performance.

But practical experience of personally experienced events is locked in episodic memory and released during performance. It can either be converted into a generalised knowledge in semantic memory or thence move to performance, or it can directly become performance through the path of implicit learning. These various routes to performance are diagrammatically shown (Eraut, 2000, pp. 117):

**Diagram 3.1**



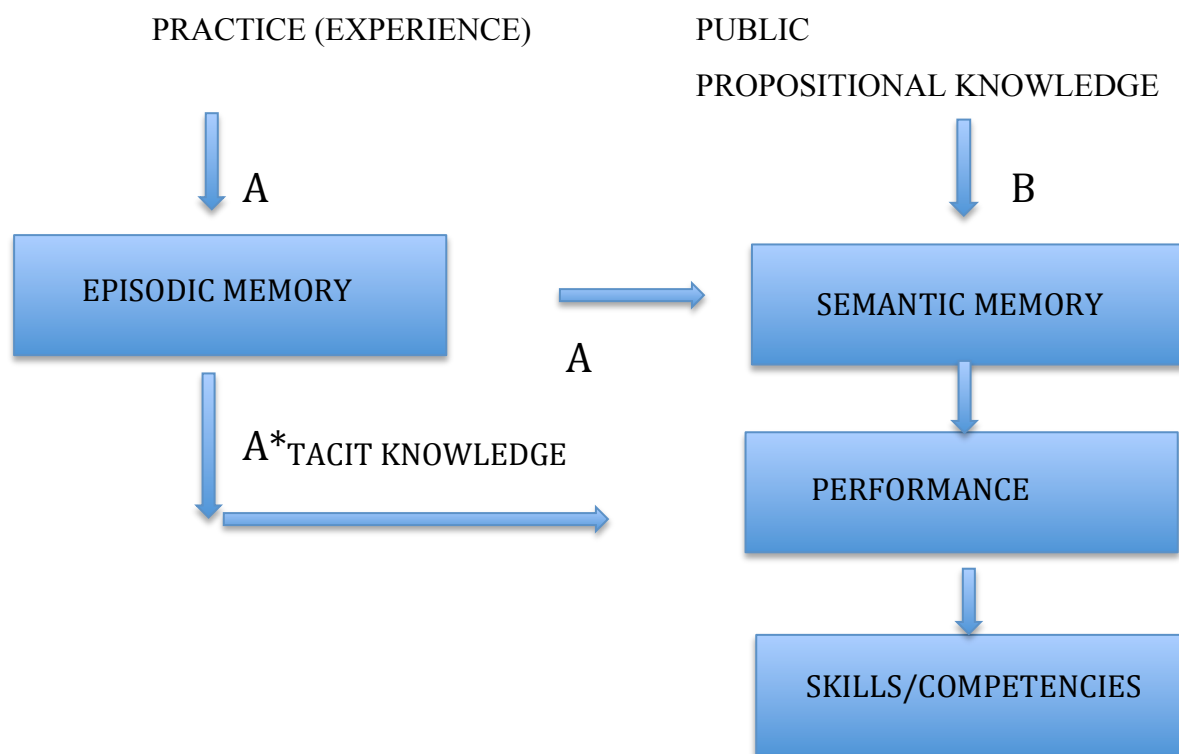
In the diagram above, “the top of the figure represents the sources of inputs to the memory system and the bottom of the figure represents the behavioural consequences of learning (performance or the output of the memory system); the arrow between the boxes depicts the processes whereby generalised knowledge is derived from episodic memory” (ibid, pp. 117). Path A is experiential learning. Path B is the direct acquisition of generalizable knowledge from other people. Path A\* depicts tacit knowledge or implicit learning, which contributes to performance.

“In practice, multiple pathways are likely to be in use. The same episodes may contribute to performance both implicitly via Path A\* and explicitly via Path A ... Another possibility is that knowledge acquired by both Path A and Path B is combined. Path B knowledge is often useful in reflection upon and clarifying the meaning of experienced events or in fitting new Path A knowledge into a broader conceptual structure (an important aim of formal mid-career courses). Conversely Path A knowledge (and probably also Path A\* knowledge) is helpful, perhaps essential, for learning how to use Path B knowledge in practical situations. Typically, tacit Path A\* is ready to use while Path B knowledge is too abstract to be used without considerable further

learning. So if a situation demands rapid action or is too complex to be fully analysed, tacit knowledge is the only available solution” (ibid, pp. 117-118).

The above diagram could be adapted to fit in competencies:

**Diagram 3.2**



The adapted diagram (*Diagram 3.2*) shows how competencies are produced in the newsroom. There are two possible processes. The first is through formal learning by making use of codified knowledge programs such as externally administered training programs. Universities and training programs that make use of educators and trainers play a role here. The second process (Path A as well as Path A\*) is through implicit learning, through a process of observation and socialisation at work. This is how junior journalists learn from the experts. It is this channel that makes meaning out of tacit knowledge gleaned out of experience.

Work-related experience can be seen as an accumulation of tacit knowledge in episodic memory. This is probably why experienced journalists are given to narrating anecdotes from their past years. They are actually displaying their knowledge in the precise form in which it is preserved. But tacit knowledge is a personal storehouse and it is seldom capable of being transferred to others through narratives. A narrative of personal knowledge-forming episode does not in itself become an episode of



significance for others. However, anecdotes become part of the tool-kit for externalising tacit knowledge.

The personal knowledge gathered through experience is, therefore, best leveraged through work. The expertise of experienced journalists is best made use of in the workplace so that others can socialise and learn from them in the work context, either through observation (by watching and learning) or by doing.

These diagrams show how learning is converted to performance at the workplace. The implications for the newsroom become clear when this process is seen in combination with the concepts outlined earlier – of group work, situated learning and communities in practice. The picture that emerges is that of a traditional newsroom with very little need for formal learning programs, such as training and externally provided knowledge courses, to improve its performance. Formal learning takes a longer time to be internalized and become a part of implicit learning structures within the newsroom. They are also costlier to administer. It is perhaps for these reasons that few newsrooms are put through very few professional development programs. However, this does not prove that codified knowledge programs will not be useful in the newsroom or that they will not substantially improve performance. It merely justifies the organisational strategy of doing the least to preserve the dynamic forces in the newsroom active.

Organisations clearly make use of tacit knowledge without recognising it as such. It is seldom acknowledged in organisational literature such as manuals. But the presence of expertise and experienced performers is ensured by organisations keen on achieving a standard of performance. An organisational rule of thumb in the staffing of newsroom ensures experienced journalists are present in the staff mix. The value assigned to experience in the newsroom is not quantified but observable.

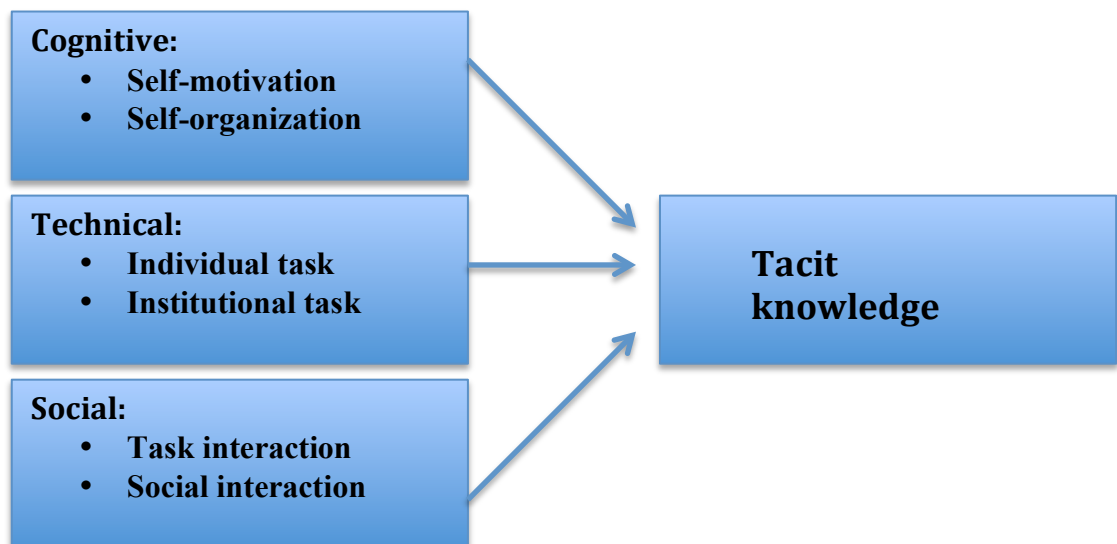
“A master potter may not be able to precisely articulate how to throw an intricate pot, but by observing the behaviour of the master versus a novice it is clear that the master potter has a great deal of knowledge that the novice does not have. This knowledge has been developed over years of throwing pots and can be observed by watching the master in the process of creating the intrinsic pot. This has led many researchers to explore tacit knowledge as indicated by skills, competencies, and behaviours” (Leonard & Insch, 2005, pp. 496).

Tacit knowledge consists of various kinds of content (Wagner, 1987), including “tacit knowledge about managing oneself, managing tasks and managing people” (Leonard & Insch, 2005, pp. 497). Self-motivation and self-organisation are a part of managing oneself; doing specific tasks is a part of managing tasks; and managing one’s interaction with peers and subordinates comes under the umbrella of managing people.

Leonard and Insch propose a model of tacit knowledge as consisting of three dimensions: cognitive (self-motivation and self-organisation); technical (individual task and institutional task); and social (task-related interaction and social interaction). “For the sake of discussion, we refer to these dimensions as ‘skills’” (ibid, pp. 498).

We now have a basic set of competencies emerging from tacit knowledge. These competencies relate to “knowledge of self, knowledge of tasks, and knowledge of other people” (ibid, pp. 498). This model shows “tacit knowledge is developed through action and experiences” (ibid, pp. 498).

This model is represented in **Diagram 3.3** below (ibid, pp. 499):



In the newsroom, these basic competencies are always in use, whatever the stage of convergence. It is quite likely that these competencies can be split into various closely related competencies that have specific relevance to newsroom content production work. At this point, these competency categories can be noted as useful to a discussion of competencies development in the newsroom.

## Learning from experience

The notion of tacit knowledge is closely linked to another concept that clarifies what constitutes common sense in the newsroom. In order to explain workplace performance, learning theorists have focused on extending the concept of practical intelligence, “which reflects a broader conceptualization of the abilities needed for real-world success” (Sternberg & Hedlund, 2002, pp. 143).

“Practical intelligence is defined as the ability that individuals use to find a more optimal fit between themselves and the demands of the environment through adapting to the environment, shaping (or modifying) the environment, or selecting a new environment in the pursuit of personally valued goals” (ibid, pp. 145).

Sternberg and Hedlund believe practical intelligence is the embedded concept behind the expression “street smart”, as contrasted with “book smart”, which denotes academic intelligence. “Street smart” also connotes common sense.

In the newsroom, it is akin to the intuitive knowledge assumed by the term “news sense”<sup>17</sup>. “Practical intelligence encompasses the abilities one needs to succeed in everyday life, including in one’s job or one’s career” (ibid, pp. 145).

Studies by Sternberg and his associates define tacit knowledge as “an important aspect of practical intelligence that enables individuals to adapt to, select, and shape real-world environments” (ibid, pp. 145). Tacit knowledge “reflects the practical ability to learn from experience and to apply that knowledge in pursuit of personally valued goals” (ibid, pp. 145). It is seen as relevant to “understanding successful performance in a variety of domains”. These studies also relate tacit knowledge to experience. “Tacit knowledge generally increases with experience” (ibid, pp. 149).

Tacit knowledge is, therefore, correlated with experience, performance and skills (which are components of a set of competencies displayed at work). With experience comes expertise. “One comes to be an expert in the skills needed for

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<sup>17</sup> “Such notions about the tacit quality of the knowledge associated with everyday problem solving also are reflected in the common language of the workplace as people attribute successful performance to ‘learning by doing’ and to ‘professional intuition’ or ‘instinct’.” (Sternberg & Hedlund, 2002, pp. 145)

success on ability tests in much the same ways one becomes an expert in doing anything else – through a combination of genetic endowment and experience” (Sternberg, 1998, pp. 13).

Eraut (2000, pp. 126) describes a skills acquisition model from Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) that shows a worker’s characteristics and progression through five stages, from novice to expert.

*“Level 1: Novice*

Rigid adherence to taught rules or plans

Little situational perception

No discretionary judgment

*Level 2: Advanced Beginner*

Guidelines for action based on attributes or aspects (aspects are global characteristics of situations recognisable only after some prior experience)

Situational perception still limited

All attributes and aspects are treated separately and given equal importance

*Level 3: Competent*

Coping with crowdedness

Now sees actions at least partially in terms of longer-term goals

Conscious deliberate planning

Standardised and routinized procedures

*Level 4: Proficient*

Sees situations holistically rather than in terms of aspects

Sees what is important in a situation

Perceives deviations from the normal pattern

Decision-making still laboured

Uses maxims for guidance, whose meaning varies according to the situation

*Level 5: Expert*

No longer relies on rules, guidelines or maxims

Intuitive grasp of situations based on deep tacit understanding

Analytic approaches used only in novel situations, when problems occur or when justifying conclusions

Vision of what is possible” (Eraut, 2000, pp. 126)

For this study, the above model is useful in building a competencies model for the newsroom. It divides journalists into five categories based on the behavioural characteristics they exhibit. It shows the progression of a journalist through the newsroom, from novice to expert<sup>18</sup>.

“Its early and middle stages involve the development of situational recognition and understanding and of standard routines which enable one to cope with crowded busy contexts; the later abandonment of explicit rules and guidelines as behaviour becomes more automatic; and a peaking of the deliberative mode of cognition (not usually very analytic) at the competence stage. Progression beyond competence is then associated with the gradual replacement of deliberation by more intuitive forms of cognition.” (Eraut, 2000, pp. 126)

### **Role of reflection**

Harnessing tacit knowledge is the next step. The development of experience-based learning is a natural theoretical progression. Reflection is widely seen as the answer. Reflection “is defined here as a process of guided critical thinking that directs attention selectively to various aspects of experience, making knowledge typically acquired without conscious awareness explicit and available for examination and modification” (Matthew & Sternberg, 2009, pp. 530).

The thinking is that if those who acquire tacit knowledge can reflect, then what remain unarticulated can be expressed and made available to others. “As such, strategies have been developed to engage the learner in the process of reflection, articulation, and examination of experience in the hopes that it will facilitate learning. Some examples include action learning, mentoring, coaching, and communities of practice” (ibid, pp. 531).

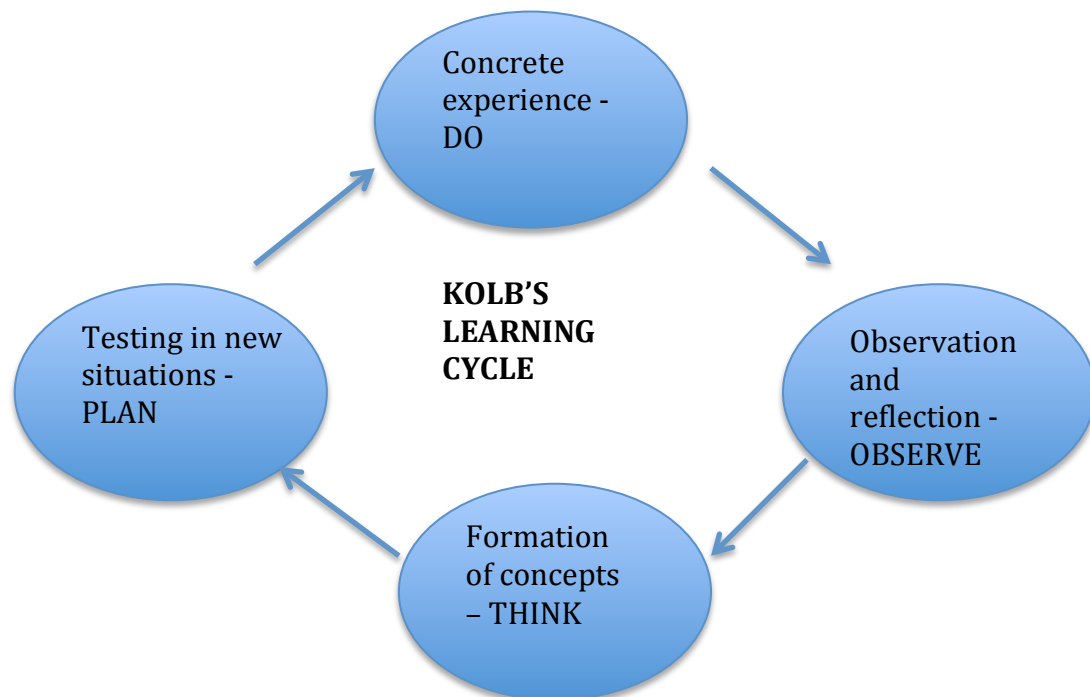
Kolb (1984) suggests an experiential learning cycle for the reflective practitioner, which is widely used and adapted as a model for reflective practice. It

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<sup>18</sup> The advantage of the Dreyfus & Dreyfus model is that it accounts for newsroom experience. Journalists often conflate experience with expertise, although they may not be correlated after a certain level of experience or expertise.

hypothesises a two-way flow between theory and practice. The practitioners go through a cycle of concrete experience (“do”), reflective observation (“observe”), abstract conceptualisation (“think”), and active experimentation or testing in new situations (“plan”), which leads in a circular motion back to the first stage of concrete experience.

This is shown in **Diagram 3.4** below:



Kolb identified four types of learners who exhibit different styles of learning. Assimilators learn better with logical theories. Convergers need practical applications of theories. Accommodators require hands-on experience. Divergers need to be allowed to observe and collect information. A classification of learners or performers based on a typology such as this enables a better outcome when training programs aim to tap into tacit knowledge.

Argyris and Schon (1974) distinguish between theory in use, which is implicit in what practitioners do, and espoused theory, which practitioners would like others to believe they do. Reflection, in their view, needs to reveal theory in use<sup>19</sup>. Learning is about detecting and correcting failures or errors. Merely correcting and proceeding with a new course of action, in their view, is single-loop learning. Double-loop

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<sup>19</sup> What journalists do and what they believe they do are different, according to this distinction.

learning, which they advocate, involves a critical scrutiny of the assumptions and variables behind the action. Going back to the action and reflecting on it produces a better set of strategies with which to embark on renewed action. Reflection is what enables double-loop learning.

Schon (1983) suggests two kinds of reflection: reflection in action, which can take place simultaneously with action, and reflection on action, which occurs retrospectively and away from the action. Reflection, in Schon's paradigm, is the link between assumptions that led to action and the action outcomes. Raelin (2001) highlights the social aspect of reflection, using a framework involving peers and experts. The principle behind this format "is that learning requires social interaction, including feedback and collaboration on shared activities in an authentic context" (ibid, pp. 531). Action learning (Revans, 1982) is a reflection exercise carried out by a group of peers working together. It is aimed to address problems within their contexts as they occur. Action science (Argyris, 1994) is action learning with guidance from experts to resolve assumptions behind actions that impede learning. Another group format of learning is communities of practice (Gherardi et al, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wenger, 2000), when people with different levels of expertise exchange knowledge and experience informally.

Raelin (1997, pp. 563) postulates that reflection "is required to bring the inherent tacit knowledge to the surface".

"Work-based learning is much more than the familiar 'experiential' learning which consists of adding a layer of experience onto conceptual knowledge. In work-based learning, theory, for instance, may be acquired in concert with practice. Theory may also be introduced after rather than before experience in order to question the assumptions of practice" (Raelin, 1997, pp. 564).

Tacit experience needs the test of reflection, according to Raelin. Individual learning is not enough. It is an illusion to think of oneself as autonomous. "Most of us work with others and so we need to inquire as to how they see us in action and how they interpret workplace phenomena" (ibid, pp. 573). Drawing from the analogy of the musician in an orchestra who views the music as a whole rather than the mechanics of playing, Raelin constructs a model of work-based learning in which the community of practice is an important part of experiential learning (which combines tacit knowledge and practice), in a manner equivalent to applied science (which combines explicit knowledge and theory). Raelin's model of work-based learning

takes three dimensions into account: collective (action science and community of practice) versus individual (experience and reflection); explicit (action science, applied science, reflection and conceptualization) versus tacit (experimentation, action learning, experience, community of practice, action science and reflection); and theory versus practice.

Among individual reflection methods, journal writing has been advanced as a useful exercise in capturing the value of experiences. Other methods involve the use of mentors and coaches to elicit feedback. Writing answers to semi-structured questions is a variation of journal writing. Epstein (1999) suggests mindful practice, a process of critical reflection, in the context of medical practice<sup>20</sup>. Studies show “individual and tutor-guided methods were superior to the peer-group format” (Mathew & Sternberg, 2009, pp. 532).

Sternberg postulates that intelligence is “inherently malleable and can be conceptualized as a developing form of expertise” (ibid, pp. 532; Sternberg, 1998). His theory describes three cognitive processes behind tacit knowledge acquisition: selective encoding, selective combination and selective comparison of information. All three processes affect an individual’s capacity to learn from experience. “Selective encoding involves attending to information that is relevant to personally valued goals. Through selective combination this encoded information is integrated to form a meaningful pattern. Through selective comparison, this pattern of information is compared to previously acquired tacit knowledge” (ibid, pp. 532). Sternberg’s theory hypothesises that previously acquired tacit knowledge shapes problem solving when confronted with new experience. Previous experience, therefore, is an important factor in organisational attempt to utilize tacit knowledge.

Rolfe argues that “reflective practitioners must step outside of the dominant paradigm of evidence-based practice in order to reassert the importance of experiential knowledge” (2001, pp. 21). In the context of nursing practice, he suggests seven tenets for a reflective paradigm.

“Paradigms, as we have seen, are concerned with how a discipline organizes and manages its knowledge base, and so any new paradigm needs to address what is understood by knowledge, what counts as valid knowledge in this discipline, what the criteria are for judging its usefulness and validity, how

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<sup>20</sup> Mindful practice or critical reflection may suit newsrooms too.



that knowledge is generated, how it is taught, and how it is applied” (Rolfe, 2001, pp. 25).

It is clear from this definition of paradigms that it is possible to postulate a knowledge-production paradigm for journalism practice that involves the use of reflection. What counts for knowledge within journalism can be outlined in such a paradigm. For any knowledge production paradigm for journalism practice to be robust it will have to take into account both explicit and implicit knowledge streams<sup>21</sup>.

### **Implications for newsroom journalists**

The distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge and between classroom-style learning and tacit learning has a significant impact on how journalists’ competencies are assessed and developed. Newsrooms embarking on discovering the competencies existing within will need to recognise that knowledge and skills are generated within newsroom contexts, that they cannot be extrapolated from the environment in which they are situated.

“The notion of community of practice returns knowledge back into its context. As a model of work-based learning, it suggests that learning is built out of the materials of the local situation and that it is often collective” (Raelin, 1997, pp. 570).

Other concepts with similar impact on newsroom learning are media logic and routinisation of news production.

### **Media logic and multimedia logic**

Workplace learning – whether individual or collective – takes place within the content production context. It is circumscribed by the environment in which media operate. Context thus becomes a limiting force, signposting the fences for the individual’s interaction with others and with work. A certain logic or a way of operating defines media work. Media logic “refers to the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium” and it includes “rhythm, grammar and format” (Altheide, 2004, pp. 294). It denotes “the particular institutionally structured features of a medium, the ensemble of technical and

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<sup>21</sup> Newsrooms implicitly acknowledge the existence of tacit knowledge when they encourage new and less experienced journalists to learn from the more experienced journalists. But they rarely document who knows what.

organizational attributes which impact on what gets represented in the medium and how it gets done” (Dahlgren, 1996, pp. 63).

Media logic, although not a central concept used in this study, explains how and why the newsroom operates the way it does. It explains the evolution of journalistic skills – the cultural and professional constraints as well as the effect of the larger external and internal environmental forces at work that shape, limit and delimit journalistic performance.

Traditional media follow their own logic, each medium being influenced by a different set of factors. Internally, they are strongly influenced by production practices, rituals, routines and cultures. Externally, the media are defined by regulation, competition, stakeholders and publics. With technologically driven changes in the newsrooms, these factors are altered but their influence on multimedia practices remain strong.

Deuze notes a number of ways in which news work is affected by media logic, observing that “newsrooms, whether in print, broadcasting or online, look remarkably the same all over the world” (Deuze, 2008, pp. 14). “Although journalists, much like other professionals in the media industries, like to think of themselves as autonomous and creative individuals, in fact most of the work at news outlets is based on a set of routine, standardized activities” (ibid). As technologies and platforms converge into a single newsroom, newsroom journalists work under similar hierarchies, socializing more in the workplace because of the increased workload, which is organised into recognisable routines. In his view, media logic under convergence gets transformed to multimedia logic.

Jenkins (2004, pp. 35-37) sees the rise of a new knowledge culture and believes “convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process”. In Altheide’s analysis (2004, pp. 293), “media sociology has shown very clearly that news and politics are immersed in the entertainment format. Research also demonstrates that this emphasis has changed the organisation as well as the working assumptions and culture of journalists and audiences.” Garcia-Aviles et al observe that “media houses worldwide have adopted a multi-platform approach to content production and distribution” (2014, pp. 573), and note that as newsroom practices undergo a transformational process in response to changes in the media market, “the traditional logic and rhythm of daily newspaper production are

losing ground” (ibid, pp. 582).

Important ways in which media logic affects news media are:

**1. Media ownership:** Fewer companies own more media outlets. Regulatory changes have opened up media markets to transnational ownership. A consequence of global media conglomerates becoming bigger is that institutional factors become more significant for newsroom work. Journalists working for a newspaper in Australia could prepare for changes that are affecting their counterparts in a sister newspaper overseas. The workforce becomes more flexible, multi-skilled and highly moveable (Marjoribanks, 2003).

**2. News industry changes:** Media companies “are not behaving in a monolithic fashion” (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 37). Convergence represents an opportunity for media conglomerates to expand across media platforms – for television companies to become newspaper companies and vice versa or for search engine companies like Yahoo and Google to become news content companies. But convergence could also be seen as a risk when audience fragmentation and audience migration is taken into account. Journalists globally are getting used to the “mother-medium” (i.e. the original, core asset of media companies) acquiring an online presence. Deuze (2004, pp. 146) observes that today’s news consumer is multitasking – “surfing the web, searching databases, responding to email, visiting chat rooms”. Audience fragmentation has occurred along with digitisation of the media. Old assumptions about audiences will need to change. “If old consumers were predictable and stationary, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or even media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, then new consumers are more socially connected” (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 37-38).

**3. Routinisation:** Journalists’ work tends to be marked by a high degree of routinisation, which “facilitates the control of work”, and “without some routine method of coping with unexpected events, news organizations, as rational enterprises, would flounder and fail” (Tuchman, 1973, pp. 110-111).

“News organizations can process seemingly unexpected events, including emergencies and disasters, because they typify events-as-news by the manner in which they happen and in terms of the ramifications ‘this manner of happening’ holds for the organization of work” (ibid, pp. 129).

Newsrooms thus impose consistency and predictability of approach on their treatment of unforeseen news events. They standardise work. Standardisation evolves from routine interaction (co-operation and confrontation) with news sources; adaptation to unwritten rules about the way things are done in specific media outlets; and daily information sharing with fellow reporters (Bennett, 2001, pp. 165). In convergent media, the pressure to routinize tasks across multimedia platforms works against constant innovation. “Innovation will occur on the fringes; consolidation in the mainstream” (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 35). A way of doing things emerges in the newsroom that becomes part of the journalistic culture<sup>22</sup>.

The operation of media logic and routinization has implications for journalists’ competencies development. They reduce the pressure to radically overhaul operational competencies; they stabilize and standardise the work requirements across media platforms.

## **Summary**

This chapter has presented three vital frameworks that influence the development of competencies in the newsroom:

1. Tacit knowledge is generated and widely used in the newsroom during the course of journalistic work. Tacit knowledge is implicit in the commonly used criteria of experiential levels during selection, training and development of journalists. Few studies are available on tacit knowledge generation or its use in newsrooms.
2. Reflective practices can make tacit knowledge explicit. They need to be developed in order to enable individual journalists, newsrooms and news organisations to make better use of their knowledge. Reflection breaks the cycle of silence in the newsrooms about what journalists know and do not know.
3. Media logic – or multimedia logic – can influence the development of skills in the newsrooms. Newsroom culture (professional ideology and values of journalists) and organisational culture are aspects of journalism production that journalists need to be aware of

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<sup>22</sup> Within media industries, very little is known about the interaction of professional and organizational cultures and how that interaction may influence decision-making processes and media content (Hollifield et al, 2001, pp. 95).

in order to make creative use of their skills<sup>23</sup>. The concept of media logic is not developed in this study, although its possible relevance is noted.

At this stage of this study, these theoretical frameworks point to the need for increasing the knowledge base about the practice of journalism. Increasing the awareness of the circumstances under which journalists work and produce knowledge for themselves and for their organisations is vital if journalism competencies are to be developed while the industry is changing. Change involves greater reflection on practices, not less. Without reflection, responses to change will have little basis in knowledge about what works and what doesn't. As far as this researcher is aware, few studies are available on the correlation between newsroom practice and knowledge generation. Literature searches on tacit knowledge generation and use in the development of newsroom practice were unsuccessful.

A tentative conclusion is that reflection experts – such as university educators and trainers – have as much a role in the development of mid-career journalists as mentors, coaches and expert practitioners. This will be addressed in detail in Chapter 8 (interviews with experts).

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<sup>23</sup> "In contrast to the manufacture of tangible products such as automobiles, in the news business, each story, newspaper or newscast is a creative product unique to the individual or team who created it. Thus, from a management standpoint, having talented and capable newsroom personnel is key to being able to create a quality news product that stands out from its competitors" (Hollifield et al, 2001, pp. 98).

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the relevant studies, and the methodologies used to examine the concepts of competencies, learning and acquisition of skills and knowledge in the newsroom. A discussion of how learning occurs in the newsroom and its implications for this study has been dealt with in the chapter on theoretical framework.

The study of competencies combines concepts from the disciplines of “differential psychology, educational and behavioral psychology and management science/industrial engineering” (Marrelli, 1998, pp.9). Within the discipline of management, it is associated with human resources development (Stevens, 2012, pp. 86). Competencies are identified, analysed and modeled for “performance appraisal, performance management, employee selection or a program to support self-development” (Mansfield, 1996, pp. 7). A twin theme in the study of competencies is performance.

“Competencies are sets of skills, knowledge, abilities and attributes – characteristics – that enable people to successfully perform jobs” (Spicer, 2009, pp. 34). Described as concepts underlying professional performance, competencies are more than skills. “Skill” does not reveal a behavioral component, any intent, knowledge base or standard of performance. The knowledge, attributes and skills that measure performance correspond to the three domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) of mental skills, emotional areas and physical skills in Bloom’s taxonomy (1964), developed in the 1960s for training and educational use.

McClelland (1973) argued in the 1970s that competencies provide a better gauge of job performance than traditional methods based on aptitudes or knowledge alone. Spencer and Spencer (1993, pp. 9) define competency as an “underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job or situation”. There is thus a causal link between competencies and superior performance.

Performance has to be at a predictable level of quality: “A competency describes a combination of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that an individual or an

organization is competent at, that is, the ability to deliver; perform (a set of) tasks with relative ease and with a high level of predictability in terms of quality and timeliness”, as executive coach Hanneke C. Frese says (Hayton & McEvoy, 2006, pp. 495). Competencies, by this definition, apply to both organisations and individuals. Competencies are important because they “help to communicate what an organization or individual stands for or what the expectation is” (ibid). At any given time, a snapshot of the competencies in the newsroom can inform decision-makers and practitioners about its collective ability (or the lack of it) to face the immediate future.

Prahalad and Hamel (1991) developed the idea of core competencies at the organisational level to denote collective learning and the use of company-wide capabilities within a company that contribute to its competitive advantage. This extended meaning of competencies has since been applied with renewed vigor at the individual level in the workplace. Observing that “competency models are hot”, Mirabile (1997, pp.73) defines the concept as a “knowledge, skill, ability, or characteristic associated with high performance on a job, such as problem solving, analytical thinking, or leadership”, noting that some definitions “include motives, beliefs and values”.

Marrelli (1998, pp. 10), defining competency as “a measurable capability required to effectively perform work”, observes that “competency analysis involves identifying the knowledge, skills, abilities, and enabling behaviors that employees must demonstrate for the organization to meet its business goals and objectives”. A competency may “involve just one knowledge, skill, ability or enabling behavior, or it may be a cluster of any combination of these” (ibid). Competency analysis is, therefore, pursued by companies engaged in tracking, evaluating, developing, rewarding or strategically enhancing their performance capability as represented by their people. Competency analysis leads to a conceptual framework or competency model (ibid), differentiated from job analysis as being more about people than about the job being done. Job analysis “may be thought of as primarily looking at ‘what’ is accomplished, and competency modeling focuses more on ‘how’ objectives are met and how work is accomplished” (Schippmann et al, 2000, pp. 713).

## **Knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics**

Campion et al (2011, pp. 226) refer to competency models “as collections of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) that are needed for effective performance”. Their study presents a detailed methodology for best practice in competency modeling “based on the experiences and lessons learned from all the major perspectives on this topic including two major companies (Boeing and Microsoft), a major consulting firm (Aon Consulting), a major university (Purdue), and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology taskforce on competency modeling” (ibid). The study states that although individual KSAOs or combinations of KSAOs are the competencies, a model is more than just lists. Unlike job analysis, competency models include descriptions of how competencies change or progress with employee level and consider future job requirements. They are presented in a usable manner, using organisation-specific language. Typically, a competency model uses rigorous job analysis methods and identifies “a finite number of competencies and applies them across multiple functions or job families” (ibid, pp. 228). Models develop and align HR systems and maintain “the currency of competencies over time” (ibid, pp. 230). They are “often highly tailored to the organization” (ibid, pp. 231).

Best practices focus on the organisation’s context, using rigorous job analysis methods, considering future job requirements, defining the language of competencies and using the organisational language, including both fundamental (cross-job) and job-specific technical competencies, using competency libraries, creating a reasonable number of competencies and adding the right amount of detail (granularity), using diagrammatic presentations, and creating ways to integrate the models into HR systems (Campion et al, 2011, pp. 230).

Marrelli (1998) outlines the flexibility aspect of model building in a study drawing from many years of experience in learning and development and performance improvement. Competency-based systems allow employees more autonomy, clarify expectations for current positions and future roles, promote equity in selection and compensation and identify a pathway to “excellence and advancement in the organization” (ibid, pp. 8). A model may be developed for an entire organisation or for specific business units, functions, processes or jobs. A



common approach, according to Marrelli, is to identify core or key competencies for all employees and then identify additional competencies for specialized objectives (ibid, pp. 11). The study describes a sample model in which competencies are organised by three levels of specialisation – a basic level, showing a capability to perform simple tasks and an elementary understanding of principles; a fully functional level, showing the ability to perform 80 to 90 per cent of tasks and showing an independent problem solving ability; and an expert level, showing the ability to solve the most difficult problems and a highly specialized level of understanding.

Models can be developed for single jobs, through data collection that “includes both a resource panel or focus group of job holders and/or their managers and interviews with job holders”, according to Mansfield’s study (1996, pp. 8), which also describes a second, one-size-fits-all, model “for a broad range of jobs (e.g. all managerial jobs)”. This second approach has advantages: it can be applied to a number of employees. The cost involved in developing and using the model to monitor performance is less. Since all employees are assessed against the same competencies, comparisons of performance become meaningful. Concepts are consistently developed and applied to all and can be aligned to organisational values (ibid, pp. 10). The study also suggests useful ways in which models can be customized to suit organisational purposes. A requirement for a model, in Mansfield’s view, is that models define a set of levels of performance required. If levels are not specified, rater bias increases. “For example, some raters concentrate most of their ratings at the high end of the scale or produce ratings with little variance. These kinds of rater bias can be minimized if a rater is presented behavioral statements describing the different level of a competency and is asked to select the statement that best describes the individual.” Competency concepts relating to levels and the settings at which they apply can be tailored (ibid, pp. 13).

Schippmann et al (2000) investigate the other side of flexibility and creative use in their study focusing on a level of rigor scale that can be applied to variables such as method of investigation, type of descriptor content (for example competencies, work activities, KSAOs or performance standards), procedures for developing descriptor content, detail of descriptor content, links to business goals, content review, ranking of descriptor content, assessment of reliability, retention (or

deletion or updating) of content, and documentation. Their typology of rigor has these categories: low, low/medium, medium, medium/high, and high rigor. For example, a low rigor methodology for developing descriptor content (a variable with five scales of rigor) will involve “no effort to gather information from content experts; instead, the researcher or analyst serves as sole content expert” (ibid, pp. 717). A medium rigor methodology involves collecting information from a number of content experts using a semi-structured protocol, and high rigor involves collecting information from content experts “using a structured protocol and following a logically developed sampling plan with a comprehensive and representative sample”. A high rigor model also ensures “content experts meet some qualification criteria”, such as time on the job or top performance based on appraisals.

### **Methodology and critique of models**

A competency model “addresses two important aspects: what skills, knowledge and characteristics are required to do the job and what behavior has the most direct impact on performance and success in the job” (Sanghi, 2009, pp. 15). Models can be built by using tools such as job analysis interviews, focus groups of SMEs (subject matter experts), questionnaires, job descriptions and competency model formats (Mirabile, 1997, pp. 75). There is no single preferred method agreed upon by modeling studies. Flanagan (1954) developed the critical incident technique by analysing incidents showing effective and ineffective performance relating to 3000 air force officers and identified six classifications of behavior. Effective performance and a behavioral analysis of the outcome of work are at the foundation of McClelland’s (1973, 1998) behavioral event interview, a technique adapted by Boyatzis (1982) to investigate managerial characteristics that correlate with effective performance.

Irrespective of the methodology adopted, rigor is one of the critical issues in the development of competency models. Some critiques have alluded to a “general lack of methodological rigor” in models (Stevens, 2012, pp. 97). Schippmann’s study provided some answers. Campion et al (2011, pp. 233) note: “Competency modeling does not inherently lack rigor. However, most early efforts were conducted by less methodologically rigorous consultants who were not researchers”. Early models had the advantage of a “broader view of management” and “were extremely helpful in

bringing employee KSAO considerations to executive discussions”, but “early models lacked rigor in terms of the standards of industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology”. Campion et al recommend a combination of traditional job analysis and competency modeling methods. These methods include the use of multiple data collection methods such as observations, SME (subject matter expert) interviews, and structured brainstorming methods in focus groups to identify potential competency information; the use of clear construct definitions in the competencies and linkages to theory and literature; the use of survey methodology to empirically identify critical competencies and to differentiate the job grades where specific competencies emerge as most important (e.g. Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999; Parry, 1996; Rodriguez et al, 2002); the use of sampling techniques; the use of appropriate statistical analyses; the assessment of reliability and other psychometric quality checks; the validation of models against important organisational criteria (e.g. differences in the job performance of employees demonstrating the competencies); and the validation of models across sources of information or job groups” (Campion et al, 2011, pp. 234-235).

Markus et al’s study (2005) raises validity issues that competency models must address if “competencies are to be used to promote, develop and assess behaviours associated with job performance”. Construct validity, adoption of models without validation and predictive validity are three of the main raised in the study. Construct validity relates to “whether a measure of an individual trait or characteristic actually measures what it is meant to” (ibid, pp. 119). As “there is no real world aspect of competencies”, problems may arise over agreement among staff, managers and SMEs as to whether “the descriptors of competencies are a representative sample of the universe of interest” (content validity), and whether the competency categories are appropriate for use as judged by their users (face validity). The study does not provide methods for overcoming content and face validity issues but instead suggests they may persist despite the most systematic inputs into the design of competency models (ibid, pp. 119). The issue of the adoption of a model without validation needs to be addressed by the organisation developing the model “because competencies describe normative behaviours, behaviours the organization wishes to promote and develop to enhance organizational effectiveness” (ibid, pp. 121). Predictive validity refers to the “lack of evidence for benefits that result from adopting a competency

approach” (ibid). The study notes the absence of conclusive empirical evidence to prove the effectiveness of competency models. It also notes “the implicit confusion between competency and job performance” which “has arisen through the language associated with the competency movement, the confusion of behaviours, knowledge and personality traits which are inputs to the job, with results or outcomes” (ibid).

Competency models are most likely to be incomplete at any given time, since it is difficult to assess what a competency consists of in terms of observable elements (Hayes et al, 2000). Stuart (1983) presents a dilemma that the three qualities often sought in training models are not achievable together: generalizability (rather than specificity), simplicity (as opposed to complexity), and accuracy (as against approximation). There is always a trade-off in one of these for achieving the other two. “If, for example, our explanations of work competencies are to be relatively simple, then this poses severe limitations for either their generalizability or their accuracy. Generalisable and accurate explanations must necessarily be complex and composed, for instance, of a large number of variables rather than being a single causal explanation” (ibid. pp. 239). The study emphasises “the built-in impossibility of achieving an ideal design” (ibid, pp. 240).

Stevens (2012, pp. 102) notes that “the science supporting competency modeling has often lagged behind the practice, largely as a function of its rapid rise in popularity, leading some to question its viability as a practice” and “despite its near 40-year history in the literature, competency modeling has typically been fraught with issues of conceptual ambiguity, lack of methodological rigor and dubious psychometric quality” (ibid). Competency modeling is not a simple fix, the study concludes. “Rather, competency models ought to be approached with an understanding of the theoretical boundaries of competencies, an acknowledgement of the explicit relationship between the context in which the competency model will be applied and the choices regarding the design of that model, and a consideration of factors that will influence the required amount of structure, documentation and rigor” (ibid, pp. 103). Competency models have limitations as well as their contexts and their advantages persist over their perceived inadequacies within these contexts.

Sanchez and Levine (2009) argue that future research may benefit from a blended approach, combining the benefits of traditional job analysis and competency

analysis. Their study highlights the advantages of competency modeling (CM) for strategic planning, despite its disadvantages pointed by other studies. While measures of inter-rater agreement may provide content validity, “is content validation the best approach to evaluate CM? We believe it is not” (ibid, pp. 60). The researchers maintain that competency modeling should be “evaluated by broadly examining its consequences” because “CM creates a conduit to influence day-to-day employee performance along strategic lines” (ibid, pp. 61).

### **Models for other professions**

Before examining available literature on KSAOs in journalism, it is instructive to review the use of competency models in other professions and how studies relating to them have critiqued their adequacy and how those models have been analysed for the issues pertinent to professional performance.

Competency-based education models are used in health care professions. Pincombe et al, 2007, in their study on national competency standards for midwives in Australia, note that “assessment of clinical competency is fundamental to midwifery education programmes” and that “assessment of midwifery students’ clinical competence is complex”. It cites the relevance of Benner’s study (1984) conceptualizing “competence as moving through a number of stages from beginner to expert” and notes: “Perhaps it would be prudent to acknowledge the beginner status of graduating midwives and provide a more substantial means to transition from student to autonomous practitioner” (ibid, pp. 104). This observation could well be made about the transition from journalism graduate to journalism practitioner in the newsroom.

Gangani et al (2006) assess the role of competencies in human resources development and the issues HR professionals might encounter in implementing a competency-based strategy through a case study of American Medical Systems, a medical technology company. Data collection methodology included job analysis interviews, focus groups and job descriptions of those performing the roles. Critical incident interviews and a questionnaire survey were conducted for building a competency framework that would help the organisation “to identify current and future competency gaps and design its training and employee education strategies

accordingly” (ibid, pp. 136). Competencies were divided into “fundamental competencies (essential competencies that all employees share across the board), functional competencies (competencies that help perform the current job effectively), and personal competencies (competencies that help employees achieve their individual objectives and prepare them for their next level or future job)”. One of the objectives was also to direct those lacking in specific competencies, identified through performance evaluation, to training and development (ibid). Using gap analysis for learning and development is also emphasised by Pickett (1998), whose study focuses on the utility value of competency frameworks. “By first determining the specific competencies required to perform the job at a fully competent level, then objectively assessing the current level of knowledge and skills possessed by the person performing that role, it is possible to establish the competency gap and develop an action program that becomes an effective individual development plan” (ibid, pp. 107). The identification of competency gaps could be developed in the newsroom for journalism training in specific functional areas.

Ramkey’s study (2012) on updating the competencies needed for federal librarians in the US examines an aspect that is relevant to Australian journalists: grades defined the pay and the level of work performed by most librarians. “We learned the hard way that an individual’s competencies are not defined by a particular grade or pay band. Someone can have high-level competencies in one functional area and beginner-level competencies in another. Basic competencies do not necessarily correspond to lower-grade positions, nor do expert competencies correspond only to higher-grade positions” (ibid, pp. 13). This is a situation that often applies to Australian journalists, who are on grades that determine pay and level of work through enterprise bargaining awards negotiated between news organisations and unions.

The number of competencies and the amount of detail woven into the description of competencies (granularity) is described in the Microsoft competency model examples alluded to by Campion et al (2011). “Microsoft’s approach has been to identify a small set of ‘foundational’ competencies, which are core and common across all competency models. These foundational competencies are essential to success in any role at Microsoft. These are then supplemented by other more job-

specific competencies. Additional competencies are defined for each profession in the company, although some, such as project management, are present in multiple profession models” (ibid, pp. 245). Microsoft “limits its competency models to a total of 8 to 14 competencies applied to each role” (ibid, pp. 248). Each competency is described in some details. “A fully described competency may take a half page, or possibly even a full page, but rarely more” (ibid, pp. 247). Competency models are built with the help of behavioral event interviews, employee surveys and subject matter experts or SMEs “who will be responsible for establishing or defining the future state”. SMEs “may be senior business leaders, functional experts, senior HR members, or others as appropriate” (ibid, pp. 237). The lessons from Microsoft’s competency building exercise are useful for a newsroom competency model, particularly as similar studies of newsroom models or descriptions of newsroom models in journalism are rare, if they can be found at all. Keeping competency component numbers economical is the main lesson from the Microsoft model for this study.

Rodolfa et al (2005) suggest a three-dimensional cube model of competencies for psychology educators and regulators incorporating the domains of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values deemed essential to the profession by a consensus among “a broad array of educators, practitioners, and regulators, identified as experts” (pp. 348). The model is a cube because it explains competencies as developing across three dimensions over time: foundational competency domains, functional competency domains, and stages of professional development. The foundational competency domains are the “building blocks of what psychologists do” and “are primarily taught in graduate school and other aspects of doctoral education (e.g. internship)” (ibid, pp. 351). The functional competency domains “describe the knowledge, skills and values necessary to perform the work of a psychologist” and they “continue to be enhanced” throughout the career. The stages of development represent the experiential dimension from graduate education, internship, postdoctoral training and continuing competency development. The model “has implications for educators, practitioners and regulators” (ibid, pp. 352). Practitioners can “assess their own domains of competency” and “use the cube model to help them decide domains of practice that may be beneficial to seek further training” (ibid, pp. 353). Regulators and organisations involved in certifying the competencies of professionals or

licensing them can use the model as a gauge or a measure of minimum requirement. The model is thus a tool for self-assessment, performance appraisal, further education and training. Its clear division between foundational and functional competencies and its inclusion of the experiential component as the third dimension are features that could be adapted for a newsroom model. The three-dimensionality and the theoretical underpinnings of the cube model have been implicitly incorporated into this study about a newsroom model.

### **Future newsrooms**

Before we consider the studies about KSAOs in the newsroom, it is important to note the context in which the discussion of knowledge, skills and attributes about the newsroom is grounded. Newsrooms are adapting to future requirements. Technologically enabled news delivery platforms are converting traditional newsrooms into multimedia or convergent newsrooms in preparation for a slow transformation from single platform news delivery processes. New skills, attributes and knowledge areas are needed to make the transition effective. Media practitioners, educators, researchers, newsroom managers and subject matter experts (those associated with the media and credited with long-standing experience and knowledge about the media) are aware of the transformational context in which newsrooms continue to produce news-related products, whether it is for television, radio, print, online or other media such as mobile phones. Available literature on the KSAO needs of the newsroom is often predictive as well as prescriptive, interpreting the foreseeable future in terms of contemporary requirements (Cleary & Cochie, 2011; Carpenter, 2009; Wenger & Owens, 2012). News industry decision-makers as well as educators present a perspective enmeshed with a view of the future. “The newspaper, as we know it – the actual broadsheet or tabloid that is delivered at our doorstep or purchased at the news stand – will cease to exist within the next 34 years, assert the scholars who trace the circulation and readership statistics in the United States” (Gunaratne, 2010, pp. 33). Changes will result in “the increasing hybridity of journalism, public relations, and advertising” (ibid, pp. 35) and “the end of the newspaper portends the demolition of the inverted pyramid to fast-breaking spot news and to produce summaries of longer stories for quick perusal by readers in a hurry” (ibid, pp. 34). Implicit in this prognosis is the paradigm of new writing skills and skills relating to breaking news. Literature, including popular media articles,



reflecting news industry views on the changing newsroom echoes hope as well as concern over the changing newsroom and its implications for journalists.

The “all-digital newsroom” will need people with “an understanding of, and probably enthusiasm for, new forms of media and storytelling” and the “transformed newsroom will be filled with multi-functional journalists who are comfortable carrying around a digital camera and tiny video camera; who make it part of their routine to record audio for possible use in podcasts or multimedia project sound clips; who are regular users of social networks and understand how to leverage them to communicate with and attract new readers, and share some personal information about themselves as well as promote their work” (Outing, 2009). In the 24/7 newsroom, “extreme flexibility and the love of learning and a challenge will be the qualities that hiring managers will seek” (ibid). The new skills required will be multimedia skills, knowledge will relate to new media, and attributes to flexibility and willingness to learn.

Australian news media are preparing for a future that “has never looked stronger” in an age “where opinions can be formed, disseminated, digested – and twisted – in moments in a fast-flowing stream of tweets”, according to Fairfax Media chief executive Greg Hywood (2011). “The future of journalism should not be confused with the future of print – journalism can be delivered in any number of ways: online, smartphone, iPad, IPTV” (ibid). Multimedia newsrooms are an integral part of the future of journalism.

Fairfax Media’s rival, News Corp, is equally optimistic about the future. “Already, we are doing work we could not have contemplated five years ago,” writes The Courier-Mail’s editor-in-chief, David Fagan (2010). “Our newsroom produces high-end video and audio and animations that help bring to life the stories we would once have published only in newsprint. Newspapers have been remarkably adept at taking on and beating radio stations and TV stations to break spot news online” (ibid). The emphasis is on breaking news and competing across platforms of delivery. These skills will be integrated into traditional newsrooms.

Introducing the ABC Television’s first purpose-built continuous news centre, managing director Mark Scott (2008) envisages a 24-hour news service. “We begin with a great advantage: our strength and reputation in news gathering. By adopting a

new production model we can harvest more effectively the news and information we are generating. Digital technology means we can create news content once and use it many times over on a number of different platforms.” Voices heard on radio can be seen on television and those who are heard and seen will be read on the website. Journalists become more multi-functional, learning appropriate technology along the way. Newsrooms become a conglomerate of multimedia skills, with the required knowledge and attributes being developed in order to make 24-hour news delivery possible.

While newsroom’s top managers offer a perspective of futuristic hope, the view from a distance, particularly from an academic standpoint, is different. McKnight & O’Donnell (2008) point to the collapsing business model for journalism as print winds down. “We are living in an interregnum between the age of print and the age of the net. The content-rich newspaper websites in Australia and overseas are living off the assets of newspapers and their present advertising. Many non-newspaper sites, in turn, depend on them. If newspapers decline, the tap will be turned off and the apparent abundance of news will dry up.”

While traditional media are facing an uncertain future, newsrooms are adapting to the contemporary reality of doing more with less, more platforms, more learning, more skills, more attributes and more knowledge demanded of the few remaining in the diminished newsrooms. More competencies will be required of fewer newsroom journalists.

*Life in the clickstream II: The future of journalism* (2010), a report published by Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, the union representing Australian journalists, notes that news industry has “seen the impact of the digital revolution on the working lives of all working journalists” as recent years have been “characterized by job losses at the major newspaper and magazine houses”. Job losses have resulted in centralized production centres. “The past 18 months has also been a period of digital experimentation and expansion – most major news companies have extended their slate of offerings to include new online ventures. That they have done this while rationalizing their print staff hints at a gradual transformation of the workforce in newsrooms” (ibid, pp. 4). The report also observes “this attrition has occurred over a period during which news organisations have grappled with ways to expand their coverage to cater for the new demands of online news: continuous deadlines, the use of blogs, Twitter and other social media, slideshows, video, etc.” (ibid, pp. 19).

The report also analyses the findings of a survey of Australian journalists who are members of the union about their working conditions, pay, and levels of training. About 60 per cent of the journalists in the survey indicated they were expected to develop new skills. New skills included blogs (indicated by 59 per cent), social media (44 per cent), and video (52 per cent). Journalists in the survey (54 per cent) also indicated they received no training for new media.

Another view on the traditional newsroom suggests print news media may exist as more elite and specialized products that “survive by serving a narrow market well” (Meyer, 2008, pp. 32). “The old hunter-gatherer model of journalism is no longer sufficient. Now that information is so plentiful, we don’t need new information so much as help in processing what’s already available. Just as the development of modern agriculture led to a demand for varieties of processed food, the information age has created a demand for processed information” (ibid, pp. 35). The newsroom, after it has shrunk to an irreducible size, will contain journalists who will provide “evidence-based journalism” of high quality that will be demanded by the “educated, opinion-leading, news-junkie core of the audience” (ibid).

Luscombe (2009) interviewed 27 BBC journalists for a study about radio practitioners’ perspective on their future during an industry-wide trend of layoffs and economic crisis similar to what the print media are undergoing. Despite the decrease in the number of journalists, output has risen, with the number of radio bulletins and summaries showing a fivefold increase from 1966 (35 summaries and bulletins), through 1986 (69), to 2008 (more than 160), the study finds. Journalists have had to expand their skill sets, learning to edit their own material. “Specialism in either radio or television journalism became a thing of the past, as the drive towards first bi-medialism then multi-medialism took over” (ibid, pp. 115). As journalists adapt to interactivity with audiences working across radio and online platforms, they are “no longer just newsgatherers and writers; they have had to become multi-skilled, able to work across all media with all types of technology” (ibid, pp. 119).

Major changes in how news journalism works as a business model will affect how journalists work in the newsroom and develop their skills. News journalism in its form is based on a business model that came together by accident, argues Kramer (2010). As the old model that made news journalism sustainable falls apart, there is

little hope that a new model will take its place. There will, instead, be a “patchwork of partial solutions specific to the kind of content being delivered, and the habits and preferences of the particular audience that wants it” (ibid, pp. 46). Journalists, newsrooms and journalism skills will not vanish. “By understanding their job – reporting and analyzing the news – future newsrooms will find themselves built around the audiences they serve, not the platforms they use. They will not be newspapers or TV news operations or radio newsrooms; they will be news organizations built around the content they cover” (ibid). Journalists’ skills, by implication, will need to adapt to serve their audience rather than a platform of delivery. The newsrooms will, under this scenario, become convergent.

Convergent newsroom is the most likely change contemplated by studies on the immediate future of news journalism. “Convergence is the window of opportunity for traditional media to align itself with technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Lawson-Borders, 2003, pp. 91). Multimedia news reporting has been described as a continuous news cycle in an era of convergence (Barron, 2000). Instead of convergence being seen as the collapse of traditional news delivery models, it is presented as a new model of survival in which customer is at the centre and competition is at the national and international levels as well as in the local markets. Convergence “as a concept and process is in a stage of evolution” and “blending of the cultural dynamics that are specific to a medium is key to the success of convergence” (Lawson-Borders, 2003, pp. 96).

News acquires the characteristics of online news, which is characterised by interactivity with audience, immediacy (in following a continuous news cycle) and liquidity (in continuing to be shaped by journalists in successive online versions and never assuming a definite shape) (Karlsson & Stromback, 2010). In a fluid environment in which news is never finished or whole, “the newspaper becomes an unbounded and unfinished thing, never final and never finite but instead interconnected with all the other unfinished things with which it now shares its communication space in a way that it never did – or could – as a physical printed product” (Singer, 2008, pp. 122). For journalists, the changing nature of news brings “legal, ethical, and economic challenges” (ibid). Journalism will be produced by “the journalist plus a whole lot of other people”, including “bloggers, ‘citizen journalists’, videographers, you and I with our mobile phone cameras, and a host of others not yet labeled” (ibid, pp. 126). Producers will be drawn from outside the newsroom, but “we

need journalists to be sense makers” and “to explain how the pieces connect” in an “interconnected world” (ibid). As news and news producers become varied, the role of journalists changes.

Journalists will necessarily have to develop the skills to deal with multimedia. A study conducted by Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism on the differences between new and old media focused on “how the blogs and social media agendas relate and differ from the traditional press” (Pew report, 2010). “Social media and the mainstream press clearly embrace different agendas. Blogs shared the same lead story with traditional media in just 13 of the 49 weeks studied. Twitter was even less likely to share the traditional media agenda – the lead story matched that of the mainstream press in just four weeks of the 29 weeks studied. On YouTube, the top stories overlapped with traditional media eight out of 39 weeks” (ibid, pp. 3). In a convergent newsroom, journalists have to keep abreast of technical know-how as well as the differentials in the news agendas relating to the new media.

Saltzis et al (2008), using semi-structured interviews with journalists from four UK news organisations (two newspapers – Financial Times and The Guardian – and two television news organisations – BBC News and Sky News), investigate work reorganisation in newsrooms as a result of multimedia convergence and its effect on journalists’ practices. Their findings “confirm what has been suggested elsewhere in the literature about modern journalism: that in the age of converging media, journalists are expected to follow that trend and become more versatile” (ibid, pp. 220). The study concludes that “traditional news organisations are undergoing significant changes in terms of strategic thinking and work reorganization which ultimately affect the work and role of journalists” (ibid, pp. 225).

Traditional media, defined as analogue media (Saltzis et al, 2008, pp. 217), are becoming digital and converging within news organisations that were single-platform production units. Video, audio and the written word are simultaneously being produced by journalists working together as a team within the same newsroom or same news organisation. A characteristic of multimedia newsrooms is the socialization or inter-mixing of news narratives that were once distinct for different media (Singer, 2004). Convergence “is a catalyst for the resocialisation of print journalists, who are being asked not only to change the way they do their work also to re-examine notions about themselves as journalists” (ibid, pp. 838). Singer’s study notes that changes are occurring in professional values – a dilution of the notion of

who we are – as well as news routines, the way we do things (ibid, pp. 840). News production platforms may not merge to form a single platform, but will most likely retain their individual characteristics while adopting extra routines from other media.

“Medium-driven variations in professional practice – notably issues related to newsroom structures and storytelling norms – may well separate newspapers, television and online products and producers for the foreseeable future” (ibid, pp. 851).

However, since Singer’s study, changes towards further convergence have become widespread with single-platform production streams, mainly newspapers, being forced to close or adapt to become multi-platform delivery channels, with some reappearing as a web-only offering. Convergent platforms are modified single-platform news production streams that utilize the many of the same journalists who used to work in print (or television or radio) media. The journalists, like their organisations, have had to adapt or perish. Changes in the newsroom production processes involve changes in competency components of journalists. They acquire some new competencies and retire the outdated ones. With the aid of a competency model, it is possible to track the changes in journalists’ competencies and list the competencies required in journalists seeking work in the newsroom. Through the various changes, the competency framework can adapt and act as a guide for newsroom managers and individual journalists. Hence the need for a competency model for newsrooms.

### **Value of KSAs**

“The fundamental skills of writing, grammar and critical thinking were once the primary skills that editors were looking for in new journalists. But, is convergence changing the skills base of journalists, and more specifically, are editors re-evaluating what they believe are the most important skills that new journalism graduates should possess?”

These questions form the basis of a study (Pierce & Miller, 2007), which finds that “although the industry is becoming more and more converged, the basic journalism skills remain the most important among newspaper editors”. The study concludes that writing, spelling, grammar and critical thinking still form the foundations of journalism. The skills or experiences editors expect from journalists are, in order of importance, writing, objectivity, basics of libel law, copy editing, use

computer-assisted reporting, write headlines, shoot news photographs, design pages and work with television (ibid, pp. 55).

A study of 238 advertisements for newspaper positions between 2004 and 2009 and an analysis of 180 advertisements from 1982 to 1987, shows that “while the demand for abilities including multitasking increased during that time, writing, editing and design remained the skills most requested for all years studied” (Cleary & Cochie, 2011, pp. 68). The study recognises the value of using knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) as key concepts and offers some valuable definitions from the federal government’s Office of Personnel Management: “Knowledge is a body of information applied directly to the performance of a function. Skill is an observable competence to perform a learned psychomotor act. Ability is competence to perform an observable behavior or a behavior that results in an observable product” (<http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/policy/Terms.asp>). This study reiterates the human resources perspective that “KSAs offer important insight into what executives prioritize for the news organization”.

“Tracking the progression of KSAs in job ads also offers some indication of whether the industry has completed the change process or is in the middle of a transitional period”.

More than 78 per cent of the job ads studied in the period between 2004 and 2009 did not specify any knowledge area. The skills most in demand were writing, editing and print design or layout. Editing skills were required in different areas such as print, web, audio and video. Knowing how to use content management systems, blogging, web editing, multimedia production, and video shooting were other multimedia skills mentioned. The abilities (or attributes) required were deadline orientation, leadership, and motivation or enthusiasm.

Cleary & Cochie’s study resonates with the research being undertaken in this thesis because it acknowledges the role played by KSAs. It does not, however, undertake a discussion of newsroom competencies, on which subject there appears to be gaps in available literature. Newsroom and competencies are seldom conflated in academic studies. Minimum required skills for journalists at various levels, and their knowledge and attributes requirements are seldom synthesized into a unified study. Competency categories for journalists generally manifest themselves through job advertisements, which offer the only clue that they exist in the decision-making systems of news organisations.

Analysing job advertisements platform-specific content skills, Massey (2010, pp. 142-155) concludes that traditional print media organisations show a modest demand for multiplatform skills. The study finds evidence for the existence of “two journalisms”, one in which reporters are still specialists in traditional media platforms and another in which reporters are platform agnostic, working across many platforms of delivery simultaneously. In the first, journalists keep producing content as they have always done, and continue to use their skills as though nothing has changed. In the second, multiplatform work requires the use of new skills in recasting stories for new media. How far should journalism programs offered by universities adapt to market needs for new skills? The study suggests a prudent approach to changing needs of organisations without forsaking instruction in journalism’s fundamental skills. It recommends that course curriculum needs to be sensitive to market requirements but must avoid being driven by skills-based criteria.

Content analysis of job advertisements is a common source of categories of skills and attributes in many studies. “Employment advertisements are a genre of organizational communication that can provide insight into the characteristics of a company and its employees. Job postings can be considered representations of occupations; their language providing rich detail for researchers” (Wenger & Owens, 2012, pp. 9-25). News organisations do not afford the benefit of transparency about their human resources policies. Their criteria for the selection, performance assessment and advancement of journalists are revealed through the words in the advertisements. News organisations’ human resources policies otherwise remain largely unknown to researchers and, often even to journalists working within. Job descriptions can therefore yield the terminology from which competencies can be extrapolated. Knowledge, skills and attributes – the three main components of competencies – can be categorised by distilling the terms used in position descriptors and requirements for applicants.

Wenger & Owens (ibid) analyse job postings from companies’ websites for a three-month period in 2009 to obtain a list of skills and attributes required by news organisations in the US. In the study, 735 job postings are coded for 22 skills and attributes. The study also seeks answers from recruiters in five large news media companies through in-depth interviews. This combination methodology is used to refine the findings of the content analysis. The study reinforces the finding in other similar studies that “even with the technological changes in today’s newsrooms,



traditional journalism skills are still in demand; however, web/multimedia skills appear to be growing in importance for broadcast journalists and remaining relatively steady for print positions” (ibid, pp. 21).

Carpenter (2009, pp. 287-304) undertakes a quantitative content analysis of all the journalism job advertisements featured on a specific website, journalismjobs.com, over a six-month period from January to June 2008. The study uses the term “expertise” in ways that evoke the underlying concepts behind “competency”. It distinguishes between routine and adaptive expertise: “skills acquisition reflects routine expertise, while adaptive expertise requires broader knowledge” (ibid, pp. 291). Routine expertise manifests itself during everyday work, making use of the capability acquired through experience in dealing with routine tasks accurately. Routine expertise, however, proves to be inadequate during times of change and uncertainty, when problem solving in novel situations becomes a requirement. “Adaptive experts go beyond the learning of skills by seeking to understand the meaning and implications of their tasks” (ibid, pp. 292). Employers sought nontechnical skills relating to writing (62.7%), working under deadline pressure (52.1%), editing (40.8%) and teamwork (37.8%). Among technical skills, they sought HTML (27.4%), content posting (20.6%), image editing (20.2%), blogging (17.8%), video editing (16.3%) and content management system (12.8%). Adaptive expertise sought by employers included outside knowledge area (38.4%), creativity (32.5%), independent thought (27.2%), leadership (19%), critical thinking (12.3%), and problem solving (10.1%). The study recommends training in all three areas.

Fahmy (2008, pp. 23-39) uses the survey method to elicit responses from 245 online news professionals in the US, who answered questions on newsroom skills and online trends and hiring criteria. The study found traditional journalism skills (ability to learn, editing, reporting, spelling, research, writing, team work and interviewing skills) were ranked the most important by the respondents.

Quantitative research aiming to rank skills of the immediate future generally has at least two drawbacks. A substantial portion of the sample is likely to be drawn from industry professionals who are already embedded in traditional practice and are likely to take the primacy of traditional skills for granted. Hence survey results need to be updated constantly and require the addition of qualitative inputs through other methods. Secondly, projecting skills needs of the future newsroom is more often than not a hit and miss exercise as news industry is going through rapid changes and the

convergent newsroom itself is a recent phenomenon that has not yet been defined adequately. The inadequacy of the skills-based approach, thus, suffers from contemporaneity; in fact, it is unlikely to retain its relevance across contexts or across time. A competency-based framework for newsroom has the merit of adaptability; categories can be added or deleted to maintain currency.

The content and survey studies cited above identify and isolate many categories of skills, knowledge areas and attributes without synthesizing them as competencies. They are mainly market-centric, keeping news organisational needs in focus. They pose the research question: what are the skills needs of a changing newsroom? This is not far from the main research question posed in this thesis: what are the competencies required in a changing newsroom? The competency dimension – a unified framework of knowledge, skills and attributes – is missing in earlier studies. Also missing is a universal perspective that can be applied in a general way to the needs of individuals as well as industry, training organisations and educational institutions. This thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature.

### **Newsroom as a community of practice**

As this thesis attempts to synthesise a universal framework on competencies – a combination of skills, attributes and knowledge – required for newsroom journalists, one of the key questions it poses is: how can competencies be acquired and developed? The traditional paradigm of a period of learning in a classroom at a university followed by a period of on-the-job training or practice in a newsroom is still prevalent although it has been questioned and tagged as dated. Learning is traditionally conceived of as an acquisition – of knowledge, concepts, meanings, facts, or content. This notion views learning as gaining possession of a commodity, writes Anna Sfard (1998, pp. 6), who compares the “acquisition metaphor” or AM against the recent development of “participation metaphor” or PM, which views learning a subject “as a process of becoming a member of a community” (ibid). Without the community, “talk about the ‘stand-alone learner’ and ‘decontextualised learning’ becomes as pointless as the attempts to define lungs or muscles without a reference to the living body within which they both exist and function” (ibid).

Contextual learning or workplace learning is being advanced as a mode of learning similar to learning at the university. Situated learning and learning by doing (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991) are synonymous concepts that

extend the idea of knowledge generated through practice. Practice is not isolated from theoretical knowledge in the sense in which the university and the news organisation are distinct entities. “The community of practice of midwifery or tailoring involves much more than the technical knowledgeable skill involved in delivering babies or producing clothes”, and “a community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 98). By extension, the newsroom may well be the learning centre that journalists need. As the news industry goes through the transformations wrought by the blurring of division between media producer and consumer, the validity of existing journalism education models too are being questioned. Journalism schools are enjoined to “take up a rigorous examination of their own practices” and “consider an alternative to the transmission-driven, industry-conceived model of journalism” (Mensing, 2010, pp. 512).

Journalism courses offered by universities need to realign themselves to the reality facing the industry, which is adopting multimedia and multiplatform newsrooms. It is no longer possible for a centre of learning (such as a journalism training institute) to remain isolated from a centre of practice (such as a newsroom), with the one offering theory and the other an opportunity to practice. The classroom-newsroom dichotomy no longer has the validity it had prior to the advent of online media. It looks as though the classroom has shifted to the newsroom, where the community of practice exists. The implicit learning inherent in practice is progressing so rapidly in multimedia newsrooms that journalism courses, which have traditionally distanced themselves from the gyrations of industry practice, are left with an adapt-or-perish choice. It is not merely a question of revenue: journalism courses apparently need to re-establish their relevance, as advocated by some journalism educators.

Competencies are the concepts linking the classroom to the newsroom. The components underlying competencies – knowledge, skills and attributes – are incubated in the classroom and developed in the newsroom. A competency-based framework provides the link between journalism students in the classroom and journalists in the newsroom. The development of the professional can be seen as a continuum through such a framework. This thesis is an attempt to create the competency framework.

The methodologies used in this study for synthesizing a competency model are discussed in the next chapter.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This study arose as a philosophical inquiry into the future of newsrooms as they adapt to the requirements of technological change in the internal and external environments in which they operate. Their transformation from dedicated single platform news delivery centres to multiplatform convergent newsrooms demands that news journalists and their managers reflect on their careers and audit their capabilities. The urgency to develop new attributes, knowledge and skills raises the question: what are the competencies required for the convergent newsroom?

The question is important for both the newsrooms producing news across new platforms, and the newsroom journalists as individual professionals seeking to be equipped for the future. The probability that convergence of media platforms may be a transition phase and that newsroom may diminish, disappear or modify into vastly different entities imposes pressures on news organisations and newsroom journalists to acquire new competencies to survive as professional entities.

That they can perform to new production requirements if they focus on the competency question is evidenced in the literature on the definition, development and application of competency-based performance models in other professions. The research questions focus on the competency requirements of the newsroom.

The previous two chapters, on the theoretical framework and literature review, map the relevant knowledge areas relating to competencies that have been explored in journalism studies and other fields of inquiry. This chapter outlines how a competency model has been constructed as a preliminary contribution to this knowledge domain.

### **Researcher's involvement**

The formative stage of the research question is informed by the researcher's role as a practitioner in the evolving convergent newsroom in Australia. Having witnessed the transformation of the newsroom from the typewriter days to the computerized page production for newspapers, this researcher has been a practitioner in print newsrooms for more than three decades. The journalistic production work in the newsroom has changed vastly, but in the view of this researcher, changes in Australian newsrooms have kept pace with those in other developed nations, such as the US, Britain and Canada. The congruence in transformation has been mainly due to

simultaneous or near-simultaneous adoption of new technology, including news production software and printing machinery. Colour printing, progressive adoption of desktop publishing and substitution of layers of people such as proofreaders, linotype operators and page layout foremen with automation software synchronized with the increased production knowledge and skills of newsroom journalists who learnt to work with the relevant software.

This study attempts to utilise the researcher's practical newsroom experience in major newsrooms in Australia and forge a valid and reliable competency model for the newsroom. Practice, in this sense, is an ally and a guide, informing the research questions and the theoretical framework underpinning them. Practical experience has also contributed to the research design by helping the researcher make informed choices about the methodologies that will yield the answers to the research questions, as explained below.

Immersion in practice has contributed to the researcher's understanding of the usefulness of the concepts outlined in the theoretical framework chapter, in particular the notions of tacit knowledge and implicit learning. The existence of tacit knowledge – what you know but cannot express – is substantiated by newsroom experience. Experience, when viewed as operational usefulness of tacit knowledge in a professional, is variously known as “news sense”, “nose for news”, “instinctive journalism”, or connoted when a professional is described as “highly experienced”. It is not uncommon to find newsroom journalists who cannot describe what they do or why they do it, but perform effectively, whether through their writing or page production or story editing.

Implicit learning, as observed in the theoretical framework chapter, is associated with communities of practice, where tacit knowledge is produced in the working context and situation. The research design takes into consideration the centrality of newsroom learning and seeks inputs from newsroom practitioners on competencies.

### **Triangular approach**

Competency models show an assessment of skills, knowledge and attributes as emerging from workplace behaviours that lead to high performance. Modeling studies have historically used any one or a combination of these methodologies, as stated in Chapter 4 (Literature Review):

1. Questionnaires (survey).
2. Job descriptions.
3. Previous models.
4. Interviews with employees.
5. Interviews with those knowledgeable about the industry or organisation for which the model applies.

Each of these methodologies is based on a pragmatic approach to find a solution to the question: how can a workable competency model be created? In the absence of previous models for the newsroom, a preliminary model was constructed using a content analysis of job descriptions. A survey of newsroom practitioners was undertaken to refine the result of content analysis and provide granularity and richness of detail. Finally, interviews were conducted with subject matters experts to sift through the more problematic issues in the findings of the previous two methodologies.

Using a qualitative methodology, such as in-depth interviews, to confirm or supplement the results of quantitative studies or vice versa has been described as triangulation (Hammersley, 1996).

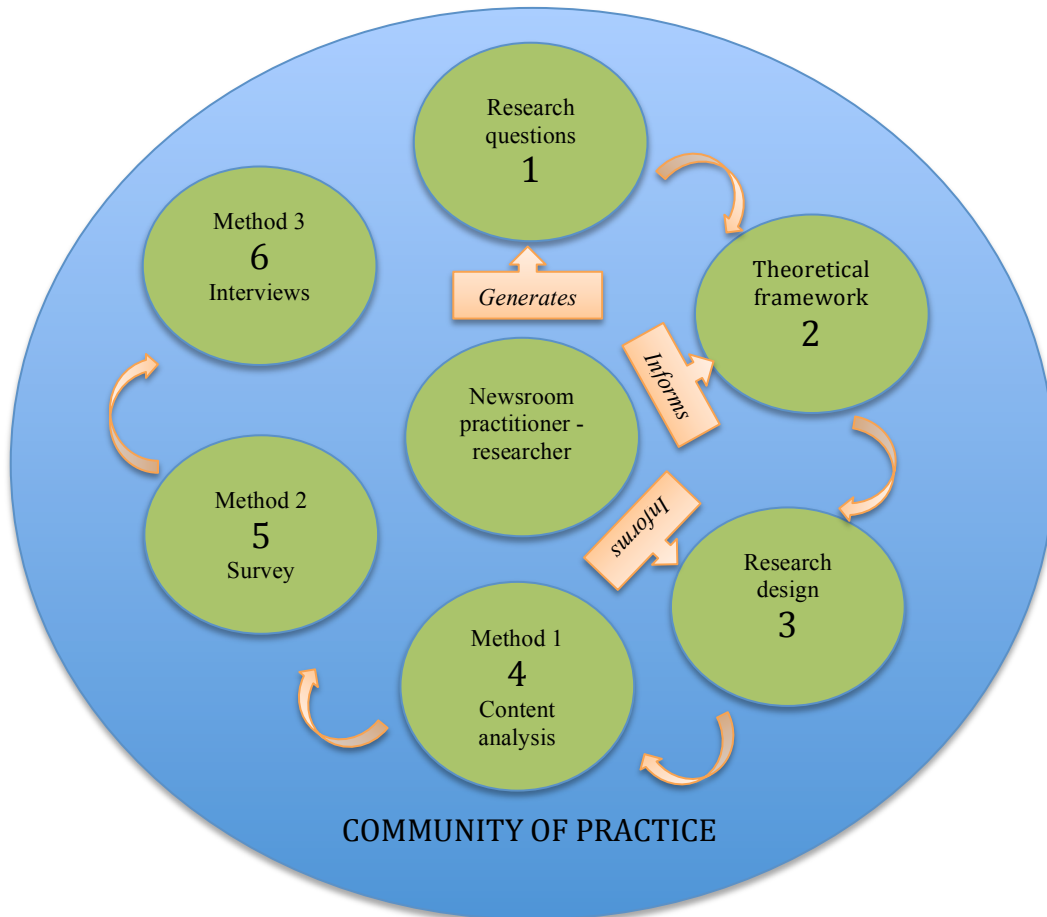
“Many research designs now combine quantitative methods, which provide reliable results that can be generalized to the wider population under study, with qualitative methods to produce results that are rich in meaning and understanding of social processes (triangulation)” (Walter, 2010, pp. 26).

Of the three methods, the first (content analysis) was quantitative; the second (survey) a mix of quantitative (preset answers to be chosen by questionnaire respondents) and qualitative (open-ended questions to yield a variety of answers from respondents); and the third in-depth interviews with subject matter experts. The findings of each added breadth and depth while confirming the previous results.

All three methodologies were grounded in the community of practice, seeking data from sources that were either in the newsroom (journalists and editors at decision-making levels) or had a vital influence over it (journalism educators, newsroom trainers and union representatives). The methodologies were closely linked to the theoretical framework of this study, which views the tacit knowledge and implicit learning within the community of practice as an important generator of competencies along with educational and training institutions.

The development of the research methodology is illustrated below:

**Diagram 5.1 – Research process**



The research process shown above acknowledges the centrality of the researcher’s practitioner role in generating the research questions and informing the theoretical underpinnings as well as the research design. The researcher’s experience was viewed as contributing positively to the process despite the possibility of biases arising from it. Triangulation of methodologies was an important factor neutralizing the biases arising from an over-reliance on the researcher’s own background or on any single methodology.

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods also eliminates the limitations of both kinds of research. Although this study primarily seeks a variety of data (competency components) through qualitative methods (survey and interviews) for

the competency framework, it derives the benefits of robustness and reliability from quantitative data (content analysis and survey). This is due to the survey containing open-ended questions along with those where the responses could be counted, thus performing a dual qualitative-quantitative function. The content analysis too has a dual function, its findings reliant on the repetition of data (same categories adding to the count) as well on the range of data about competency components.

The interviews pursue a purely qualitative research aim, that of exploring “a social or human problem” to understand which “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Cresswell, 1998, pp. 15). Newsroom practitioners thus become ideal interview subjects for any inquiry into the community of practice or the “natural setting” of the newsroom.

“Qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents” (Patton, 2002, pp. 4).

The qualitative aspects of this study are based on the researcher’s experience as a practitioner and open-ended interviews. However, observation as a sole methodology has limitations since it focuses only on external behaviours and the data are “constrained by the limited sample of activities actually observed” (Patton, 2002, pp. 306). Interviews, however, “permit the observer to go beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts” (ibid), allowing a research inquiry to tap into the knowledge base of those interviewed.

The following table outlines the methods selected to answer the research questions:



**Table 5.1: Suitability of methods for research questions**

Research Questions	Objectives	Method
<i>RQ1: How can traditional newsrooms transforming into converging newsrooms benefit from a competencies model in preparing for the immediate future?</i>	1. Discover competency components.	Content analysis of job ads and survey of practitioners (Quantitative)
	2. Inquire into the extent of implicit learning at the workplace.	Content analysis of job ads and survey of practitioners (Quantitative)
	3. Describe the newsroom requirements at various functional roles.	Content analysis of job ads and survey of practitioners (Quantitative)
<i>RQ2: What are the competencies required for a journalist in a traditional print newsroom that is being transformed into a convergent newsroom in Australia?</i>	1. Inquire into attributes required for convergent newsroom journalists.	Content analysis of job ads and survey of practitioners (Qual & Quant)
	2. Inquire into knowledge areas required for convergent newsroom journalists.	Content analysis of job ads and survey of practitioners (Qual & Quant)
	3. Inquire into skills required for convergent newsroom journalists.	Content analysis of job ads and survey of practitioners (Qual & Quant)
<i>RQ3: How can competencies be developed for a journalist in a transforming newsroom in Australia?</i>	1. Discover the nature of community of practice in the newsroom.	Interviews with subject matter experts (Qualitative)
	2. Analyse the advantages and disadvantages of classroom learning and newsroom learning.	Interviews with subject matter experts (Qualitative)

## **Content analysis**

RQ1 demands a description of the competency framework in an outline format so that its components and usability could be gauged. The answer will be an introduction to the competency model for the newsroom. It will be an emergent model resulting from an exploratory inquiry into the competency components. An appropriate method of obtaining a preview of the competency model would be one that other professions follow when they create a competency model for their organisations – an analysis of job descriptions. A content analysis of job advertisements would yield attributes, knowledge areas and skills required of professionals without too much expense in terms of time and money, both precious commodities for a researcher operating alone. All the competency components are built into a job advertisement for a position in their most idealized form, each descriptive phrase defining the characteristics of the best performer. Job advertisements are also the most accessible resource since they are available in print, online and from across the globe.

Job advertisements for newsroom positions encapsulate the competency components required for various levels of work and therefore make ideal starting point for any inquiry into the usefulness of a competency model. The aim of the content analysis is two-fold:

1. It can give a range and breadth of components. A qualitative perspective can discover the components that are required for various positions. A quantitative study of the competency components can select those more frequently mentioned, thereby noting them for confirmation through another method in the study.
2. A global sample (confined to English language journalism in western democracies, so as not to mix dissimilar or unrepresentative samples) may confirm similarities in the components required, provided the majority of the advertisements are chosen from Australia, since the focus of the study is Australia. A global sample will also enable a fairly good sample size, such as 100 advertisements, to be analysed.

Thus the content analysis was undertaken first, in order to lay the groundwork for the competency model.

However, the content analysis is limited by these factors:

1. Coding may affect reliability (whether its results can be universally applied) since “it is almost impossible to devise coding manuals that do not entail some interpretation on the part of coders” (Bryman, 2001, pp. 191). Coders’ knowledge of the working culture (i.e. the community of practice) is a crucial ingredient in the reliability of coding (Cicourel, 1964; Garfinkel, 1967).
2. Coding reveals existing categories, but many significant categories may not be present at all in the material analysed. For example, an attribute such as passion for journalism may be mentioned in job advertisements for journalism positions, but an obvious skill such as good writing skills may be not be present in many job descriptions as it may be assumed to be present in the candidates applying for mid-level positions.

The first of these limitations, inter-coder reliability, was a not a factor in this study as the researcher was the only coder. Being a newsroom practitioner, the researcher could also claim to have sufficient knowledge of the working culture to be able to overcome the cultural factor as a limitation.

Content analysis is a useful first method for this study, since it has qualitative (breadth of categories) and quantitative (importance of certain categories over others) aspects. But it needs to be supplemented by other methods, as the table above indicates.

## **Survey**

The survey canvasses the opinion of professionals who are member of the community of practice. For newsroom journalism, this is an important consideration as access to the newsroom is limited and hard to obtain except for members of the community of practice. For the practitioner, since access is not an issue, the survey becomes a more time-effective method of obtaining a diversity of practitioners’ viewpoints on competency requirements.

Another advantage is the dual role of a survey – as a quantitative method and as a qualitative method, particularly when open-ended questions are embedded into the survey. Open-ended questions can simulate a structured interview (with the same

questions being posed to all the survey participants). The responses diversify the competency categories for the model.

The survey questionnaire was posted on a dedicated website, Survey Monkey, which generated an email link to the page containing the survey. The link was posted to a purposive sample of journalists across various large newsrooms in major Australian cities. The website kept track of the responses, collating, grouping, counting and graphically displaying them. The first 40 relevant responses were used in the survey.

The questionnaire contained 42 questions, including five about the background and relevant professional details of the respondents. Thirty-seven questions required responses about the attributes, knowledge areas and skills required for four experiential levels of journalists. Of these, 12 questions were open-ended, asking respondents to suggest their ideal competency components for journalists at these levels. The responses to these questions were collated by the researcher separately and treated as structured interview responses.

An ethical issue to consider was ensuring the privacy and anonymity of survey respondents. This was done through a document stating the conditions of the survey, including the rights of the respondents and the responsibilities of the researcher. A copy of the document was given to each respondent.

### **In-depth interview with SMEs**

SMEs – subject matter experts – were drawn from among organisational trainers or training managers who coach newsroom journalists; academics involved in the teaching of journalism at universities; editors or top-level newsroom leaders or decision-makers in the journalist recruitment process. The group also included a journalists' union representative as the union-formulated skills achievement levels are used in the grading system for journalists (which indirectly indicates their level of professional capability). SMEs are closely involved in the competency development of journalists through their roles in the education, recruitment, career advancement and definition of roles, grades and ethical guidelines. Their influence in the newsroom competency development is both direct and indirect and their source of power over development programs is both formal and informal.

The advantage for a newsroom practitioner undertaking research is the ease of access to SMEs. In-depth interviews are constrained only by the time it takes to obtain

the consent of SMEs. The main limitation in the interview method was the bias arising from their professional profiles. However, the bias was mitigated by:

1. Selecting the SMEs from across opposite camps (representing two major rival publishing houses; newsroom and classroom; and newsroom management and journalists' union.
2. The interviewees' and researcher's awareness of their own bias.

In-depth interviews analysed the philosophical aspects of the concepts and categories emerging from the content study and survey responses. They can clarified and confirmed the emergent parts of the competency model. The interview subjects also introduced new concepts that were relevant inclusions in the competency model.

An ethical issue to consider during the interviews was ascertaining the subjects' level of personal disclosure and ensuring their professional positions or their relationships with their employers were not jeopardized. This was done by explaining to each of the interview subjects the context in which they would be quoted (in an academic thesis) and by seeking their consent to use their names and professional designations. The video attached to this thesis was prepared with their consent to lend the visual weight of authority to the discussion on competencies in the newsroom.

The table below summarises the advantages and disadvantages of the three methodologies used in this study:

***Table 5.1: Comparison of three methodologies***

<b>Method</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages (and how they were overcome)</b>
Content analysis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resources easy to access.</li> <li>2. Global resources possible.</li> <li>3. Can yield quant &amp; qualitative results.</li> <li>4. Good starting point for competency components.</li> <li>5. Reflects industry views.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vital components may be missing in content studied because they are too obvious. (Other methodologies provided these components.)</li> </ol>

Survey	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Involves practitioners.</li> <li>2. Can yield quantitative &amp; qualitative responses.</li> <li>3. Can increase range of components.</li> <li>4. Can save time if emailed.</li> <li>5. Can be analysed with available software.</li> <li>6. Confirms previous results.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sample selection may be unrepresentative.</li> <li>2. Questions can be wrongly interpreted.</li> </ol> <p>(1. A purposive sample was used. 2. Questions were explained by phone or follow-up email when necessary.)</p>
In-depth interviews and video presentation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Involves experts.</li> <li>2. Clarifies concepts.</li> <li>3. Confirms previous results.</li> <li>4. Forces review of previous results.</li> <li>5. New concepts emerge.</li> <li>6. Weight of authority through voices and images.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access may be difficult.</li> <li>2. Biases may intervene.</li> </ol> <p>(1. Researcher's practitioner role made access easier. 2. Biases were neutralized by selection process and awareness.)</p>

Despite the time and intensity of effort required, triangulation's compelling recommendation for use is its ability to minimize the shortcomings of each method used. The content analysis was a universal sample representing hidden sources, presumably those representing the employers. The survey sample was drawn from a more focused group of newsroom practitioners in Australia. The subject matter experts interviewed were highly targeted respondents, known for their expertise in journalism and involvement in the selection and development of talent within the newsroom. Thus, triangulation allowed for a guided combination that sharpened the focus with the use of each methodology.

## 6. CONTENT ANALYSIS

This study analyses 100 job advertisements for journalism positions. It aims to identify the competencies expected of mid-career journalists by news organisations. The components of competencies, as discussed in previous chapters, are knowledge, attributes (traits or characteristics and attitudes), and skills. The content analysis aims to identify the key categories of each of these components.

### Objectives

The content analysis of job advertisements addresses RQ2: *What are the competencies required for a journalist in a traditional print newsroom that is being transformed into a convergent newsroom in Australia?*

Although the advertisements selected for content analysis included those for jobs overseas, the in-demand competencies in Australia were expected to conform to a global trend and, therefore, Australian advertisements were part of the global set. The competency categories emerging from the content analysis were used as the raw materials for constructing a model, which addresses RQ1: *How can traditional newsrooms transforming into converging newsrooms benefit from a competencies model in preparing for the immediate future?*

### Methodology

#### Number of ads

A total of 100 was selected for practical reasons: the number of each category automatically becomes a percentage estimate. A higher sample number would possibly refine the findings, but for the purposes of this study a sample of 100 was deemed sufficient because:

1. Content analysis is one of three methods being used in the thesis. Other methods used in the thesis – questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews with journalism experts – provided the context for the findings of the content analysis.
2. The objective is to construct a competency model that could be adapted and amended as users deem fit. The model will provide a workable first framework.

3. The advertisements were used to identify the categories of competency components.

### Sample selection

The organisations chosen for this study were predominantly large, with at least 100 journalists in their newsrooms. Their scale of operation, usually evident from the description in the advertisement, was taken to indicate standardisation of journalistic functions. Large news organisations (with 100 or more journalists) were selected because they generally have the resources to develop journalistic talent and the grading-to-function correlation is consistently maintained. For example, in major metropolitan dailies such as The Sydney Morning Herald or The Australian, experienced journalists are usually assigned to cover courts and national parliament, but the one covering parliament will be more experienced and graded higher than the court reporter. Similarly, a news editor's role in a large newsroom is usually a higher level function, involving assigning of stories and managing staff to some extent. These assumptions were borne out by the advertisements analysed.

From Australia, among the organisations included in this study were metropolitan dailies of Fairfax and News Ltd, ABC radio and television, Prime TV, Channel Ten and Bloomberg.

From the US, the advertisements analysed are from organisations such as global news agencies Associated Press, Thomson Reuters and Dow Jones, Wall Street Journal, Gannett, Cox Media and Los Angeles Times. Metropolitan newsroom advertisements, such as Des Moines Register, Charlotte Observer & The Raleigh News, Cincinnati Enquirer, Miami Reporter and San Jose Mercury News, were also included.

From Britain, the organisations included WSJ Europe, Yahoo News, Reuters, and Bloomberg. A few British advertisements did not disclose the organisations requiring the journalist but the job descriptions appeared in line with the rest of the selected advertisements, and importantly, were available. At the time of study, large organisations in the UK were not in the recruitment mode (see discussion of sample selection issue below).

New Zealand organisations too were predominantly large: nzherald.co.nz, APNZ, TVNZ, Key Media, TML Publishing, Pagemaster NZ.



Canada's nine advertisements were from organisations such as Shaw TV, Reuters, Huffington Post, and Bay of Plenty Times.

Others (Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, Turkey, Brazil, India and Singapore) were from international news agencies such as Reuters and Bloomberg and from Singapore's MediaCorp Private Ltd.

The 100 advertisements were sourced from:

1. Newspapers of 2011 and 2012 in Australia.
2. Websites of Australian news organisations such as Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
3. Job website advertisements (such as Poynter Institute of the US, The Guardian from the UK of May to June 2012).
4. Vacancies advertised on the websites of journalism agencies such as Bloomberg, Associated Press and Reuters (May to June 2012).

The geographical spread for journalism positions was as follows:

**Table 6.1: Nations as sources of advertisements**

Australia	40
US	24
UK	11
Canada	9
New Zealand	7
Others*	9

\*Others : Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, Turkey, Brazil, India and Singapore

The last category (Others) does not imply the advertisements were sourced from these nations. They were advertisements from news agencies for journalists to be stationed in these locations. The Singapore advertisement was for staff to work locally.

The sample has an Australian bias to reflect the scope of the thesis. Hence 40 per cent of the advertisements related to Australian journalism jobs. The practice of journalism, however, is an evolving process that cuts across national boundaries. It is a globally connected process, freely borrowing best practices from other nations. This is increasingly pertinent as online journalism does not observe geographical borders. Hence 60 per cent of the advertisements related to other nations.

The advertisements showed a bias towards English language journalism. Journalism of other languages is beyond the scope of this thesis.

#### Sample selection issue

At the time of this study, newspapers were going through a crisis. Few advertisements were aimed at print journalists. In Australia, two major newspaper publishing organisations – Fairfax (the publisher of Sydney Morning Herald, The Age and Australian Financial Review) and News Corp (publisher of The Australian, The Daily Telegraph, Courier Mail, Herald Sun and The Adelaide Advertiser) were winding down their print operations and were not recruiting newspaper journalists through advertisements. So this content study had to source Australian advertisements from a longer time frame stretching through 2011 and 2012. Globally the recruitment of journalists was subdued. Many news agencies were, however, recruiting. Many advertisements were for a newsroom in transition to a convergent newsroom. Some international news agencies' advertisements and online and television media advertisements were included in the sample so that a wider spectrum of convergent media categories (beyond what print media alone would yield) could emerge.

#### Advertiser profile

Of the advertisements studied, 41 were for print newsrooms. The newsroom spread is given below:

**Table 6.2: Media platforms**

Newspaper newsroom	41
News agency	22
Web (online news)	15
Multimedia (nondescript)	15
Radio	3
TV	9
Total	105

The total added up to more than 100 because of the overlap in the description of the newsrooms in the advertisements. The geographical distribution of the advertisers was:

**Table 6.3: Geographical spread and platforms**

Nation	Total	Print	Radio	Web	Multimedia	TV	Agency
Australia	40	23	3	4	5	3	3
US	24	13	0	3	4	2	6
UK	11	1	0	2	4	2	2
Canada	9	2	0	4	0	1	1
New Zealand	7	2	0	1	2	1	2
Others*	9	0	0	1	0	0	8
Total	100	41	3	15	15	9	22

\*Others: HK, Japan, India, Mexico, Turkey, Brazil, Singapore

#### Coding

Job advertisements were coded for:

1. Level of experience required, designation, organisation name and location
2. Knowledge
3. Attributes
4. Foundational skills
5. Functional skills (Platform specific skills)
6. Advertiser profile, and
7. Geographical area.

1. Designation, organisation name and location were taken from the advertisement. They usually occurred in the heading and the first paragraph. A small percentage (5 per cent) of advertisements concealed the name of the organisation. For example: “Our client requires a Producer/ Sub Editor with experience on an online publication, to work on their highly successful B2B financial print and online publication.”

Level of experience was inferred from the advertisement. The levels were:

Level 1 = Entry level (No previous experience)

Level 2 = Experienced - Up to two years' experience

- Level 3           = Advanced level - 2-5 years' experience
- Level 4           = Adept level - 5+ years' experience
- Level 5           = Mentor or trainer level – not defined by years
- Level 6           = Leader level – many years' experience

Level 1 is an entry-level position, usually for trainees, first-time journalists and recent graduates. Jobs at this level are not advertised often and even less frequently during times of revenue crisis in the media industry.

Level 2, with up to two years' experience, was counted as “experienced” but journalists at this level need more training on the job. They are either junior reporters or entry-level sub-editors. While big newsrooms have a sizeable number of these journalists, there is an expectation that after induction into the job they will develop and become capable of taking on more important roles.

Level 3, along with Level 2, are the workhorses of the newsroom. They are capable of performing a number of functions, such as reporting beats and sub-editing, and are in the process of learning more skills. They are often well-trained to work with minimal supervision and are keen to be trained in new areas. They are often specialist reporters or editors in areas such as business, copy-editing or page design.

Level 4 journalists can work independently across a number of roles. They can be section editors or reporters in charge of important beats or subject areas.

Level 5 journalists are in charge of pools of journalists in the newsroom. They can be chief sub-editors, news editors or chiefs of staff.

Level 6 journalists are managing editors, deputy editors or editors, with the specific brief to run the newsroom in the absence of anyone higher being present. They are in charge of a publication stream. They lead.

These levels became apparent after a pilot study of job advertisements. However, there were overlaps between Level 2 and 3, between 3 and 4 and between 4 and 5. Job descriptions generally are not precise instruments and they do not make it easy to judge. Hence they were coded as Level 2/3, Level 3/4 , and Level 4/5. They were counted individually under Level 2 and Level 3 and so on. Thus the total number of jobs falling under the experiential levels exceeds 100. The break-up was:

**Table 6.4: Experience levels**

Nation	Experiential Level					
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Australia	2	12	27	21	7	2
US	2	6	9	6	4	1
UK	0	5	7	1	0	0
Canada	0	3	4	5	4	2
New Zealand	0	2	4	4	1	0
Others	0	2	6	5	4	0
Total	2	30	57	42	20	5

(Total adds up to more than 100 because some positions cannot be precisely categorised.)

Level 1 = Entry Level

Level 2 = Experienced, 1-2 years

Level 3 = Advanced, 2-5 years

Level 4 = Adept, 5+ years

Level 5 = Mentor (Not defined by years)

Level 6 - Leader (Many years)

2. Knowledge was coded as what a person knows as a result of formal learning. Tacit knowledge – the kind of experiential knowledge that a professional does not know he or she possesses – was not been taken into account. Knowledge in this study denotes explicit knowledge. Job advertisements frequently mentioned university degree as a pre-requisite. Hence a degree was classified under knowledge. Grammar, spelling, shorthand and house style (news agency or newspaper’s style) fell under this category. So did specialized knowledge in areas such as business, finance, markets, sport, politics and technology.

3. Attributes represent a combination of attitudes, values and characteristics or traits of a person. Job advertisements often demanded a number of attributes.

4. Skills are capabilities for action. They are usually present in verbs – in the “do” descriptions. They were classified as foundational skills or functional skills. Foundational skills are generic skills that can be transported across many platforms. An example is the ability to manage people. The ability to write and edit are also basic enough to be coded as foundational.

5. Functional skills are platform-specific, such as the ability to work with Photoshop or Cybergraphic software for page design. These skills are useful for a specific role within a specific context and are not always transportable.

### Coding issues

Coding for knowledge, skills and attributes can strike grey areas. Leadership is an attribute, but leading the daily briefing in the newsroom is a skill. In this study, it was categorised as both whenever appropriate. The ability to thrive under pressure is an attribute under the guise of a skill; although it contains a “doing” word, it is a characteristic. It was classified as an attribute.

Working with social media is a skill but knowing a lot about social media is part of knowledge. Communication skill is an ability (when used in specific situations) and an attribute (when describing a person as communicative). Analytical skill is an attribute (when describing a person who is logical in approach to decision-making) as well as a skill (when used while writing a feature story). Nose for news or news judgment can be an attribute or part of what a person knows formally (and hence classified as knowledge). However, the inference from job advertisements very often was that nose for news is an instinctive approach to decision-making as though it were an innate part of a person. News judgment was classified as an attribute.

### Findings

1. A number of newsrooms – whether print, radio or television – are in transition. They are diversifying into other platforms of delivery. Television stations maintain websites and require text inputs for publication. Print needs video for its online version.

Content analysis found that multimedia aspects, though not the word “multimedia”, were frequently mentioned in the advertisements. Online, web, internet and digital were mentioned in 39 per cent of the advertisements in mutually exclusive contexts (counting their occurrence only once in an advertisement). This count excludes the times when the words related to specific job function designation such as Online Editor. Social media – including Facebook, Twitter and blogs – were mentioned in 36 per cent of the advertisements. Cross-platform work or subjects or levels of work were mentioned in 28 per cent of the advertisements. Video work was mentioned in 17 per cent of the ads, blog or blogging in 12 per cent (see table below).

**Table 6.5: Mention of multimedia (%)**

Online, web, internet, digital (ex designation)	39	(Counted once in an ad despite many mentions)
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, blog )	36	
Across platforms, formats, subjects, levels	28	
Video (excluding fulltime video roles)	17	
Blog	12	

From the table above, it can be deduced that multimedia delivery of news was a major requirement across all platforms of delivery. Skills relating to multimedia and convergence media were required in a substantial number of newsrooms (at least 39 per cent despite pure web platform advertisements numbering only 15).

2. Knowledge as a formalised component of a journalist's competency (or the capability to perform a function) was mentioned as a requirement in newsrooms both directly and indirectly. A direct mention was when a degree qualification was set down as a minimum requirement (18 per cent of advertisements, with 5 per cent asking for a journalism degree). An indirect mention was when the person was required to navigate confidently through the media industry or media processes or publishing (47 per cent of advertisements needed this kind of knowledge). Local area knowledge (as when a Hong Kong-based company news editor was required to know the Asian region well) included the specific geographic location as well as the broader geographical area. It was mentioned in 19 per cent of the advertisements.

Another aspect of knowledge frequently mentioned was specialized knowledge, as when a journalist covering the bond market was required to know the financial markets well (25 per cent of the advertisements demanded knowledge of finance, business or markets). Wherever specialization was required (as when reporting or working for a specialized publication), formal knowledge relating to it played a vital role.

Grammar (5 per cent), legal knowledge (5 per cent) and spelling (2 per cent) were not mentioned frequently, but this may be because they were assumed to be part

of the knowledge domain of journalists in general. They were usually mentioned only during the assessment of beginner levels (0 to 2 years of experience). Therefore, any conclusions about their low prominence in the list below had to be carefully drawn.

#### Knowledge count (%)

Media industry, processes, publishing,

media, news, digital	:	47
Social media	:	12
Financial markets, economy, business	:	25
Local area, local govt, local knowledge	:	19
Degree (qualified)	:	18
Politics, national (community) affairs	:	14
Technology	:	6
Jour degree	:	5
Style (Reuters, AP, ABC)	:	5
Grammar	:	5
Legal	:	5
Sport	:	3
Spelling	:	2
Shorthand	:	1

3. Attributes incorporate attitudes, values, self-beliefs and personal characteristics that make their presence felt during workplace performance.

The most required attribute in a newsroom, as seen through this content analysis, was the ability to manage time and withstand deadline pressure. Job advertisements (60 per cent) mentioned this in a number of ways – deadline-driven, deadline orientation, deadline pressure, high-pressure environment, thrive in a high-speed environment.

Passion for journalism (49 per cent) was the next most required attribute. It was also mentioned in many ways – motivated, drive, vigour, desire, energy, enthusiasm, passion, passionate, self-starter, self-motivated, work independently.

The ability to work in teams (team work) was mentioned in 23 per cent of the advertisements. Being organised (ability to prioritise, self-organised) was equally in demand (23 per cent). News judgment as an instinctive way of decision-making about



what is news (also termed nose for news or news sense) was also mentioned by 23 per cent of employers.

Being accurate (accuracy) was mentioned in 23 per cent of the advertisements. Creativity (innovative, innovation) was mentioned by 20 per cent. This relates to a creative approach to work, whether it is page design or headlining or finding an angle for a news report. Flexibility in dealing with shift work and working weekends is demanded by 17 per cent. Ethical outlook (ethics, standards, integrity) was mentioned by 14 per cent. Other attributes (see attributes count below) rated in single digits as a percentage of the total advertisements.

It is worth noting that the poor rating that some vital attributes appeared to receive might not indicate how they were actually perceived by employers. For example: ethical outlook (14 per cent), commitment (3 per cent), hard work (2 per cent), and adaptability to change (4 per cent). A plausible conclusion is that when an attribute was mentioned frequently (that is, when it gets an affirmation through the wording of the advertisement), it was quite likely a key attribute, whereas when an attribute was not mentioned, it is far-fetched to conclude it was deemed irrelevant in the work context. The inclusion of an attribute was a point in its favour whereas the omission of an attribute was not a vote against it.

#### Attributes count (%)

Deadline pressure total (see below)	:	60
<i>Deadline or deadline-driven</i>	:	27
<i>Pressure (deadline)</i>	:	22
<i>Speed (ex designation)</i>	:	11
Passion total (see below)	:	49
<i>Self-starter, self-motivated, motivated</i>	:	16
<i>Drive (=energy, passion)</i>	:	3
<i>Vigour (= passion)</i>	:	1
<i>Passion or passionate</i>	:	12
<i>Hunger</i>	:	4
<i>Desire</i>	:	4
<i>Energy</i>	:	4
<i>Enthusiasm</i>	;	3
<i>Work independently</i>	:	2

Team player, team work	:	23
Judgment (news, editorial)	:	23
(Nose for news – 3; news sense - 7)		
Organise, organised, self-organised, prioritise:		23
Accurate, accuracy, eye for detail	:	23
Creative, innovative, innovation	:	20
Flexible, flexibility with time, shifts, weekends:		17
Ethical total (see below)	:	14
<i>Standards</i>	:	7
<i>Ethic, ethical, ethics</i>	:	4
<i>Integrity</i>	:	3
Leadership	:	9
Interpersonal (networking, communication)	:	8
Multi-task, multiple tasks, versatile	:	9
Analytical	:	4
Adaptable, adapt to change	:	4
Aggressive	:	3
Ambitious	:	3
Commitment	:	3
Efficient, efficiency	:	3
Interest (storytelling), interesting	:	3
Work hard, hard-working	:	2
Clarity	:	2
Responsible	:	2
Tenacious	:	2
Loves challenges, challenging	:	2
Talent, talented	:	2
Objectivity	:	1

The bulk of the positions advertised were for the mid-level (Levels 2, 3 and 4) and hence one conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that the ability to withstand time pressure and passion for work were standout attributes for early to mid-career journalists. Team work, self-organisation, accuracy and news judgment were next in importance for the work horses of the newsroom.

4. Foundational skills are those that are portable across media platforms. For the convergent newsroom, in which media content is delivered across many platforms, writing and editing appeared to be the most fundamental. They were required by 54 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively. Breaking news – the capability to access the news and take it to the audience or viewers or readers – was mentioned in 25 per cent of advertisements. The ability to cover economic news, including the markets, was seen as vital by 24 per cent of newsrooms in this study. Managerial function – whether it be staff, tasks or processes – was required by 20 per cent. The ability to maintain contact, network and develop news sources was mentioned in 11 per cent of the advertisements. Among the least mentioned were generate ideas (6 per cent), interview (5 per cent) and assign stories (4 per cent). Again, it may be appropriate to defer the conclusion that the least mentioned were the least important.

#### Foundational skills

Write (excluding designation, counting once):	54
Edit (excluding designation, counting once) :	49
Break news :	25
Cover markets :	24
Manage staff, function :	20
Network, networking :	11
Search, research :	9
Develop :	9
Liaise :	9
Manage (work with) change, change agent :	7
Supervise, supervisory :	3
Generate ideas :	6
Interview :	5
Assign :	4
Community interaction :	4
Coach :	3
Real-time :	5
Proofread :	3
Control (quality), take control :	2
Drive (= lead, leadership) :	2

5. Functional skills are important in that other things being equal, the presence of functional skills – such as the ability to use the preferred platform software – may make one journalist more desirable as a team member than another.

This content analysis yielded the following functional skills, in no particular order of significance. A different set of advertisements might well have provided another set of functional skills. Nevertheless they are important in every newsroom and are specific requirements in many jobs, particularly at the mid-level.

#### Functional skills

1. Use Cyberpage or Hermes or NewsEdit Pro, InCopy software for newspapers
2. Headline writing (as a platform-specific skill)
3. Design and layout (as a platform-specific skill)
4. Video journalism – camera work for video
5. Attend industry events (as a platform-specific skill)
6. Edit or take photos
7. Use Web 2.0, HTML, SGML, XML, CSS, Javascript, JQuery, MySQL, MS Office, web design tools
8. Specialised reporting – for example, bond market, court reporting
9. Specialised editing – for example, use Bloomberg data and products
10. Specialised feature writing – for example, opinion, analysis
11. Use Photoshop, Adobe suite, InDesign, Fireworks, Dreamweaver, QuarkXPress, Illustrator, Saxotech
12. New media-specific editing – audio, video or edit non-linear video or podcasts, webinars
13. Edit using special content management system software
14. Use specialized software specifically named such as Protocol or Final Cut Pro
15. Use platform-specific production processes – radio production, live broadcasting, ability to deliver live using a good voice or pre-production skills for TV
16. Use blogging software such as WordPress.

## **Competencies matrix for the newsroom**

Content analysis of job advertisements showed newsrooms made specific demands in terms of competencies from those applying for journalism roles. These competencies could be categorised as attributes, knowledge areas and skills from the descriptions in the advertisements.

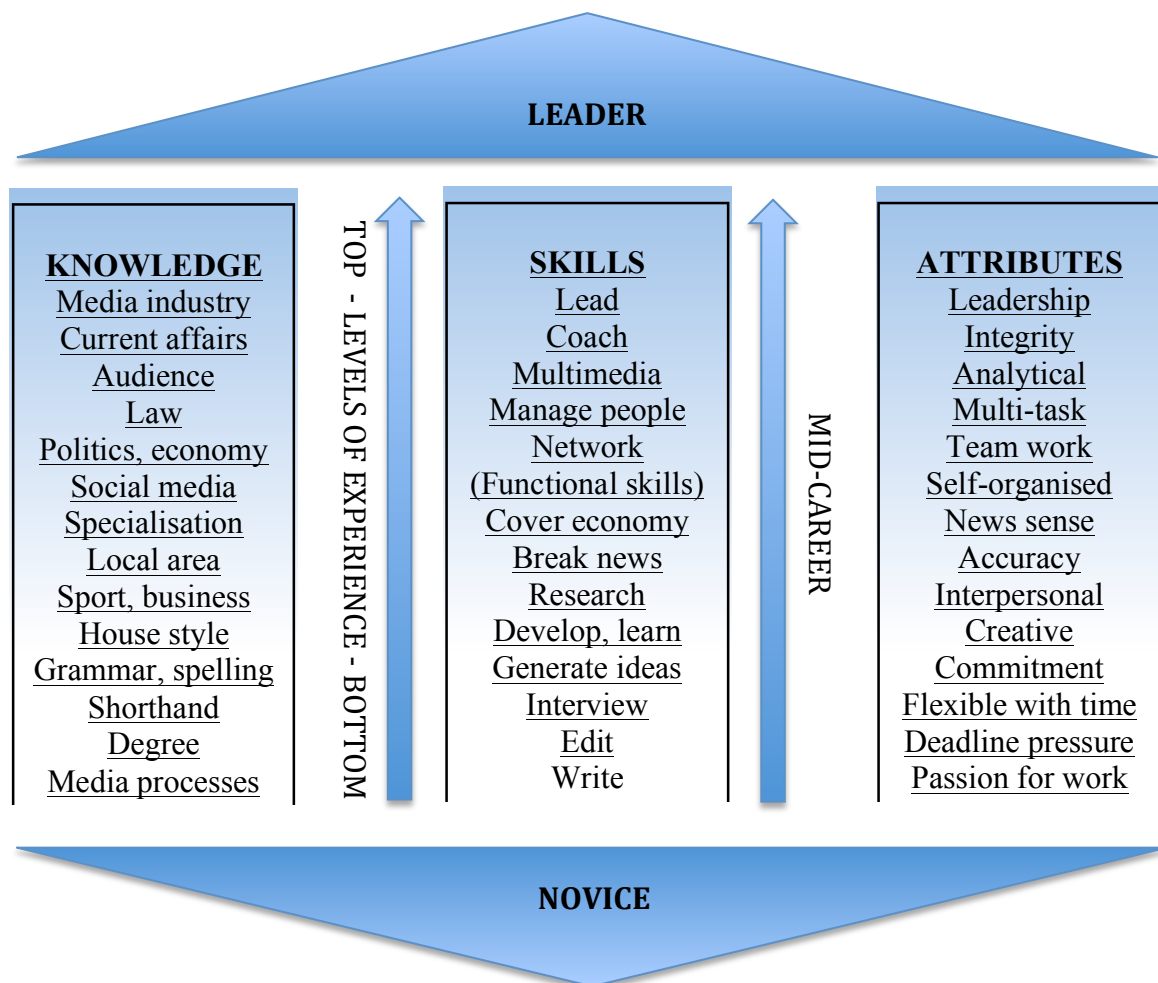
Newsrooms, as the findings showed, required a number of key competencies from mid-career journalists, especially those who could be considered “experienced” (with two or more years of experience). The competencies “discovered” from an analysis of job advertisements could be arranged on a progressive scale, in an ascending order of experience levels, even though the pattern or model is still at a preliminary stage and needs further refinement and confirmation through other methodologies.

Although the correlation between “experience” and specific competencies is yet to be confirmed, the diagrammatic view of the model presents the newsroom as a reservoir of competencies at work. It shows the requirements of the newsroom clustering around the mid-career journalists, who were expected to possess a number of attributes, foundational and functional skills and knowledge of many areas including multimedia processes and specialized subjects such as finance, local government and national affairs.

It is useful at this stage to view the acquisition and development of competencies as a progression through time and experience in the community of practice. This perspective, however, is at an early stage and requires corroboration from other methodologies.

A preliminary model emerging from the content analysis is presented diagrammatically below:

**Diagram 6.1: Competency model**



### Uses of the model

The model presented above is a visual synthesis of the findings of the content analysis. The three components – skills, knowledge areas and attributes – are arranged in a progressive view, with the competencies for the more experienced journalists and the newsroom leader at the top and those for the beginner at the bottom. Those in the middle, the vast majority, are the competencies for mid-career journalists. It should be noted that “mid-career” and “experienced” are terms that encompass a broad experience range – from two to 20-plus years, as indicated by the content analysis of job advertisements. Newsrooms’ perspectives on the competencies requirements of an “experienced” journalist show a range of expectations, with the new media platforms considering two years’ experience as a “mid-career” profile that is ready to take on

more independent roles in the newsroom, and the more mature, traditional platforms requiring five or more years for similar roles.

Traditional competencies such as writing and editing have not disappeared. They co-exist, often retaining their primacy, with new skills and knowledge relating to multimedia or new media. The new competencies and related functional skills are embedded within a framework in which traditional competencies predominate. This is because the transition to convergence is slow and takes place without truncating or abandoning the audience and revenue bases of media platforms that existed prior to the arrival of multimedia competencies. This also explains why competencies such as shorthand and leadership maintain a place within the framework. It is noteworthy that just as newsrooms are in transition, the competencies model, such as the one presented, is also a work in progress and retains its transitional nature so long as platform-related transformations continue to occur. The model allows for competencies and sets of competencies to continue to be added (or deleted) as it is refined by newsrooms to suit their needs.

The model presented is, therefore, a developing model. The analysis of job advertisements does not reveal all the competencies required in a newsroom and hence it must be emphasised that the absence of a competency in the model does not indicate its lack of significance.

The job advertisements also indicate that newsrooms emphasise different competencies. “Breaking news” and “networking” could be higher level skills for new media platforms than for traditional platforms such as print. Conversely, social media skills could be a lower level of skill for new media, taking them for granted from beginners in the digital side of the newsroom, than for traditional media, where “highly experienced” journalists are still adapting to the new media. This lopsidedness of expectations necessarily means that competencies are graded differently in different newsrooms. It could be reasonably inferred that, barring the more foundational competencies, such as writing, passion for journalism and knowledge of media, many competencies can be arranged in an “ascending” scale of experience in different ways depending on the newsrooms’ requirements. However, the job advertisements support the conclusion that there is general agreement among newsrooms on the basic competencies and the top-level competencies such as managing people, coaching, leading, and showing integrity and independence.

In practical use, the model is capable of being scaled up to include many more competencies or adapted to be arranged differently. It can be calibrated if required on an experiential scale, showing the organisations constructing a model for their use the competencies they could expect at a specific level of experience or for a specific newsroom role. In order to achieve this, and to answer the research questions of this study more comprehensively, a bigger range of competencies and methods of developing them need to be “discovered”. The methodologies discussed in the next two chapters focus on these aspects of the research questions.



## 7. SURVEY OF JOURNALISTS

Content analysis of job advertisements was an exploratory inquiry into the competencies framework for the convergent newsroom. It discovered a number of competency components that could be arranged in a logical fashion to provide the model or framework of understanding. It showed some foundational competencies and how newsrooms made increasing demands on the attributes, skills and knowledge areas that experienced journalists brought into the community of practice.

The survey was the next step in discovering competencies and ordering them into a framework that could be used as a model. A survey of practitioners was undertaken to provide more details about newsroom competencies.

This chapter analyses the findings of a survey of 40 journalists working in major newsrooms in Australia. The survey elicited component categories through tick-box questions using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 as well as through open-ended questions that enabled respondents to suggest and write their own answers. It also utilised journalists' suggestions as a resource in the creation of a competencies model.

### **Methodology**

#### **Survey sample**

Forty respondents were involved in this survey. The respondents were from major print newspaper newsrooms in Australia. To the extent that newspapers and news organisations were selected for their scale of operation, the sampling was purposive. This was done to ensure the newsrooms had the requisite size to be considered large and adapted to the technological need to be up-to-date with the competitive forces faced by global media industry. This meant they were multimedia-focused and their newsrooms had multiple media platforms co-existing. Metropolitan dailies were chosen for this reason. The newspapers chosen were The Australian, The Daily Telegraph and The Sydney Morning Herald, all based in Sydney, and The Age in Melbourne. Convenience was a factor in the choice of The Australian, as the researcher had access to the newsroom.

The newsrooms chosen for this study were necessarily large (with 100-plus journalists), multimedia and metropolitan. The study makes an attempt to capture a diversity of viewpoints but geographical location was not considered to be a factor contributing to industry perceptions of professional requirements. This study confines

itself to Australia and a certain amount of homogeneity of professional outlook among the nation's news journalists was assumed. It is this assumption, for instance, that enables major Australian newspapers to recruit journalists from each other.

The number of respondents was initially planned to be around 50. However, the qualitative responses needed to be contained and hence the survey limited the number to 40.

### Questionnaire design

A pilot questionnaire was drafted and refined with the help of this study's research supervisor. The questionnaire was tested on five respondents in a metropolitan newsroom. The researcher's decades of newsroom experience was also a useful guide in drafting the questionnaire. Ambiguous questions were rephrased and tick-box answers were selected to prompt the respondents' reflection.

The questionnaire was titled *Survey on Changing Newsroom Capabilities*. The questions were structured to collect newsroom practitioners' views on four experiential levels of journalists:

1. Beginners (0-2 years' experience).
2. Experienced journalists (2-8 years' experience).
3. Mentor or trainer-level journalists (9+ years' experience).
4. Newsroom leaders or editors.

Even though the previous methodology – content analysis – dealt with six experience levels, four were deemed sufficient for the survey in order to reduce the time taken to answer the survey questions and to eliminate the risk of respondents avoiding complexity by omitting questions. (Newsrooms wishing to provide more granularity or richness of detail in their competencies model may wish to add more experience levels and make finer distinctions among the levels.)

For each experiential level, the professional requirements in terms of attributes, knowledge, skills and training were queried. Every tick-box question (radio button option) on a competency was followed by an open-ended question. For example, a question relating to the attributes of experienced journalists was:

*Experienced journalists are expected to show initiative at work. What other attributes do you expect from an experienced journalist? Select a number on a scale, with 1 for Least Essential and 5 for Most Essential.*

- a. *Deadline awareness*

- b. *Initiative with story ideas*
- c. *Flexibility with time*
- d. *Courage in tackling bigger issues*
- e. *Accuracy with details*

*Please suggest at least two attributes not listed above that you think are essential for experienced journalists.*

The open-ended question was an implicit acknowledgement to the respondents that the tick-box question did not contain an exhaustive list of options. It offered them an opportunity to provide their own inputs. It ensured an active, reflective participation in the survey, creating a platform for a structured but limited interview. The respondents were thus accorded the role of interviewees, although they would not be identified. The intention was to utilise newsroom practitioners' self-reflectivity and convert it into suggestions about competencies. While remaining unnamed, their individual viewpoints were taken note of and recorded.

The survey contained 42 questions. They were divided into five sections headed: 1) Views on beginner level journalists (0-2 years' experience); 2) Views on experienced journalists (2-8 years' experience); 3) Views on mentor or trainer-level journalists (9+ years' experience); 4) Views on newsroom leaders (editors); 5) Professional background.

Each of the first four sections was introduced in a line, such as:

*This section relates to the attributes, knowledge areas and skills or capabilities of an editor or a newsroom leader-level journalist.*

The first section (beginner level journalists) contained 10 questions, the next three sections nine questions each and the last section on the respondent's background contained five questions. The respondents' professional profiles as well as their competencies-based ideals of newsroom journalists at various experiential stages were expected to emerge from the questions.

#### Survey administration

The five pilot surveys were administered by the researcher to the respondents in The Australian's newsroom. This procedure enabled verbal feedback from the respondents about the clarity of the questions. It also helped ensure that the purpose of the survey and the meaning behind the individual questions in the survey were self-explanatory, and the time taken to answer them would not be a great imposition.

The pilot survey indicated a time frame of 20-30 minutes would be required to complete the survey. Since it was not merely a quantitative survey and some reflective input was warranted, the time for completion was deemed to be less than that taken for an interview and more than the time taken to tick boxes.

The survey questions were uploaded to Survey Monkey, a widely used survey distribution website that generates a web link. The link was emailed to journalists at The Age, The Daily Telegraph, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian using email addresses from Margaret Gee's Australian Media Guide. The survey was closed when 40 complete responses were returned.

About 120 emails were sent to journalists in these four newspapers. The potential respondents were selected by function, after checking whether they were reporters or sub-editors. The response of 40 represented 33 per cent return rate. However, it was difficult to ensure equal representation by function. This study did not attempt to correlate respondents' function with their expectations of other journalists, such as whether a reporter rather than a sub-editor expected a beginner journalist to be able to break news stories. However, it noted the respondent's profile.

### Limitations

This survey has the limitations inherent in surveys that are restricted by geography (metropolitan Australia), and sample size (kept small in order to leverage qualitative responses). Participants in a survey such as this could show what could be termed as an experiential limitation: experienced journalists might endorse attributes, knowledge and skills that served them well.

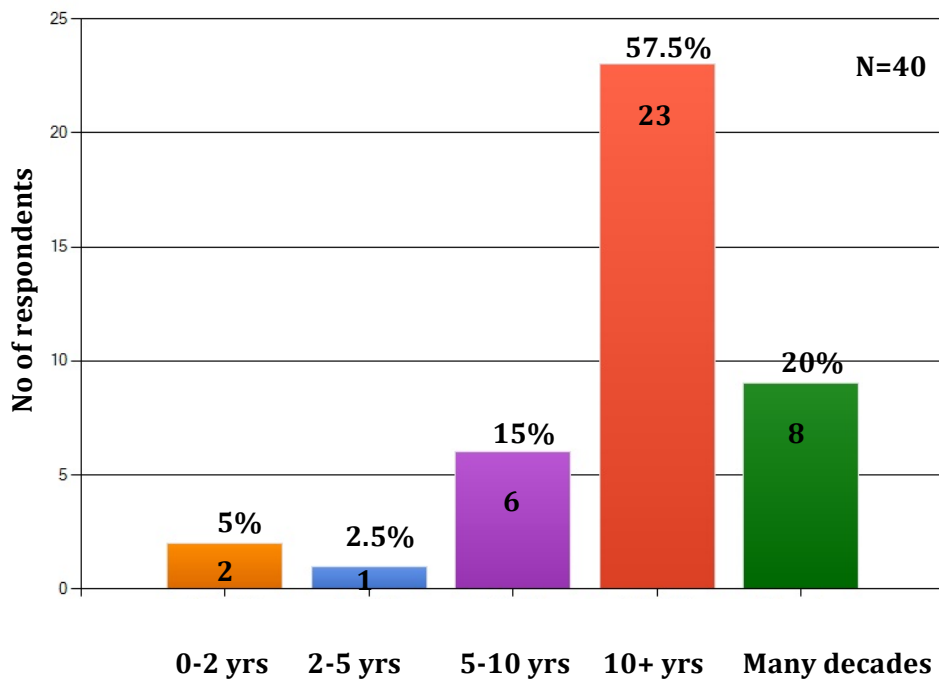
Although restricting the survey to one nation could be a limitation, this study sees the homogeneity of newsroom practice in Australia as an advantage. The production and decision-making processes within them are similar. The pilot survey revealed the range of qualitative responses that could be expected and therefore the sample size was contained to a manageable number. The possible presence of experiential bias from some respondents was neutralized to an extent by the diversity of responses received. Even though respondents were not chosen on the basis of their experience, the survey considered their experience as a resource and expertise ensuring a high level of reflection in the responses.

## Profile of participants

The end of the survey included five questions about the participants' background. The aim was to build a profile of the participants and to assess whether it had any impact on the findings. The answers showed:

1. 87.5% per cent of the respondents were involved in print-related work and 20% in web-related work. (The sum was more than 100% because some respondents were involved in both print and online.) The predominance of print newsroom journalists in the survey was in keeping with the stated objective of this thesis to study print newsrooms transforming into convergent newsrooms.
2. 57.5% of the respondents (23 out of 40) claimed 10+ years of experience. This reflected the composition of newsroom staff in metropolitan newsrooms.

**Graph 7.1: Respondents' experience**



3. 30% of the respondents were involved in editing and layout, 40% in reporting, 30% in editing a section.
4. 85% were graduates or postgraduates. 12.5% (5 out of 40) had a school-leaving certificate.

5. 55% had no formal qualification in journalism, but 38% were journalism graduates or postgraduates. The findings in this chapter on whether or not the respondents viewed journalism qualification as essential must be weighted against the educational profile of the respondents.

#### Likert scale interpretation

The respondents were asked to show their preferences on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 for least ideal and 5 for most ideal). The analysis below graphically shows the findings of the survey for each of the experiential levels in the newsroom – from beginner to midcareer journalist to newsroom leader. The percentage figures, wherever they are used in the findings, represent an aggregate of the last two readings of the Likert scale (“Required” and “Most Required”). The median, mean and standard deviation for the Likert scale scores are also provided to identify strong agreements and clustering of data. The graphs show the weighted average or mean scores. Mean scores approaching a possible maximum of 5 are interpreted as respondents agreeing on the competency component as the most required. Median scores of 4 are interpreted as more than 50 per cent of respondents agreeing.

#### Open-ended questions

The main questions posed related to the competency components of four experiential levels of journalists mentioned above:

1. What knowledge areas are required of beginners/ experienced journalists/ mentors or trainers/ newsroom leaders?
2. What attributes are essential for beginners/ experienced journalists/ mentors or trainers/ newsroom leaders?
3. What capabilities are essential for beginners/ experienced journalists/ mentors or trainers/ newsroom leaders?

The findings of the open-ended questions are tabulated and displayed for each of the competency components of each experiential level.

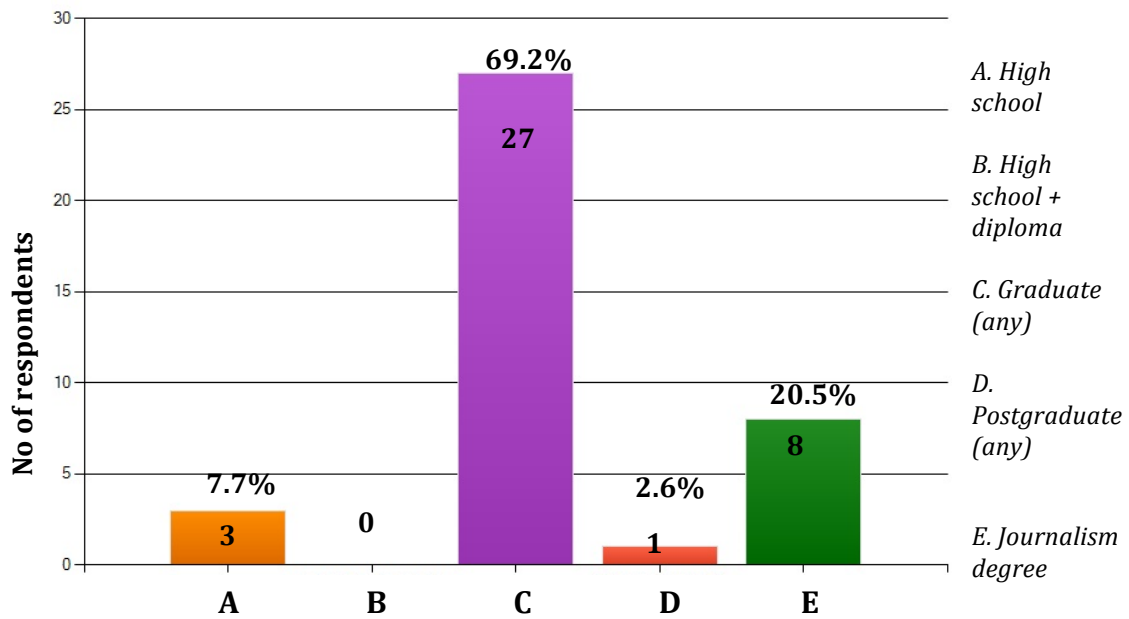
#### **Findings**

##### **Beginners**

Most respondents (92.3%) expected beginners to be graduates or postgraduates. Of these 20.5% expected a journalism degree. For 69.2%, any degree was an adequate qualification, and 7.7% deemed higher school certificate as sufficient.

**Graph 7.2: Beginner journalists' academic requirements**

**N=39**

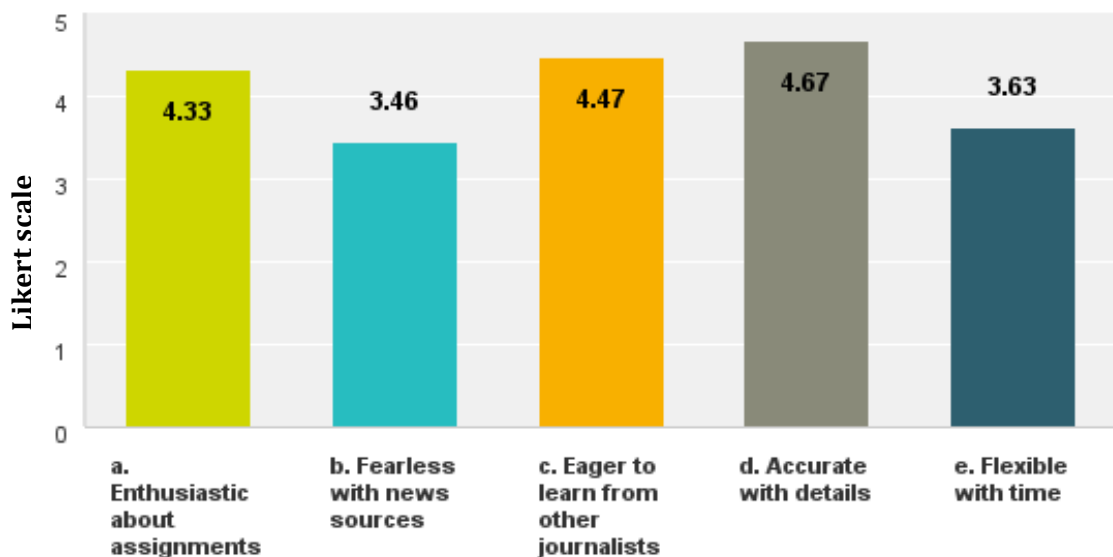


The survey participants' views on the ideal academic qualifications for beginners in the newsroom closely reflected their own profile. As noted above, 85% of the participants were graduates or postgraduates and 55% had no formal qualification in journalism. It is quite likely that the majority of practitioners did not see the need to deviate from the sufficiency of their own academic profile.

Respondents overwhelmingly chose accuracy (92.5%), enthusiasm (90%) and eagerness to learn from others (87.5%) as **essential attributes** for beginners from the options given in the survey. The other options – fearless with news sources (61.5%) and flexible with time (65%) – also found approval, but with less agreement among the respondents, as the following graph shows.

**Graph 7.3: Essential attributes for beginners**

**N=40**



Median	4	4	5	5	4
Mean	4.33	3.46	4.47	4.68	3.63
SD	0.72	1.28	0.71	0.61	1.09
Required % (Likert scale responses 4 & 5)					
More <sup>24</sup>	45%	38.5%	27.5%	17.5%	45%
Most	45%	23%	60%	75%	20%

In response to the open-ended question, 48 attributes were suggested as essential for beginners. The survey participants appeared eager to prescribe attributes for beginners. A wide range was suggested, possibly indicating the respondents were reflecting on their practice as informal mentors and drawing from their experience of progression in the newsroom.

Curiosity, tenacity, courtesy, keenness to observe, resourcefulness, honesty, patience, sensitivity, flexibility, diversity of interests, desire to improve and inclination for perfection were not unusual suggestions for beginners from more experienced journalists. But humility, empathy, sense of humour and impartiality were more indicative of the changing needs of the convergent newsroom that place a premium on new media knowledge and people management.

There was some overlapping among the categories, but for newsrooms seeking a master set of attributes, it would be useful to record these:

**Table 7.1: Suggested attributes for beginners**

<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>	<i>Desirable</i>
Curiosity	Economic literacy	Wide understanding of the world
Speak and write well	Resourceful (think on one's feet)	Be interested in people
Humility	Sensitivity	Ability to take criticism
Wide reading habits	Honesty	Flexibility
People skills	Comprehension	Ethics
Tact and empathy	Patience	Culturally aware
Thirst for news	Dedication (passion)	Creativity
Think outside the box	Open mind	Thick-skinned

<sup>24</sup> "More" corresponds to Likert scale choice of 4 and "Most" to scale choice of 5.



Tenacity	Good nerves	Love of writing
Courage	Outgoing personality	Perfectionist
Desire to improve	Diverse interests	Observant
Sense of humour	Interest in current affairs	Be objective
Good listener	Confidence	Personal integrity
Eye for detail	Common sense	Courteous
Willing to be trained, eager to learn		
Think impartially		
Awareness of commercial realities		
Fairness and balance in reporting		

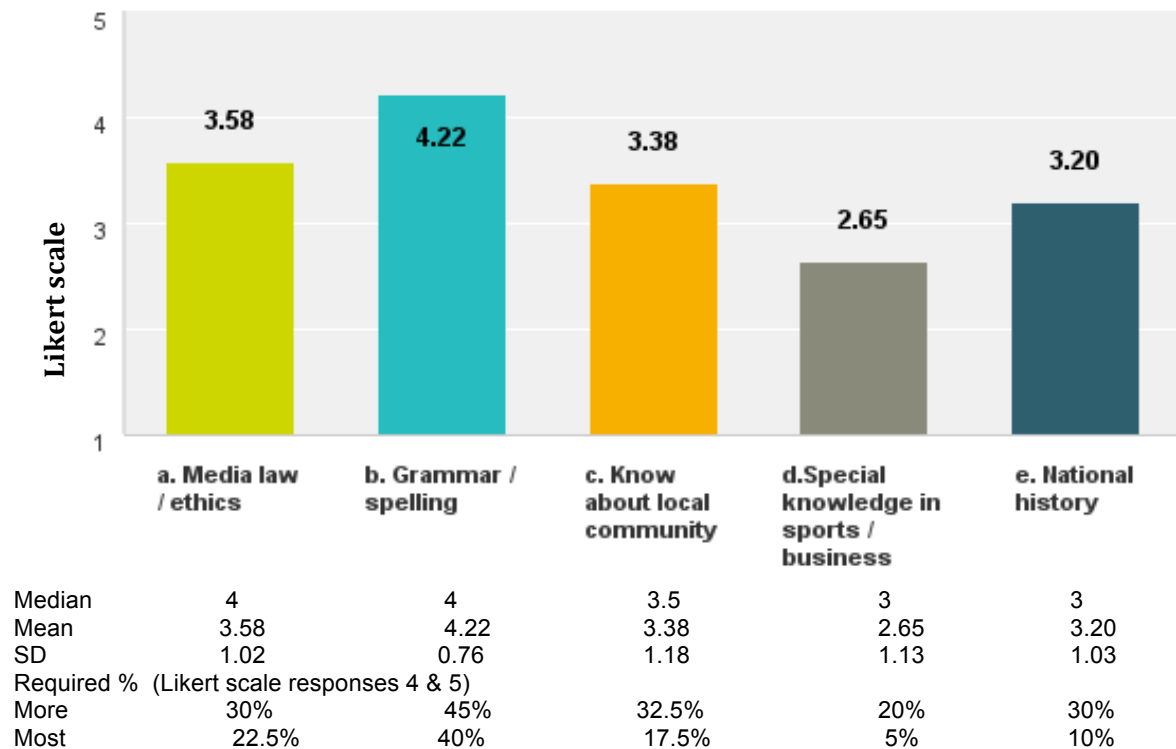
It should be noted that the three levels of essentialness is a division of convenience and not a quantitative split. A two-fold division (as presented for suggested items in the tables below) or a single column presentation would also suffice for the purpose of model building even though such a presentation may appear unwieldy. It should also be noted that most listed items were mentioned only once and are listed in no particular order, except the few at the top of the listing.

Respondents chose grammar and spelling (85%) as the most **essential knowledge area**. Specialised knowledge was not widely seen as desirable (25%), nor was national history (40%). Media law and ethics and local community knowledge gathered more approval. Traditional competencies in grammar and spelling were still highly regarded in the multimedia newsroom.

A standard deviation of 0.76 and median score of 4 indicate convergence of agreements on grammar and spelling as essential. Beginners are usually assumed to acquire knowledge of media ethics through interaction in the newsroom. This may explain the moderate weightage given to media law and ethics (52.5%) at the beginning of the career.

**Graph 7.4: Essential knowledge areas for beginners**

**N=40**



In response to the open-ended question, knowledge of national politics and government, broad general knowledge, current affairs, knowledge of journalism and media-related subjects, general economics and technology were suggested by more than 10 respondents. Beginners were expected to be more knowledgeable about the web, technology, social media and new media than experienced journalists in traditional print newsrooms.

However, many respondents emphasised the importance of having a good vocabulary, numeracy, good writing, history and shorthand. The listing is not based on quantitative significance. All suggested skills mentioned by respondents, despite some being a part of the previous question, were included in the list below:

**Table 7.2: Suggested knowledge areas for beginners**

**Most essential**

**Essential**

Broad general knowledge	Shorthand
National politics and government	History
Media industry issues	Numeracy
General economics	How to write well, check facts, find stories
Current affairs	Writing style
Social media, new media and technology	Community engagement, community knowledge
Knowledge of good media writing examples (eg NYT)	Australian legal system, legal side of reporting
Code of conduct	Common sense
Popular culture, sports	Research systems
Good vocabulary	English literature, liberal arts

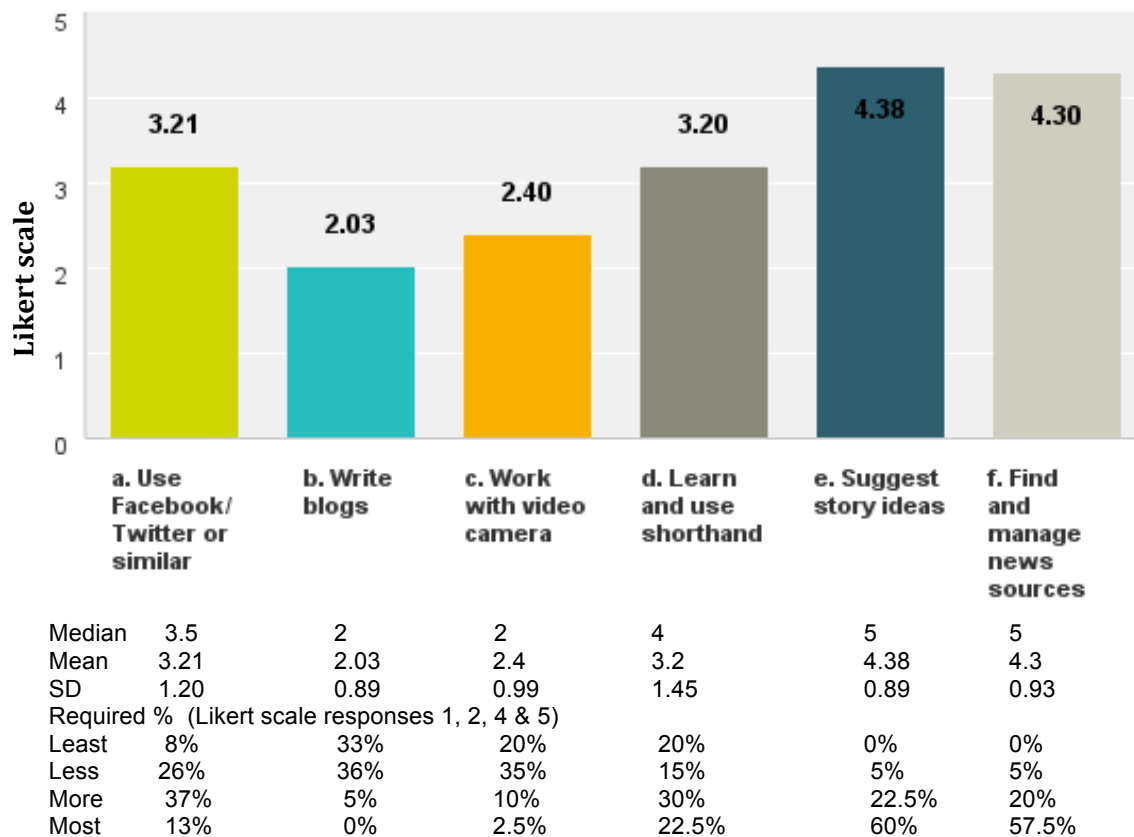
Respondents chose the ability to initiate story ideas (82.5%) and managing news sources (77.5%) as the most **essential skills** for beginners. Using social media, writing blogs and working with video were seen as less important than the ability to use shorthand. This could be because social media use is still considered a specialisation in technology rather than a commonly used skill in the traditional newsroom.

The ability to blog was considered the least important, with 69% of the respondents largely considering it less or least required. Working with the video camera was disendorsed by 55% of the respondents (see graph below). The diffusion of new technology in traditional print newsrooms is still slow and there is no advantage in possessing these skills at the expense of traditional skills such as

suggesting story ideas and managing news sources. The practitioners seemed to favour the skills currently in use in the newsroom. But the respondents were more divided on journalists' necessity to use Facebook and Twitter as part of their work, with 50% considering it essential.

**Graph 7.5: Essential skills for beginners**

**N=40**



Among the suggested skills, interviewing, research skills, technology skills, interpersonal skills, typing and listening were mentioned by more than two respondents. The listing was not based on quantitative significance. All suggested skills mentioned by respondents despite some being a part of the previous question were included in the list below:

**Table 7.3: Suggested skills for beginners**

<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>
Technological	Editing, production
Interviewing	Follow instructions
Ability to build contacts and network	Think outside the square, be entrepreneurial
Research, use stats	Time management, stick to deadlines
Interpersonal skills	Writing style
Listen	Write well
Typewriting	Accept criticism
Answer the phone well	Proof reading
Social media knowhow	Understand balance sheet, business environment
Court reporting	Second language

From the survey data, it is possible to build a **competency profile** of the beginner journalists with 0-2 years' experience. Such a profile will be a model that can be adapted by different newsrooms. For example, it can be skewed, if necessary, to include more technology skills for an online platform newsroom.

The flexibility and the emergent nature of the competency profile must be emphasised at this stage. A model profile will include at least these components:

**Table 7.4: Competencies profile of beginners**

Attributes	Knowledge areas	Skills
Accurate, perfectionist	National politics, government	Initiate story ideas
Enthusiastic, eager to learn, curious, outgoing	Broad general knowledge, current affairs, community	Find, manage news sources
Humble, courteous, people-oriented, listener, empathetic	Journalism, media-related areas	Interviewing, researching, writing, typing
Resourceful	Shorthand	Social media, technology
Fair, balanced, ethical	History	Manage time
Courageous, tenacious, confident	Ethics, code of conduct	Networking, interpersonal skills
Creative	Finance	Listen, accept criticism
Listener, culturally aware	Social media	
Well-read, news-oriented	Common sense	
Flexible, adaptable	Writing style, vocabulary	

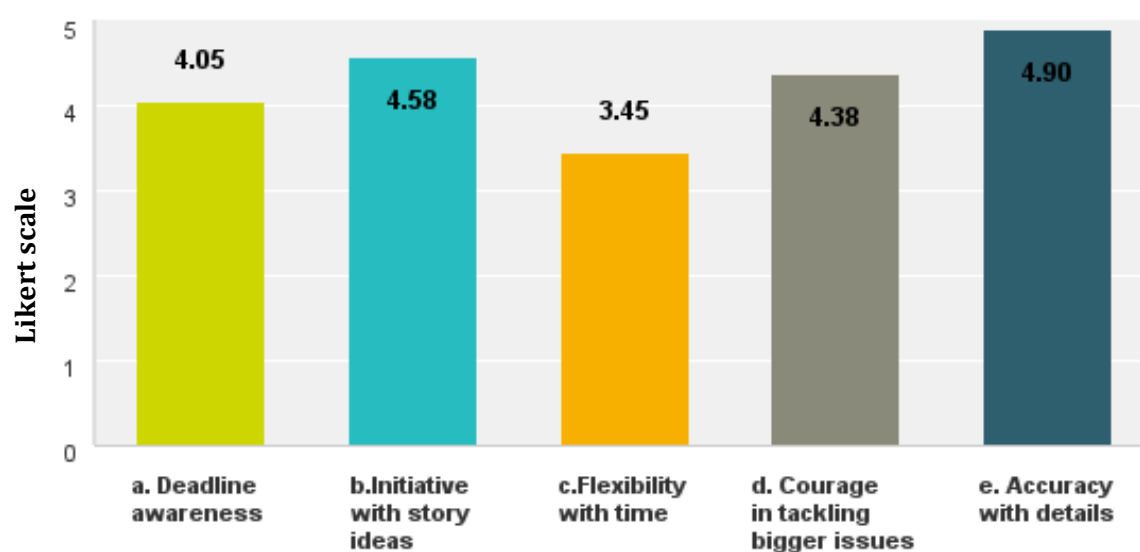
#### Experienced journalists (2-8 years' experience)

Journalists with 2-8 years' experience are the workhorses of the newsrooms. In a convergent newsroom, they cover the majority of the beats that provide the staple news stories for many news platforms, although they may be working mainly for print. Their competencies are proven, in the sense that it could be assumed they would no longer be working in important roles if they did not possess the attributes, knowledge and skills that would make them dependable news contributors on a regular basis.

Being accurate was the most **essential attribute** for experienced journalists, with 100% of those surveyed endorsing it. Most respondents expected them to show initiative (90%) with stories and courage in tackling bigger issues (90%). Deadline awareness was also deemed important (75%).

**Graph 7.6: Essential attributes for experienced journalists**

**N=40**



Median	4	5	3.5	4	5
Mean	4.05	4.58	3.45	4.38	4.9
SD	1.05	0.67	1.09	0.66	0.30
Required % (Likert scale responses 4 & 5)					
More	32.5%	22.5%	30%	42.5%	10%
Most	42.5%	67.5%	20%	47.5%	90%

Among the broad range of attributes suggested by the respondents were impartiality, speed, discretion, versatility, trustworthiness and good memory.

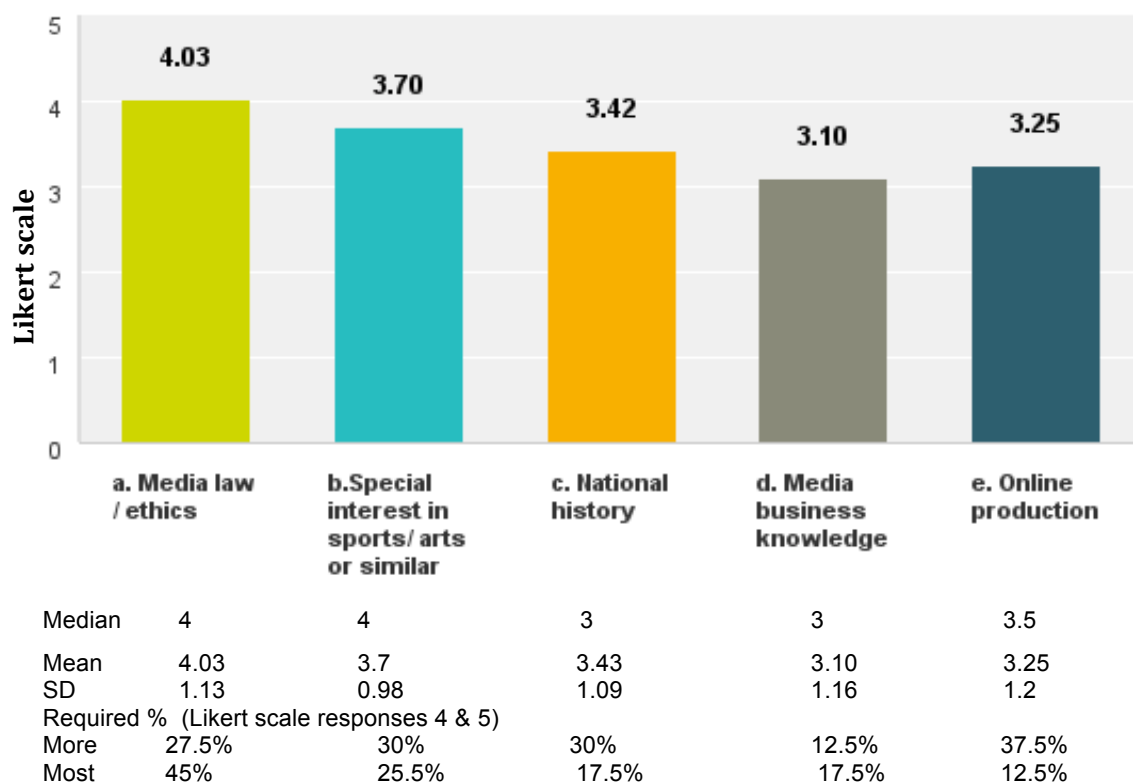
**Table 7.5: Suggested attributes for experienced journalists**

<b>Most essential</b>	<b>Essential</b>
Deadline orientation	Mentoring
Work ethic	Ethics
Think through an issue	Adaptability
Fairness and balance	Take criticism
Interest and empathy	Take direction
Impartiality / eliminate the subjective interest	Common sense
Deadline orientation	Courtesy
Humility	Discretion
Open mind	Good memory
Range of interests	Be versatile
	Trustworthiness

Experienced journalists are expected to work independently although they are not yet ready to mentor others. But they make their own decisions about approaching news sources, how to deal with them, how to construct a story without legal or ethical problems, and how to deal with the consequences arising from a story's publication. With more experience, they will most likely acquire the competencies that will make them mentors or editors in the future.

Media law and ethics were chosen as the most **essential knowledge areas** by 72.5% of the respondents. Specialised knowledge in a field of expertise or in their chosen beat (such as sports, business or arts) was considered essential by fewer respondents (55.5%). National history and media business knowledge showed greater indecision among the respondents, with median scores of 3 each.

**Graph 7.7: Essential knowledge areas for experienced journalists** **N=40**



In response to the open-ended question, knowledge of politics and government at all levels, multimedia and new media knowledge, general knowledge, court reporting knowledge, world history, and local community knowledge were among the other areas suggested.



**Table 7.6: Suggested knowledge areas for experienced journalists**

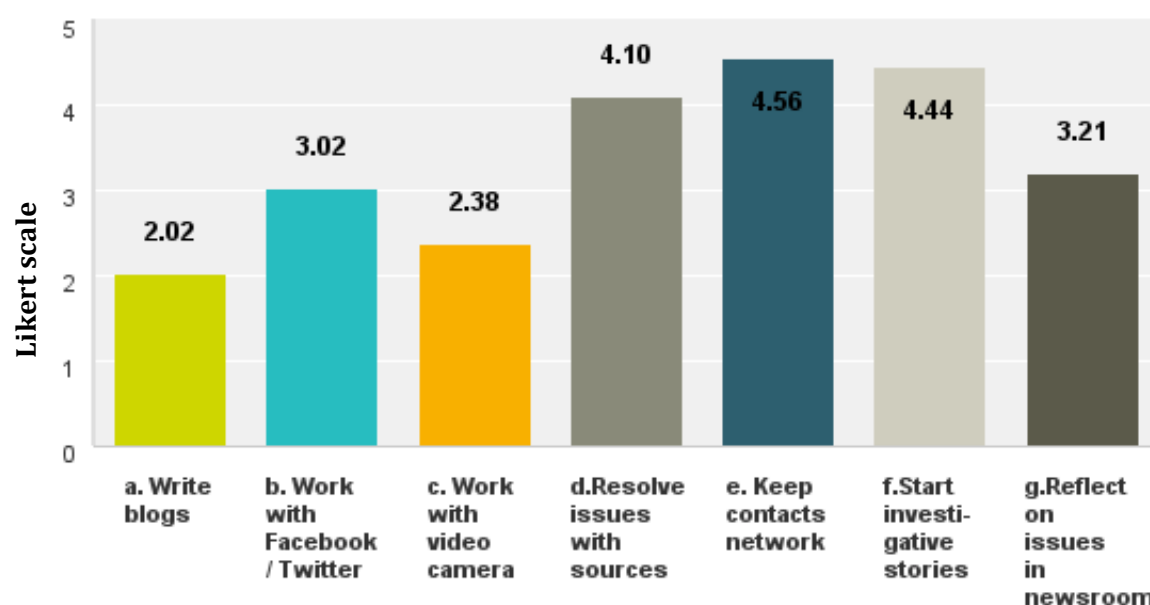
<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>
Court reporting	Environment
Politics, all levels of government	Local community knowledge
New media/ multimedia	How to conduct interviews
General knowledge, world affairs, popular culture	Legal knowledge, defamation law
English grammar	Sub-editing
Economics	Readers' perspectives/ interests
World/national history	Grammar, spelling, shorthand

Many options were offered for the skills question, considering experienced journalists are usually multi-skilled.

The respondents' view reinforced the notion of the experienced journalist as the most productive and the one with the most contacts for stories. Maintaining a network of contacts (97.5%) was seen as the **most essential skill**, followed by initiating investigative stories (87%) and resolving issues with news sources (80%).

**Graph 7.8: Essential skills for experienced journalists**

**N=40**



Median	2	3	2	4	5	5.00	3.00
Mean	2.03	3.03	2.38	4.10	4.56	4.44	3.21
SD	1.01	1.23	1.02	0.77	0.55	0.71	1.22
Required % (Likert scale responses 1, 2, 4 & 5)							
Least	40%	12.5%	22.5%	0%	0%	0%	10%
Less	25%	22.5%	30%	2.5%	0%	0%	21%
More	2.5%	20%	2.5%	47.5%	38.5%	31%	31%
Most	2.5%	15%	5%	32.5%	59%	56%	15%

Mentoring juniors, working with teams, interviewing skills, learning new skills, computer data skills, finding stories, ability to run a newsroom, write clearly in a polished manner, being multi-skilled, structure a story, research skills, and providing leadership were among the other essential skills suggested:

**Table 7.7: Suggested skills for experienced journalists**

<i><b>Most essential</b></i>	<i><b>Essential</b></i>
Mentor juniors	Be multi-skilled
Working with teams	Write lead for bigger stories, provide leadership
Interviewing skills	Find stories
Learning new skills	Manage news flow
Ability to run newsroom	Generate ideas
Write clearly, write long-form stories	Research
Computer skills, data journalism	HTML coding

The **competency profile** of experienced journalists emerging from this survey affirms their centrality in the newsroom's production process. They are dependable, as they are accurate, deadline-oriented, take the initiative, show courage and empathy, maintain a balanced and ethically sound outlook, are adaptable and versatile, and maintain an active interest in diverse current affairs topics. Their knowledge areas ideally include media law and ethics; politics; government at the national, state and local levels; court reporting; multimedia production; grammar, spelling and shorthand; sub-editing; and specialized knowledge in an area they cover.

Their skills set enables them to follow instructions or command and get tasks done. They have people skills; technology skills; and, researching, interviewing, writing, editing and production skills. They can initiate and finish a task. They can

learn and teach. They are perfect all-rounders while working as specialists. Mid-career journalists with 2-8 years' experience are, ideally, most suited to the changing newsroom: they know the old ways and they are willing to learn the new.

Their competency profile emerging from this survey included these components:

**Table 7.8: Competencies profile of experienced journalists**

Attributes	Knowledge areas	Skills
Accuracy with details	Media law, ethics	Maintain contacts network
Show initiative	Politics, govt at all levels, local community	Initiate investigative stories, generate ideas
Deadline awareness, speed	Court reporting, defamation law, legal	Resolve issues with news sources
Courage in tackling bigger issues	Multimedia	Mentor juniors
Fair, balanced, ethical, impartial	General knowledge, world history, environment	Work with teams, show leadership, be capable of running a newsroom
Empathy, humility, open mind, courtesy	Readers' interests	Learn new skills, be multi-skilled
Interest in a range of areas	Grammar, spelling, shorthand	Interviewing skills, write clearly, long-form stories,
Adaptability, versatility	Finance, specialisation	Technology skills
Trustworthy	Sub-editing	Manage news flow, show news judgment
Take criticism, direction		Research

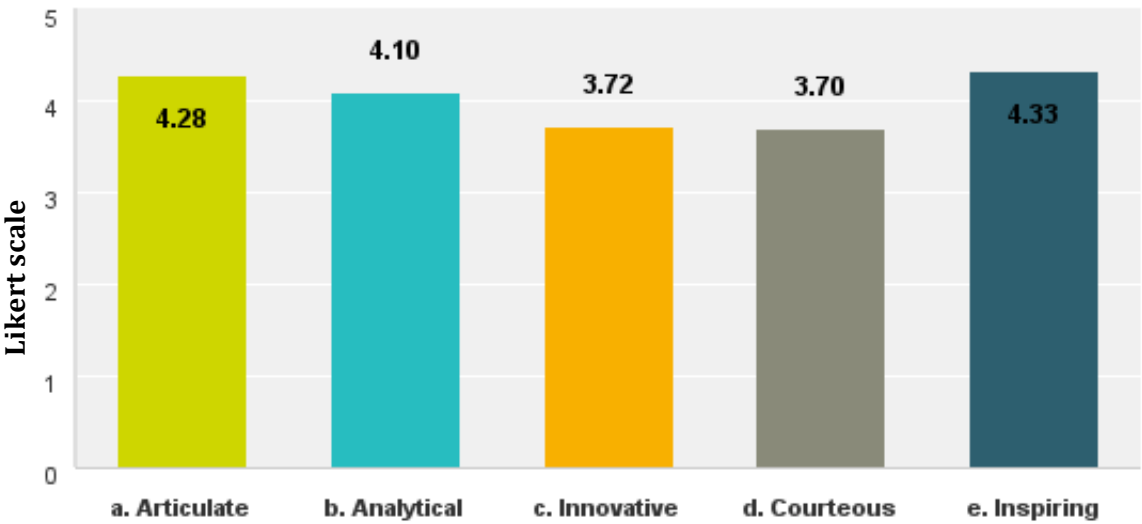
#### Mentor or trainer-level journalists (9+ years' experience)

Mentor or trainer-level journalists with more than nine years' experience can effectively replicate the successful processes of the traditional newsroom. They have mastery over the small as well as the big tasks and they are capable of thinking tactically or strategically. Their expertise as specialists and in general news

production is proven. They have a variety of handy attributes and skills; their knowledge areas are often little empires. Yet they are happy to step aside for others to take the leadership role. They revel in being useful, competent news workers.

The respondents selected being inspiring (90%), articulate (82.5%) and analytical (82.5%) as the most **essential attributes** for mentor or trainer-level journalists with 9+ years’ experience. Being innovative and courteous were also selected, albeit by fewer respondents. All the given options had a median score of 4 each, indicating were considered essential by more than 50% of the respondents.

**Graph 7.9: Essential attributes for mentor or trainer-level journalists      N=40**



Median	4	4	4	4	5
Mean	4.28	4.10	3.72	3.7	4.33
SD	0.81	0.83	1.04	0.98	1.06
Required % (Likert scale responses 4 & 5)					
More	35%	50%	49%	32.5%	32.5%
Most	47.5%	32.5%	21%	25%	57.5%

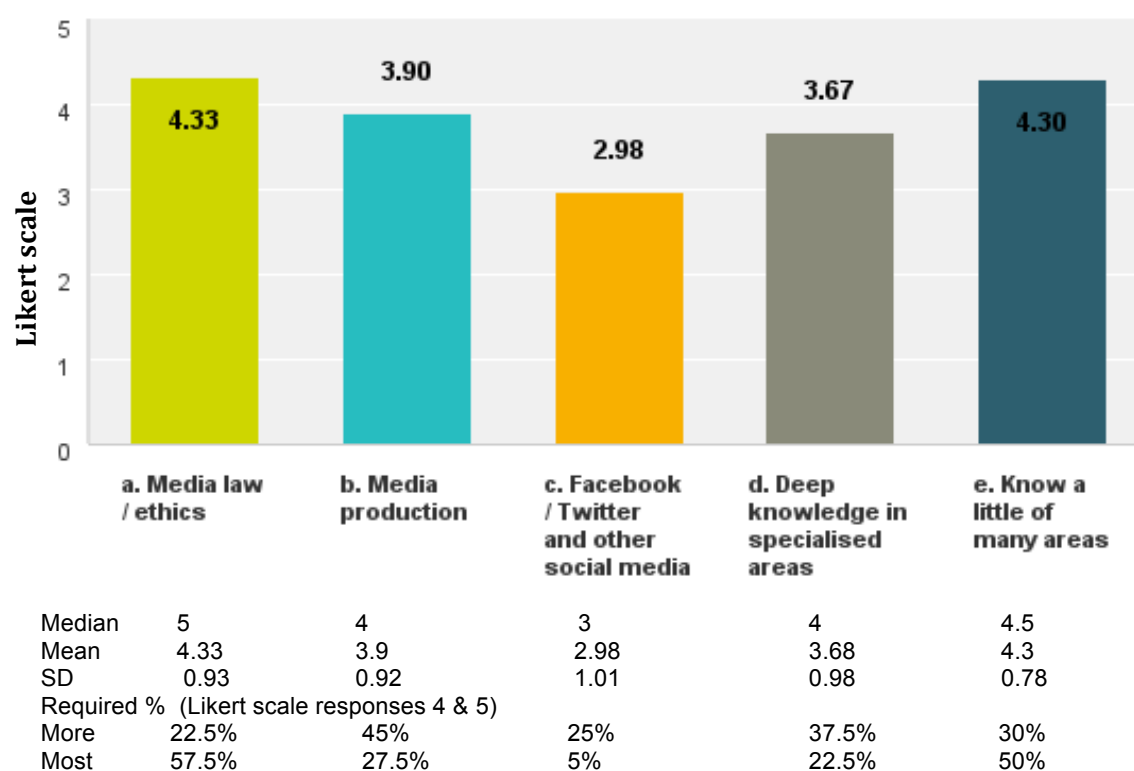
In response to the open-ended question, the survey participants suggested a number of attributes: patience, enthusiasm, broad interest in current affairs, honesty and integrity, pastoral care, critical and strategic thinking, flexibility, ethical outlook, excellent standards, supportive nature, humility, collaborative and disciplined approach, humour, empathy, fairness, willingness to teach, being approachable and helpful, willingness to listen, respectful of peers, being non-discriminatory, being approachable, emotional intelligence and deadline orientation.

**Table 7.9: Suggested attributes for mentor or trainer-level journalists**

<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>
Patience, pastoral care	Interest in current affairs
Interest, enthusiasm	Honesty, integrity, fairness, be non-discriminatory
Supportive, empathy	Excellent standards
Willingness to listen	Collaborative
Respectful of peers, humility	Sense of humour
Ethical outlook	Healthy scepticism
Critical/strategic thinking	Deadline oriented
Flexibility	Willingness to teach

All the tick-box options were endorsed as **essential knowledge areas** for trainer-level journalists, with media law/ethics (80%), some knowledge of many specialised areas (80%), and media production (72.5%) being seen as ideal.

**Graph 7.10: Essential knowledge areas for mentor or trainer-level journalists N=40**



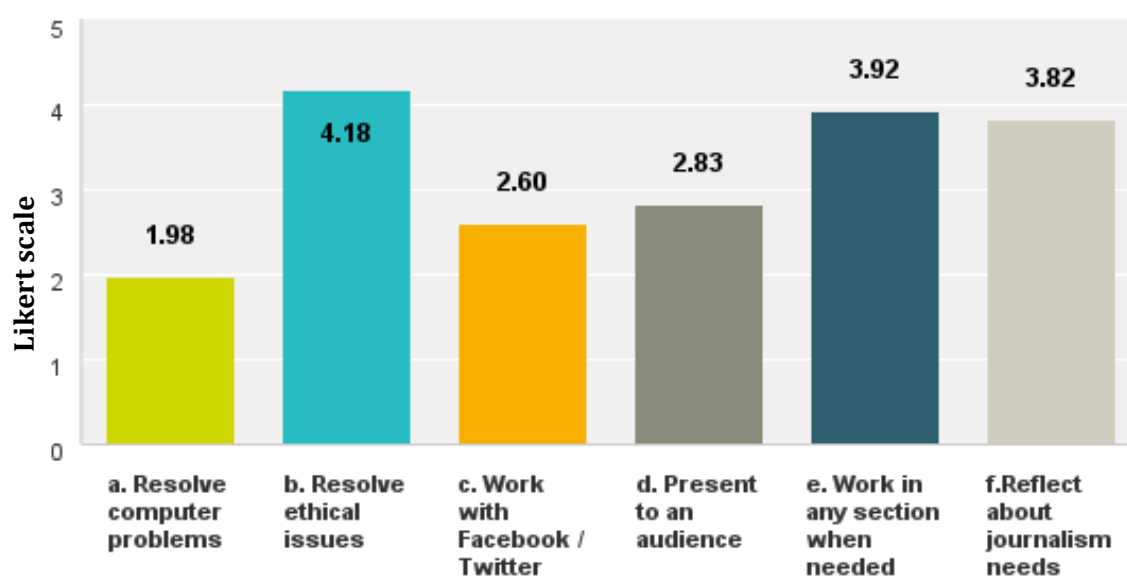
New media and media industry knowledge were suggested for the open-ended question. Other suggestions included:

**Table 7.10: Suggested knowledge areas for mentor or trainer-level journalists**

<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>
New media	Economic literacy
Management techniques	Politics
Media industry	Research techniques
Production processes	Media history
Business knowledge	World affairs
Knowledge of subject in which training is imparted	

The capabilities to resolve ethical issues (77%), work in any section when the need arises (75%) and reflect about journalism's requirements (64%) were chosen as the most **essential skills** for mentor or trainer-level journalists. Their median score of 4 indicates more than half the respondents considered them as a requirement.

**Graph 7.11: Essential skills for mentor or trainer-level journalists** **N=40**



Median	2	4	3	3	4	4
Mean	1.98	4.18	2.6	2.83	3.93	3.82
SD	1.06	0.96	1.14	1.28	3.82	0.98
Required % (Likert scale responses 4 & 5)						
More	5%	28%	10%	27.5%	45%	36%
Most	2.5%	49%	7.5%	10%	30%	28%

Production skills, editing skills, interviewing skills were among other suggestions made in response to the open-ended question on skills for mentor-level journalists:

**Table 7.11: Suggested skills for mentor or trainer-level journalists**

<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>
Production skills	Inspire others
Editing	Give feedback
Writing	Manage the roster
Best practice skills	Initiate ideas for change
Interviewing skills	Manage people
Communicate effectively	

The **competency profile** of mentor or trainer-level journalists (9+ years' experience) emerging from this survey included these components:

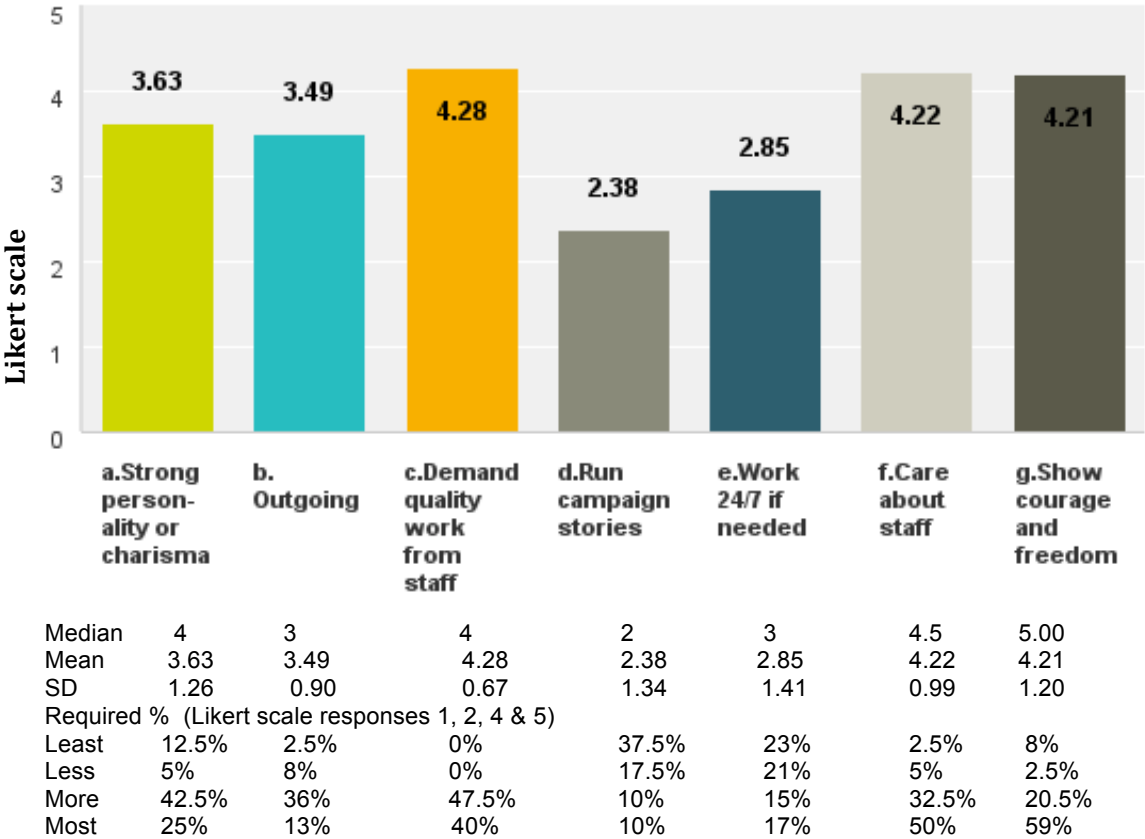
**Table 7.12: Competencies profile of mentor or trainer-level journalists**

Attributes	Knowledge areas	Skills
Inspiring	Media law, ethics	Resolve ethical issues
Articulate	Some knowledge of many specialized areas	Work in any section as need arises
Analytical, healthy scepticism	Media production	Reflect about journalism's needs
Patient, supportive, respectful, collaborative	New media, media industry	Production skills
Flexibility, strategic outlook	Editing, writing, research	Editing, interviewing, initiate ideas
Ethical	Knowledge of training	Give feedback
Adherence to excellence	Management techniques	Best practice, inspire
Honesty, fairness, non-discriminatory	Politics, economics, current affairs, business	Roster, manage staff
Sense of humour	Research techniques	Deadline-oriented

Newsroom leaders or editors

The editor’s attributes must be keenly attuned to the issues relating to staff performance. A newsroom leader must set high standards, demand the best work and get it done, according to 87.5% of the respondents. The editor must also be considerate to staff (82.5%) and show courage and independence of thinking and action (79.5%). Strong or charismatic personality was recommended as an **essential attribute** for an editor or newsroom leader by 67.5% of those surveyed. Opinion was divided on whether or not editors should be prone to running campaign-style (crusading) stories, with this inclination being the least favoured by 55%. Other choices among the attributes, such as outgoing personality (49%) and willing to work 24/7 if required (32%) met with a guarded response, as the graph below shows.

**Graph 7.12: Essential attributes for newsroom leaders or editors** **N=40**



Empathy for staff and people skills were emphasised in the responses to the open-ended question on essential attributes for newsroom leaders. “Generous with time – be accessible”, “compassion”, “empathy”, “people skills”, “consultative”, “support staff” and similar words relating to how news leaders managed the



journalists in their newsrooms were mentioned by more than one respondent as essential attributes. Leadership-related attributes and those relating to setting standards were also mentioned.

Respondents had high expectations of their leaders – they wanted “good judgment”, “perspicacity”, “strength”, “fairness”, “insight”, “integrity”, “commitment to fair and balanced reporting”, “commitment to accuracy” and “ability to protect newspaper reputation”, among other similarly demanding attributes. Listed below are the respondents’ suggested attributes for leaders, with the most frequently mentioned being featured at the top:

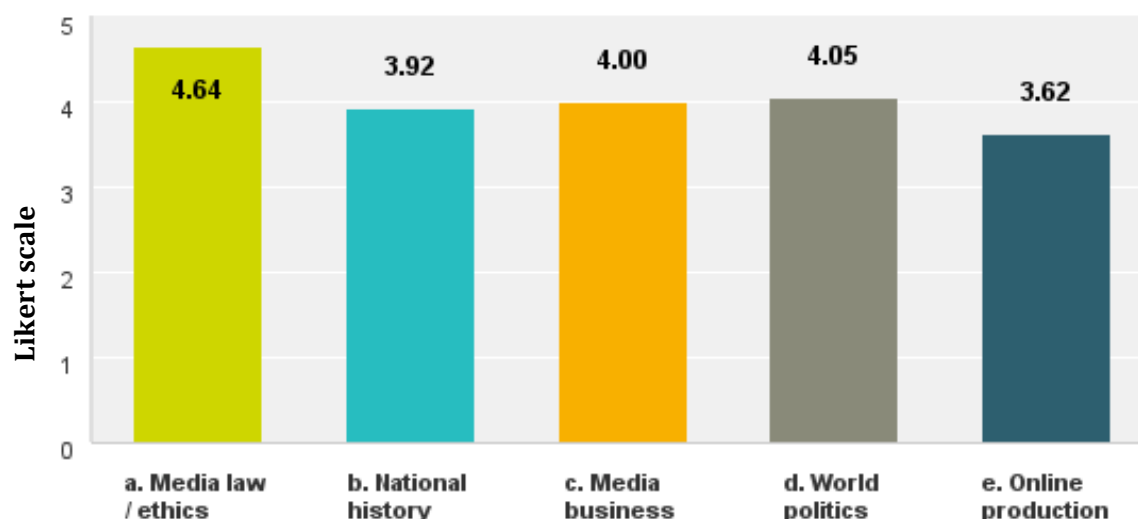
**Table 7.13: Suggested attributes for newsroom leaders or editors**

<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>	<i>Desirable</i>
Generous with time, interest in staff, willingness to support staff	Passion for journalism	Flexible
Commitment to fair and balanced reporting, integrity, consistency	Inspiring	Consistent
Ethical outlook	Genuine	Open-mindedness
Communicative	Independent	Bipartisanship
Command respect	Organised	Consultative
Courtesy	Wide range of interests	
Lead by example	Courageous	
Experienced	Reflective	
Insight, judgment		
News sense		

Newsroom leaders need an array of knowledge areas similar to the most experienced journalists, a wide range that will meet the expectations of senior

journalists in the newsroom. Their **essential knowledge** areas, in the view of this survey's respondents, were media law/ethics (92%), world politics (80%), national history (74%), media business (67%), and online production (59%).

**Graph 7.13: Essential knowledge areas for newsroom leaders or editors N=40**



Median	5	4	4	4	4
Mean	4.64	3.92	4	4.05	3.62
SD	0.70	1.07	1.09	1.01	1.27
Required % (Likert scale responses 4 & 5)					
More	18%	41%	21%	41%	28%
Most	74%	33%	46%	39%	31%

Editors are expected to show a deep knowledge of the issues they deal with and therefore the list of suggested essential knowledge areas for them was long and covered many areas, including new media, social media and technology; national, world and local politics; people management; ethical issues; business and economics; sports; grammar and spelling; environment issues; story-writing techniques, advertising; and production processes, as the table below shows. Knowledge of new media and social media was considered a prerequisite for newsroom leaders.

Editors were also required to know about media industry, advertising and media business and the changes sweeping through them. Unlike the most experienced journalists in the newsroom, editors had the responsibility over the entire staff and their performance, and therefore knowledge of how to manage people from a trained management professional's perspective was deemed essential.

Being the ultimate arbiters of all news related issues, their knowledge of ethics, reporting, editing and production processes (knowledge of the boundaries of

possibility) ought to be second to none. Knowledge of government at all levels and current affairs was also considered essential for newsroom leaders, in order to be able judge the newsworthiness of stories.

**Table 7.14: Suggested knowledge areas for newsroom leaders or editors**

<i>Most essential</i>	<i>Essential</i>
New media, social media	Management
Editing, reporting	Environment
National politics and history	Current affairs
Production processes	Advertising
Business, economics	Know staff
Media business	Liberal arts, social sciences
Local community	
Sports	
Ethics, media law	
English grammar	

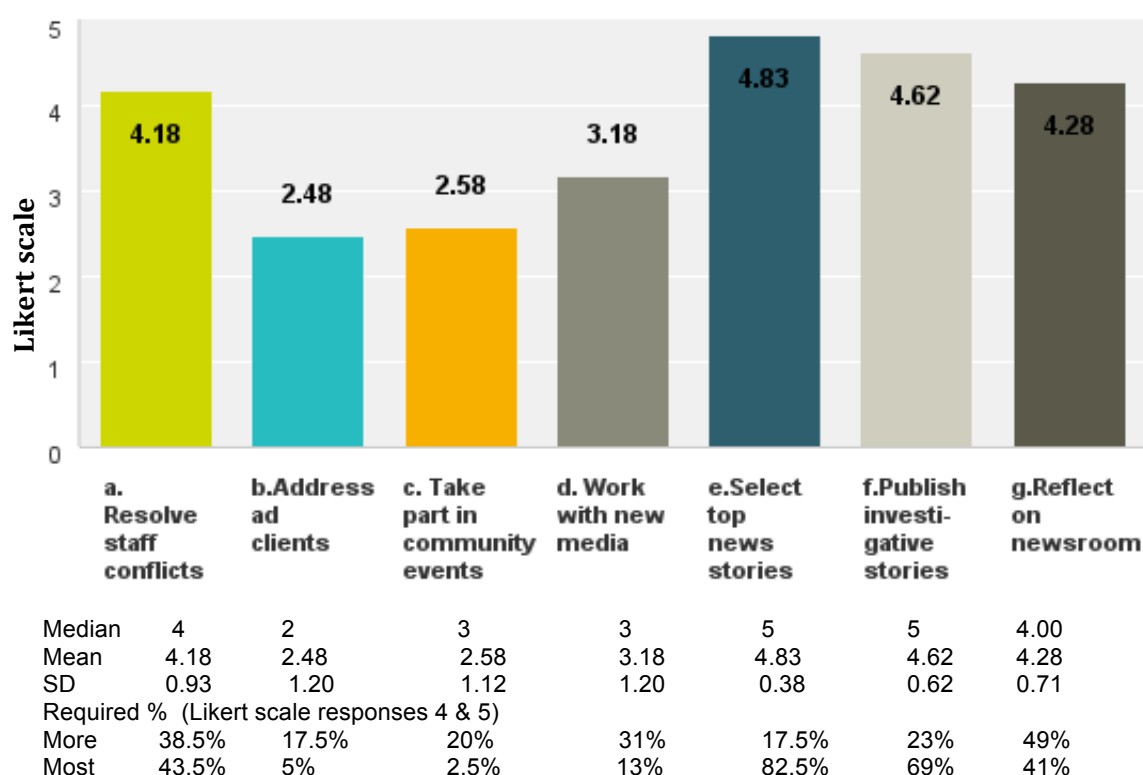
The survey provided a choice of seven **essential skills** for newsroom leaders. This was because newsroom skills invariably converged in the editor and their skills sets ought to be wide-ranging as well as in-depth. Each of the choices in the survey represented a key area of practice, such as people management, media business management, community engagement, new media, production processes, leadership and reflective journalism.

The respondents chose the selection of news stories for publication as the single most important skill, with 100% of the respondents considering it essential. Publishing investigative stories, a prerogative of editors, was chosen as an essential skill by 92% of the respondents. Reflecting on newsroom practice (90%) was also deemed essential by more than half the respondents: newsroom leaders more than others need to reflect upon the why and how of what they do everyday and evolve better ways of doing it. Resolving staff conflicts (82%) was considered an essential skill: leaders need to manage people.

The survey results on skills for news leaders are graphically presented below:

**Graph 7.14: Essential skills for newsroom leaders or editors**

**N=40**



In response to open-ended questions, people management skills were suggested by about 25% of the respondents as the most essential skills. Included in the suggested skills were: inspire, motivate and manage people. Other suggested skills included many “soft” skills, such as hiring staff, communicate well, be consultative, and articulate a vision for the publication. An important technical skill suggested as essential by the respondents was the skill to use new media.

**Table 7.15: Suggested skills for newsroom leaders or editors**

**Most essential**

Inspire staff, motivate
Manage people
Edit
Think laterally
Hire a good mix of staff
Use new media
Listen, consult

Reflect
Understand readers, serve them
Communicate well
Articulate vision
Write a column
Provide training to juniors, coach

The **competency profile** of newsroom leaders or editors emerging from this survey included these components:

**Table 7.16: Competencies profile of mentor or trainer-level journalists**

Attributes	Knowledge areas	Skills
Demand quality work	Media law, ethics	Select news stories
Considerate to staff	World politics, national history, local community	Publish investigative stories
Commitment to fair, balanced reporting	Sport, business, economics, environment	Reflect on newsroom practice
Communicative, courteous	New media, media industry, advertising	Resolve staff conflicts
Lead by example, organised	Editing, writing	Inspire, motivate staff, consult, listen
Ethical	Production processes	Train, coach juniors
Adherence to excellence	Management techniques	Hire good staff
Consistent, open-minded	Ethics	Use new media
Command respect	Grammar, spelling	Communicate vision
Strong, reflective	Current affairs	Write weekly column

### Training and education of journalists

What is the best source of training for a beginner? Practitioners favoured the newsroom to the classroom, with 95% of the respondents viewing the use of newsroom mentors as ideal or most ideal (aggregate of scores 4 and 5 on the Likert scale of 1 to 5). About 67% approved of in-house training programs as ideal for training beginners and 40% felt university courses were less ideal. For experienced

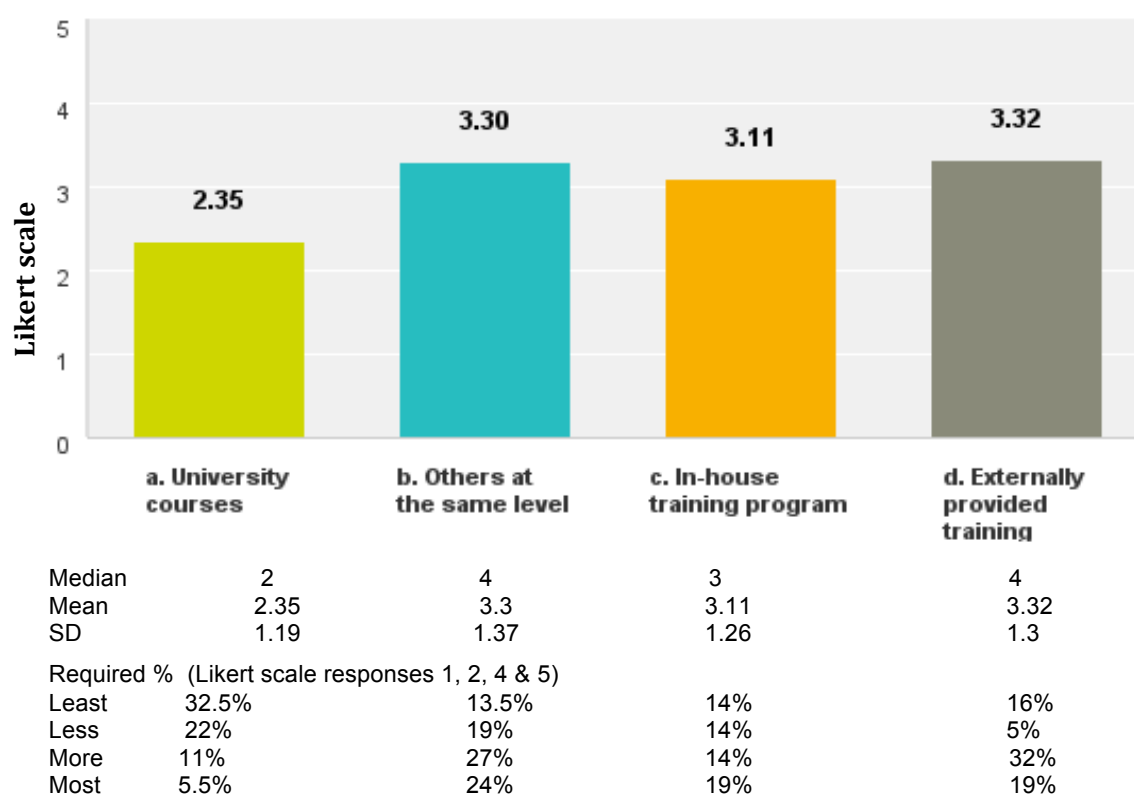
journalists, the results were similar, with newsroom mentors being seen as ideal by 71% of the respondents and university courses as less than ideal by 52% of the respondents.

Mentors would be ideally trained by in-house other newsroom mentors (65%) or in-house training programs (68%). University courses for mentors or trainers were seen as less than ideal by 40%. But external training providers rated better, with 48% viewing it as ideal.

The views of respondents were different for newsroom leaders or editors (graph below). The respondents were more favorable to externally provided training (51%) than to university courses (16.5%) for newsroom leaders. Learning from others at the same level was endorsed by more than half the respondents (51%). The respondents clearly favoured leaders obtaining explicit knowledge (documented knowledge and training) as a learning methodology while recommending implicit learning through the community of practice for other journalists in the newsroom.

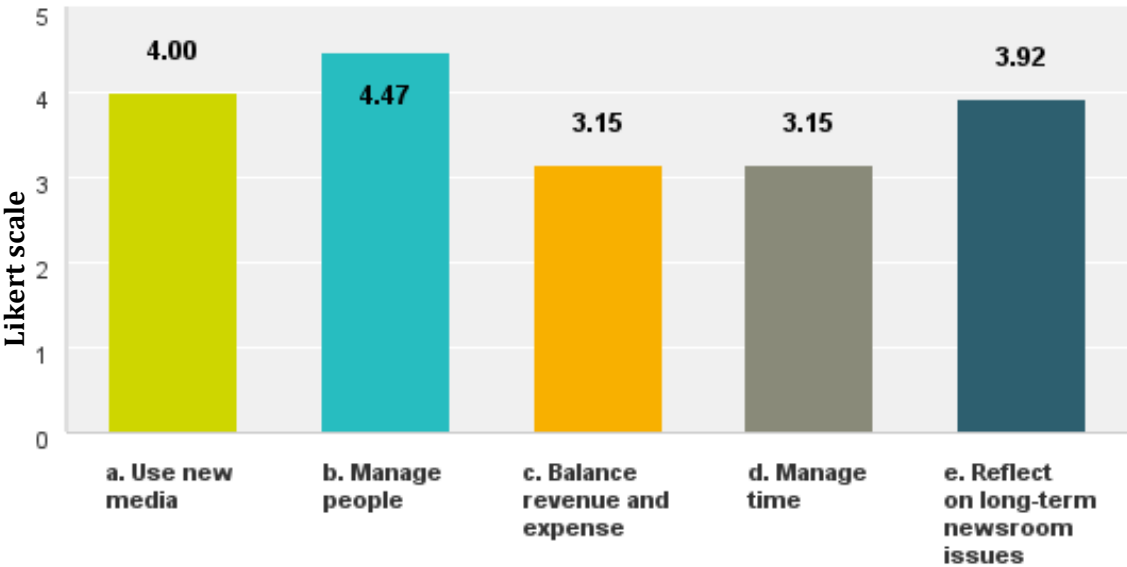
**Graph 7.15: Source of training for newsroom leaders or editors**

**N=40**



This may be partly due to the areas in which the respondents believed the newsroom leaders needed training (graph below). The survey found newsroom leaders needed training in managing people (92.5%), using new media (70%), and reflecting on long-term newsroom issues (69.5%).

**Graph 7.16: Areas in which newsroom leaders or editors require training N=40**



Median	4	5	3	3	4
Mean	4	4.47	3.15	3.15	3.92
SD	1.02	0.81	0.91	1.09	0.94
Required % (Likert scale responses 4 & 5)					
More	30%	32.5%	22.5%	27.5%	38.5%
Most	40%	60%	7.5%	10%	31%

The newsroom practitioners in this survey favoured the community of practice – learning by doing and learning from others – as a training methodology for beginners, experienced journalists and for mentor-level journalists, but acknowledged the need for externally administered training for newsroom leaders in learning to manage people, use new media and reflect on newsroom issues. Clearly, the community of practice is a limited avenue of learning for areas that relate to changes in the newsroom, such as managing people, using new media and in strategic thinking about the news industry.

Practitioners favouring the primacy of practice is not unusual. That mentors can show the way for beginners and other experienced journalists is quite possibly a normal expectation from traditional media practitioners. But newsrooms are

undergoing a change: traditional news delivery platforms now co-exist with multimedia delivery platforms. New production and publication processes are being learnt. In this context, existing practice is no longer a sufficient methodology of training. Changes in traditional newsrooms are being driven top-down by industry-level forces and newsroom leaders or editors are realigning their strategic thinking to accommodate new media in traditional newsrooms. The need for explicit knowledge is therefore more keenly felt at the top leadership level in the newsroom.

In the classroom-or-newsroom educational debate, education providers (such as universities and journalism training institutes) would do well to note the changing needs of an industry in a flux. The bias towards implicit learning and the community of practice is quite likely cracking at the top.

### **A refined competency model**

The survey findings complemented the findings of the content analysis and expanded on the range of competency components. Content analysis was a preliminary study that yielded categories rather than specific competencies. Many traditional competencies that emerged from it were confirmed through the survey. Multimedia knowledge and skills were specifically targeted by many advertisements in the content analysis and hence these competencies were emphasised in the content analysis. But the recruitment context of advertisements was in marked contrast to the reflective context of experienced journalists at various levels in the newsroom who took part in the survey. The survey respondents were already experiencing the changes in the convergent newsroom where new media competencies were becoming widely used in conjunction with traditional competencies. Hence the survey findings affirmed the old competencies as if to confirm these competencies were not about to disappear with the arrival of the new. The complementary nature of the two methodologies confirmed the co-existence of both sets of competencies – new and old – in the convergent newsroom.

Through the Likert scale process of approval and disapproval of given options, the survey sifted through many components and graded them for relevance in the convergent newsroom. Content analysis created a universal set of components, because the job advertisements were sourced from a geographically wider area. Through content analysis, deadline orientation and passion for journalism emerged as the most required attributes; multimedia knowledge as the most required knowledge



area; and write, edit, break news, cover financial markets and manage staff as the most essential skills. While these competencies were affirmed by the survey, it emphasised distinct sets of competencies for the four levels of experience. It brought the experiential dimension into sharper relief, making distinctions between the beginners and the experienced, and between the experienced journalists and the newsroom leaders.

Through the responses to the open-ended questions, which asked the respondents to suggest competencies for the four experiential levels in the newsroom, the survey enriched the list of in-use newsroom competencies. It provided detail and granularity to the research questions under study. It brought a larger consideration set for the competencies model (RQ1) and it elicited specific details from the practitioners' perspective on the competencies required for a traditional print newsroom that is being transformed into a convergent newsroom in Australia (RQ2). The survey questions on newsroom training provided direction to the development of competencies (RQ3).

The survey showed overlapping competencies across the experiential levels, indicating the presence of foundational competencies that were common to all journalists.

While content analysis brought the organisational or employers' view by highlighting newsroom requirements through the recruitment perspective, the survey was the voice of the community of practice. It pointed to the newsroom as the incubator of competencies for midcareer journalists, a term that could cover any journalist who was no longer a beginner. The survey proved that the practitioners' input is invaluable for any competency framework.

A competency model for the convergent newsroom will include most of the components of the traditional newsroom, as the survey findings showed. The attributes, knowledge areas and skills required of journalists for the print platform are still the ones at the top of the list in the convergent newsroom, except for the addition of technological components.

It is imperative that the newsroom practitioners be willing to adapt and learn, know more about more areas such as new media and their associated technology, and gain mastery over new production processes. Every practitioner may not need to possess a deep knowledge of every production platform, but as the need for platforms to co-exist grows, there is a diffusion of more competencies relating to them in the

newsroom. Hence the competency model for a convergent newsroom (a transforming print newsroom with other production platforms co-existing) is a flexible instrument, with gradual additions and deletions of attributes, knowledge areas and skills.

As the findings of this survey showed, the foundational components are common to all levels of journalists. Functional competencies, being role-dependent and platform-dependent, differ across the experiential spectrum. The experiential dimension is therefore about competency acquisition and absorption. Both breadth of competencies and depth are gained as newsroom practitioners become more experienced.

An expanded newsroom competency model can be constructed reflecting these findings. With more details than the model obtained from the content analysis, this model will still be a preliminary model but it can serve as a framework on which similar models can be based. The model below incorporates the organisational dimension from the content analysis and the practitioners' inputs.

Considering the evolutionary nature of the model, it has used a broad-strokes, informal approach to selectively articulate the findings of both the methodologies discussed so far. This necessarily means a model that shows a possibility rather than a definitive model that accurately incorporates every finding.

**Table 7.17: Competencies model for the changing newsroom**

**Newsroom leaders or editors**

Attributes	Knowledge	Skills	Source of skills
Strong, reflective	Best practice	Articulate vision	Practice community
Organised	Change management	Reflect, resolve	Practice community
Lead by example	New media	Use new media	Uni/practice
Fair, balanced, ethical	Advertising	Meet stakeholders	Practice community
Considerate	Finance, budget	Select staff	Practice community
Demand quality work	People management	Set standards	Practice community

**Mid-career journalists**

Attributes	Knowledge	Skills	Source of skills
Strategic thinking	Management	Inspire, motivate	Practice community
Command respect	Training techniques	Manage news flow	Practice community
Provide leadership	Community	Lead, manage others	Practice community
People-oriented	Code of conduct	Multi-task	Practice community
Articulate, analytical	A bit about a lot	Write long-form story	Practice community
Strive for excellence	Production processes	Work in all sections	Practice community
Guiding, inspiring	Editing	Roster, manage staff	Practice community
Collaborative	Specialization	Edit, learn new skills	Uni/practice comm
Patient, supportive	Audience-related	Give, accept feedback	Practice community
Initiate ideas	Media-related	Guide, mentor juniors	Practice community
Interest in many areas	Technology-related	Resolve ethical issues	Practice community
Courageous, tenacious	Multimedia production	Tech skills – multimedia skills	Uni/practice
Trustworthy	Business, history	Initiate stories	Practice community
Accurate	Court reporting	Manage news sources	Practice community
Deadline-oriented	Shorthand, interview	Network	Practice community
News-oriented	Research techniques	Research	Uni

**Foundational – all journalists**

Attributes	Knowledge	Skills	Source of skills
Fair, balanced, ethical	New media	New media	Uni/personal
Resourceful, creative	Current affairs, govt	Interview, write	Uni
Humble, courteous	Law, ethics	Manage time	Edu/personal
Enthusiastic, curious	Grammar, spelling	Listen, communicate	Edu background

## Uses and applications

The model above has more details than the one constructed through content analysis of job advertisements. It is adaptable and scalable.

**Table 7.18: Required competencies for experience levels – calibrated example**

Knowledge	Experience level	Desired standard
Total Management	Level 5 – Many years	Editor level – total view of product, people, revenue, audience
People management 2	Level 5 – Many years	Editor / recruitment level – strategic input
Community, audience	Level 5 – Many years	Editor level – total view
Training techniques	Level 4 – 10+ years	Trainer level
Ethics, law	Level 4 – 10+ years	Trainer level
A bit about a lot	Level 4 – 10+ years	Trainer level
Production processes	Level 4 – 10+ years	News editor level
People management 1	Level 4 – 10+ years	News editor level
Specialization – Multimedia Production	Level 3 – 5- 10 years	Deep knowledge - to platform editor level
Specialization – Government	Level 3 – 5- 10 years	Deep knowledge - to opinion writer level
Specialization – Business/Economics	Level 3 – 5- 10 years	Deep knowledge – to market analyst level
Specialization -Arts	Level 3 – 5- 10 years	Deep knowledge – to reviewer level
Multimedia production	Level 2 – 2-5 years	Print, social media, web
Editing	Level 2 – 2-5 years	Print, online
Social media – level 2 – content management	Level 2 – 2-5 years	Sourcing and development of content
Court reporting, law	Level 2 – 2-5 years	Legal knowledge
Interview techniques	Level 1 – 0-2 years	Phone interview, face to face
Social media – level 1 – writing, editing	Level 1 – 0-2 years	Facebook, Twitter
Grammar, spelling	Level 1 – 0-2 years	Check against list of common errors
Shorthand	Level 1 – 0-2 years	Up to 60 words per minute
Research techniques	Level 1 – 0-2 years	Common sense, stats

Organisations may identify more competencies through suitable methodologies (such as a survey), construct models relevant to their immediate future

directions, and calibrate them to show the experience dimension in their newsrooms against the desired competencies for journalists. This may be used to *set standards* for the newsrooms.

It must be noted that different newsrooms may calibrate their competencies differently in order to specify standards that are unique to them.

Similar calibration of experience levels and standard setting could be specified against other attributes and skills. More granularity could be achieved by a description of each desired competency level, how it may be tested and how its mastery may be detected. At this detailed standard setting stage, definitions of specific competencies as required by a particular newsroom could be offered.

**Table 7.19: Attribute description and level - example**

Attribute	Description	Required level
Balanced	Capable of understanding, analyzing many sides of an issue or disputed idea	Required at all levels in newsroom
Passion for journalism	Enthusiastic to understand ideas, people and issues; eager to engage with news sources; keen to clarify issues and write about them	Required at all levels in newsroom

Every attribute, knowledge area and skill of relevance to the newsroom can be described in a similar fashion and documented as a library of relevant competencies for the newsroom. This will help audit the newsroom to check if the competencies are present to the required level and whether they need to be developed. The newsroom audit may be conducted whenever required, but it is best done during the annual review of journalists. The audit requires a consistent approach and a framework for establishing its validity. For example, a newsroom may audit individual journalists as part of the annual review by conducting a three-way assessment – a self-assessment, a peer assessment and a superior’s assessment and give equal or a preset weightage for each. (High variances among the assessment scores on a scale of 0-5 can be reassessed.) It can then be aggregated with a weighted average:

**Table 7.20: Competencies audit for Individual A – example**

Competencies -skills	Level on 1-5 scale	Assessment
Multimedia editing – Facebook	Level 5 – Leader level	Can edit multimedia production platform or train others. Can lead development of this platform.
Write for specialized section – arts/ business	Level 1 – Novice level applicable	Does not require this skill for current or future function
Write opinion article	Level 1 – Novice level	Does not require this skill for current or future function
Write long-form stories	Level 1 – Novice level	Does not require this skill for current or future function
Editing – page design	Level 4 – Trainer level	Can design section or train others
Inspire, motivate	Level 3 – Expert	Can be developed as a trainer
Fix computer problems	Level 2 – Experienced	Can be developed as a go-to person
Editing - copy	Level 4 – Trainer level	Can be a copy chief or train others
Edit sections	Level 2 – Experienced	Can edit section when required
Resolve ethical issues	Level 3 – Expert	Can be developed as a go-to person/ trainer

The example above does not purport to be comprehensive. It shows a methodology for the audit process. In order to be comprehensive, the audit for every journalist in the newsroom can be undertaken during the annual review, noting the level of as many relevant newsroom competencies as possible. Over time the audit process may become more detailed but take less time to complete.

Individual audits can be useful for assessing training needs, curriculum development or career progression.

Team competency levels can be similarly shown through a series of aggregated individual-level audits. Team audits may be used for planning training and development, career progression and education or training curriculum development within the organisation or with further academic inputs at a journalism institute.

**Table 7.21: Group competencies audit for Team A – example**

Competencies -skills	Level on 1-5 scale		Assessment	Training needs
Multimedia editing – Facebook	Person A	2	This team needs all members to be at Level 2. At least two Level 3 members required. Person B needs team guidance and develop one more Level 3.	Develop online course for all – or identify external course they can attend. Can Person D train others or help design course?
	Person B	1		
	Person C	3		
	Person D	4		
	Person E	2		
	Person F	2		
Long-form story writing	Person A	1	This team needs at least two members to be at Level 3 or above. Discuss individual opportunities with team members and newsroom leaders.	Can Person D be a mentor for another prospective long-form writer? Discuss with other newsroom leaders.
	Person B	1		
	Person C	1		
	Person D	3		
	Person E	1		
	Person F	1		

The team audit can include a number of key competencies in order to identify the team’s capability to undertake changes in production routines, new multimedia production platforms or innovative sections in traditional or new media publishing. The audit may also reveal if the team needs to be expanded or retained at the current level of staffing.

It is most likely that every newsroom undertaking a competencies audit process will go through its own experience curve. Refining a suitable methodology for identifying competencies and conducting an annual audit will hopefully yield some experience effects by becoming more valuable and taking less time.

The competencies model, when fully developed for a newsroom along the lines shown above, will show a snapshot of individual and group competencies as they exist at a given point in time. It can also be used as an index of current competencies status or as a compass for the future by adding training notes and career development notes. It can also be used to describe the roles or positions within the newsroom through a description of the relevant competencies.

**Table 7.22: Position description – online producer – example**

Attributes & required levels		Knowledge & required levels		Skills & required levels	
Attention to details	Adept – Level 4	Current affairs, national & world politics	Adept	Social media – Facebook, Twitter	Adept
Accuracy	Adept	Economics	Experienced	Web software use	Adept
Fearless with technology	Adept	Grammar, spelling	Adept	HTML coding	Experienced or Familiar - Level 2 or 1
Innovative	Experienced – Level 3	Search engine optimization principles	Experienced	Web research	Adept
Multi-tasking	Experienced	Legal knowledge	Experienced	Write news stories, break stories on web	Experienced
Deadline conscious	Adept level	Popular culture – arts, music	Experienced	Edit news stories	Adept

All newsroom positions can be similarly described in competency terms and the descriptions refined over time. It will be a valuable instrument for the recruitment of candidates for newsroom roles.

The above examples show how a competency model can be disaggregated in different ways and developed for various uses: individual and group development and training, curriculum planning, strategic staffing, recruitment, career progression of journalists and as an index showing the value of human capability within the newsroom. A competency formulated along the lines described above thus becomes a key instrument in planning the development of newsroom journalists and provides a comprehensive answer to RQ3.

The model, however, requires another dimension: the expertise of those who have accumulated knowledge and contributed to newsrooms through journalism practice, training and education. This dimension is discussed in the next chapter.



## 8. INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

The first two methodologies in this study, described in the previous two chapters, collected data on newsroom competencies that were relevant to the research questions and the construction of a preliminary competency model. The data addressed RQ1 and RQ2 by pointing to the benefits of a structural arrangement of competencies into a practical and workable model. The development of competencies in the newsroom, which was raised in RQ3, required a deeper engagement with the underlying newsroom realities behind the data. It involved a qualitative inquiry into the operating framework of newsrooms and how journalists could adapt to the industry-wide technological transformation.

Eight experts were interviewed for their views on the changing newsroom. These experts represented the prevailing thinking in Australia's:

1. Newsrooms;
2. Academia;
3. Training divisions of major news organisations; and
4. Journalists' union.

They were chosen on the basis of their authority derived from their decision-making position in their fields of operation and their experiential knowledge in dealing with news-related human resources issues, such as the induction of journalists and their training and professional development. Their decision-making role was deemed an indicator of the impact of their thinking on the issues relating to the development of journalists' competencies. Their knowledge of the practice and theory of journalism and the education of journalists was deemed essential to analyse issues relating to the competencies of journalists and mid-career development within and outside the community of practice. Their industry knowledge was also being consulted on the survival of the newsroom as a community of practice and its ability to train and develop journalists' competencies for the production of content for new media platforms. Harnessing the tacit knowledge within newsrooms and documenting it through reflection were other issues on which expert inputs were sought.

The purpose of engaging in a thematic issues-level dialogue with experts was to view the emerging newsroom issues from an elevated perspective that could complement the views of ground-level practitioners. The assumption behind the interviews was that patterns and trends could be visible at an expert level that would

be missing at the keyboard level where there could be tendency to miss the forest for being too close to the trees.

The helicopter view provided by the experts was expected to give them a positional advantage above the day-to-day operational concerns in the newsroom.

The experts chosen to provide a qualitative analysis of the issues were:

**From the newsroom**

- (1) Helen Trinca, managing editor, The Australian newspaper, Sydney.
- (2) Graham Erbacher, former managing editor, News Central, the centralized unit carrying editing function for a number of newspapers published by News Corp in Sydney.

**From organisational training area**

- (3) Liz Bennett, former national training manager, News Ltd, Sydney.
- (4) Jock Cheetham, training manager, Fairfax newspapers, Sydney.

**From academy and industry**

- (5) Michael Gawenda, former editor-in-chief of The Age and research fellow at the Centre for Advanced Journalism at Melbourne University.

**From academy**

- (6) Alan Knight, head, Graduate School of Journalism, UTS
- (7) John Henningham, foundation professor of journalism, University of Queensland, and director of JSchool, Brisbane.

**From the journalists' union**

- (8) Christopher Warren, former federal secretary, Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

A questionnaire was provided to the interview subjects a few days in advance to prepare them and to provide a structure for the interview. They were given the freedom during the interview to move away from the questions when they found it thematically relevant to do so. The questions were, therefore, not posed to them in the order in which they were given to them in writing.

The interview subjects were informed of the competencies model emerging from the earlier methodologies and were aware that their answers would contribute to a refining of the model. Draft models within training departments of publishing houses could not be accessed due to ownership concerns.

## The questionnaire

The questions were grouped under broad topics:

### Industry:

1. *Online media and social media such as Twitter and Facebook are taking readers away from print. How can print media compete with new media to retain readers?*
2. *Advertising acts as a subsidy for the production of news. But advertising for print media is declining. Do you see a future for newspapers? What shape will they take?*

### Professionalism, values and attitudes, attributes:

3. *Anyone with a blog considers himself or herself to be a journalist. How do you define a journalist? Are there any minimum qualifications or requirements to be a journalist? What are they?*
4. *Are journalism standards declining across all media? What are the key values or beliefs that a journalist must have?*
5. *What are the important personal qualities (attributes) that a newcomer must have in order to be successful in journalism?*

### Journalism skills:

6. *Newsrooms are changing. Journalists are becoming multi-skilled. They are dealing with a number of media platforms at the same time. What are the must-have skills for a news journalist in a print media newsroom today?*
7. *What is the best way for a newcomer to learn about journalism? How can a young journalist become more skilled?*
8. *Between three applicants for a news journalism position – one with a journalism degree, another with a liberal arts degree, and a third with a science degree – who would you choose? Why?*
9. *Do you think there are certain skills and values that are more effectively learned in a newsroom rather than through a university journalism course? What are these skills and values, in your opinion?*
10. *Are there skills and values that are best acquired at the university?*

### Knowledge, training:

11. *Journalists need to be more street-smart than academically knowledgeable. Do you agree? What must a journalist know before becoming a practitioner?*

12. *Journalists don't think too much about what they do. They are more involved in action than reflection. What is your view? How can they be trained to think about their own practice?*
13. *Multimedia newsrooms need more general skills not specialized skills. What is your view?*
14. *Newsrooms need leaders from within. (Editors must evolve from within newsrooms.) What do you think?*
15. *What qualities must a newspaper editor show?*

With the exception of Liz Bennett, who wanted to answer only those questions that related to skills, attributes, knowledge and training of journalists, the subjects were at ease in responding to the questions as they were posed. In the case of some, there was a keenness to take the interview beyond the brief and the structural format. In the interests of the study, the questionnaire was preserved as the central point of return for the duration of the interview.

The interviews were conducted as conversations, but broadly within the given structure. They were recorded separately, on a one-on-one basis, with each interview subject. They were taped on both audio and video devices. The subjects were comfortable with the video-taping of the interviews. The interviews took place in the organisational setting of the subjects, either in their offices or in separate interview rooms nearby. The shortest interview lasted about 40 minutes and the longest about two hours. Some had prepared notes in response to the questions and others were interested in a free flow of ideas. On the whole, the interview subjects appeared highly engaged with the topics.

### **Biases and limitations**

The subject experts had obvious biases and limitations, which they themselves acknowledged in some instances as a prelude to making a sweeping statement about the state of the industry or their view of a particular kind of journalism practice. Their limitations were:

1. Occupational: Journalism practitioners were suspicious of the academy and those from the academy were cynical of newsrooms' ability to overcome its own failings and shortcomings. The academics were certain of the usefulness of knowledge, skills and attributes provided by their journalism courses. The newsroom

practitioners were equally certain that skills learnt on the job overwrote the flaws inherent in journalism courses. A consequence of occupational limitations of the interview subjects was the resurrection of the academy versus industry theme. A characteristic of this debate is the eagerness with which the primacy of academy or industry is asserted at the expense of the other in an either-or manner.

One way of overcoming this bias is for the researcher to be aware of it. Another way is to diversify the fields of expertise from which the interview subjects are drawn. The diversification is built into the selection of interviewees from four categories of professionals: newsroom leaders, trainers, academics and journalists' union. Another way of overcoming professional bias emerged when the interview subjects showed awareness of their own limitations and made allowances in their viewpoints or attempted to find a more balanced ground.

2. Organisational: All the interview subjects belonged to big organisations that had the weight of numbers (both in terms of number of practitioners and number of customers) lending credence to a reputational effect. It was easy for them to believe their practice represented best practice.

Overcoming this limitation involved the researcher being aware of his own limitations as well and allowing certainties to be tempered by a reflective dose of skepticism.

Despite the likelihood of these limitations or biases, it must be noted that a bias-free or neutral position is neither possible nor desirable. The purpose of these interviews was to allow the study to engage with the perspectives that were offered by the interviewees despite the inherent biases.

### **Expected outcomes**

The interview subjects were expected to:

1. Identify the main qualitative points about the topics that constitute the subject of this study.
2. Bring experts' outlook on newsroom changes. What is the nature of change? Is it technological or foundational? How can newsrooms adapt? And how can journalists evolve and navigate the white waters of change?
3. Provide their views on training and ways in which journalists could reflect on their newsroom learning. Newsrooms are experiencing a learning curve and training their journalists to work within new environments. It requires new skills and

new areas of knowledge to come into operational effectiveness. Newsrooms have to ponder over the make-or-buy decision: do they import new skills or develop them in-house?

4. Identify and clarify foundational skills, attributes and knowledge areas that can be used across multimedia platforms.

### **Findings of interviews**

The discussions with the interview subjects tackled the issues indicated in the questionnaire. The results of the interviews have been grouped under topics for convenience. Many of these topics are directly relevant to the research questions of this study. A few, such as the experts' views on the probability of survival of the newsrooms, were considered important because they dealt with issue closely related to the research questions.

#### *Survival of traditional newsrooms*

Newsrooms represent communities of practice and the question of whether they had a future could affect RQ3 and refine the perspective in this study on the nature of changes affecting traditional news platforms.

Helen Trinca sees a future for print and for the newsroom. "There is a real place for print media, in the sense of longer articles. Some people will always want to read in print," she says. But print media would have to compete with other media for audience. "The real shift in my generation has been how readers have embraced the digital reading. It's not reading on the computer as such or the laptop, but the huge breakthrough has been with the iPad, tablets and other devices. People are now prepared to read long stories on the tablet." Even though print media may transform into other digital formats, the newsroom, in her view, will continue to be engine room of news content production. "A paper is created through a hierarchy of effort," she says. The community of practice will adapt and live on, in her view.

Graham Erbacher describes himself as being pessimistic about the survival of print newsrooms beyond 20 years but is hopeful of mastheads surviving, of news organisations being able to prevail. Newsrooms would have to "somehow discover the commercial basis to continue doing what we are doing as newspapers".

Michael Gawenda sees newspapers existing within a niche market, with fewer readers and staff, and generating far less revenue. “The era of mass newspapers – in an Australian context at least, of newspapers producing hundreds of thousands of copies – is probably coming to an end.” Newsrooms would shrink in size, with more journalism being outsourced to journalists outside the organisation.

John Henningham believes newspapers would be delivered on screens in about 20 years, but the written text would survive. So would team work as represented by newsrooms. “Collective wisdom, collective production, continues to be important.”

Alan Knight sees newspapers as having a diminishing future. But like the tram system in Hong Kong, “newspapers will continue to operate not because they are the most efficient way of distributing information, but simply because people like them”. Newsrooms need to rethink “the factory floor approach” and “atomise” to become smaller operations.

Christopher Warren says “print has a limited future. How limited that is, I don’t know.” But newsrooms will be needed because of the synergy of team work and the collaborative experience that contributes to people learning at work and producing products beyond their limited experience.

Jock Cheetham says print media will not become extinct but rationalization – or a market-driven diminishing of their size – will occur. They will have to diversify into other media platforms for survival. Journalists do not work in a vacuum. Team work is a part of journalism.

The interview subjects, on the whole, see newspapers declining to smaller operations or migrating to other platforms, but newsrooms will survive even if they are reduced to much smaller operations. Team work, or the hierarchy of effort as Helen Trinca puts it, will continue, even if the members of the team exist in different locations.

### *What makes a journalist*

Multimedia platforms may diminish the role of traditional media, but newsrooms are changing to accommodate new media, according to the interview subjects. As journalists adapt to the new media, their everyday tasks may change but definitions of what constitutes journalism and what makes a journalist may be

modified but essentially largely remain unaltered. The changes in the newsroom may refine the boundaries of journalism, making it a more accommodative profession.

Whether the pursuit of journalism had the rigours of a profession was asked of the interview subjects in order to bring the larger remit of journalists into focus. In the changing media landscape, bloggers can claim to be journalists and many social media users may be described as creating and publishing news. The role of journalists as mediating agents between an event and its audience appears to have been subverted.

Warren says journalism is a profession “particularly because it is a craft”. “A journalist is someone who practises journalism whether they are practising journalism through a blog or in a traditional newspaper or TV or radio or any other format. It is a mistake to confuse the platform or the delivery vehicle with the skills of the craft.”

He says journalism is distinguished by its values as much as by what it does. “People know journalism when they see it. What defines it is a certain degree of skill in communicating, and also a commitment to the ethical standards that underpin journalism – respect the truth, respect the public’s right to know.”

In Erbacher’s view, journalism is about extracting information through a process of selection and presentation. Many bloggers may claim they are journalists, but having an opinion doesn’t make them journalists, he says. “I can draw for you a pretty house, but that doesn’t mean I am an architect. I can make a nice Lego model of a bridge but that doesn’t mean I am an engineer.”

Gawenda does not see bloggers as journalists. “Even if journalism isn’t a profession, it is at least a trade. If you look at say plumbers, for instance, there are lots of people who do plumbing, but they are not all plumbers. There are certain skills you need to have if you are going to call yourself a journalist. I believe there is a certain ethics you have work to if you want to consider yourself a journalist.” Journalism is also defined by the varied skills of journalists.

Trinca sees a vital difference between a blog and a newspaper created by a team of journalists. “Bloggers can be journalists. I have no problem with that,” she says. “A blogger sitting at home can create something. It can be an interesting thing. But they are not going to create a finished product which I would define as a newspaper at this stage. It will be called something else on a digital platform or in 20 years. A combined product tends to have more than one voice in it. And that is the



magic and beauty of a news hour on television, an online site. A newspaper is the end product that emerges from co-creation.” Journalism is about team work.

Knight sees journalism as having been redefined by the internet. Whether or not a blogger is a journalist depends on the blogger. Three decades ago journalists were defined by whether or not they worked for a recognised media organisation and whether they were members of the journalist association. “Both of those definitions don’t work anymore.”

Henningham sees journalism as having many of the attributes of a profession. “I don’t think it particularly matters what it is called except in the sense of people taking their roles very seriously, of having an area of knowledge that they are responsible for,” he says. But “doing the best job you can and doing an honest job fairly – those things cut across many different occupations.”

Cheetham defines a journalist as one who works in a “professional” capacity. “A decent journalist – as opposed to any journalist – will abide by certain standards, such as the MEAA code of ethics for example,” he says.

As inferred from the interviews conducted with the subject matter experts, journalism is defined by:

1. Its ethical standards and code of conduct.
2. Its values.
3. Its knowledge area.
4. Its skills.
5. Its activities, such as provision of news for the community about itself.
6. Its team work.

The experts feel changes in the newsroom have not substantially altered the core functions or ethical requirements of journalism. Skills required for journalism practice have only increased with more media platforms functioning in the same newsroom. The newsroom is undergoing changes in its structure. It does not work any more like a single assembly line, with the writing and editing of all news stories no longer converging towards a single deadline late night in preparation for a single product. News is being updated constantly and deadlines are hourly if not more frequent, depending on breaking news.

Changes in print media newsrooms necessitate the development of some new skills (for example, breaking news online 24/7 and social media production skills) and de-emphasise some older skills, especially those relating to editing and print media

production. But newsroom practice has always been about change, says Trinca. “The major changes in journalism in the past 20 years have come about through much wider social changes and pressures. Digital media have pushed the boundaries of what a journalist thought was something they should report on...In the 1970s, journalism was male-dominated. I always believed in those days that I was writing for a male reader. I never thought I was writing for a woman. It has changed a lot now. A lot of change has been brought about by social change, not just by digital media,” she says.

### *Degrees of eligibility*

None of the interview subjects deemed a journalism degree an essential qualification for a journalist. Opinion was divided on whether or not a degree in any subject at all was a must-have minimum qualification, even though all of them implied that other things – such as attributes (passion for journalism and curiosity, in particular), knowledge levels (wider knowledge of the world and current affairs, in particular) and skills (interviewing and writing, in particular) – being more or less equal, a beginner in the newsroom was better off with a degree, any degree at all, than without.

Warren sees the distinct advantage that a graduate has over others. “It is less important what people graduate from, than it is that they be graduates,” he says. “Being a graduate gives you a whole lot of skills like analysis – a sense of analysis – and understanding of the world into the newsroom which you don’t have coming directly out of school.”

The kind of degree they have will shape the knowledge and specialization they develop. “I think if you are a journalism graduate you have certain skills. If you are an arts, science, law or medical graduate, you have different skills,” Warren says. “There is often a frustration that some journalists will express that people coming into the newsroom with journalism degrees are not ready to be a journalist. And I will say, that’s right, they have been trained so they are now ready for you to train them to the next level. There is still a significant amount of training that needs to occur (in the newsroom).” Having a degree is better than not having one, but it is not enough. Newsroom training is essential.

Trinca says five out of eight entry-levels positions in the newspaper where she works as managing editor were filled by journalism graduates in the immediate past

year. But her own education was in the arts. “In those days journalism degrees didn’t exist. They (journalism courses) started, I think, from mid-1970s and I remember we were sceptical of them. They are obviously much improved and I wouldn’t at all be critical of them or those who come out of those courses. There is obviously a lot of really good training going on. But I don’t think you need to have that training,” she says.

Invariably senior newsroom practitioners in decision-making positions tend to reflect on their own qualifications, as a point of reference if not as the main argument, while expressing a point of view on the need for journalism specialisation at the university level for entry-level journalists. All eight of those interviewed talked about their own education (without being asked to do so) when asked if they thought a journalism degree was essential. “If I could manage well without it, why would I insist a newcomer should have it?” is a possible line of thought. But there are two tangential arguments against the self-referential point of view about educational requirements. One argument goes: ‘I can see beyond what served me well, but I see few journalism courses providing compelling value’. Another argument is: ‘I can see that journalism has changed since the time I came in, but I still see the newsroom as the best training ground’. The first argument is critical of journalism courses and expresses the view that universities could do better. The second affirms the newsroom as a better provider of journalism education, even if the education is lacking in theory and is entirely about practice.

Cheetham would rather choose someone who is well-read than “much degreed”. A degree is not absolutely essential for the traineeship at The Sydney Morning Herald, he says. University courses cannot simulate the real-time contexts of a newsroom. They also tend to be slow to respond to changes in the industry. Another drawback they have is that their feedback is more academic in nature than practical. A submitted story being knocked back or published in an altered version is the kind of feedback newsrooms provide and there is no substitute for that, he says.

Gawenda recalls how he de-emphasised the importance of a degree during the selection of entry-level candidates during his time at editor-in-chief of The Age but he had to contend with organisational bias in favour of graduates. “I think young people wanting to do journalism are better off doing other degrees, getting knowledge in specialised areas, doing a law degree, doing a science degree, even doing a medical degree, because I think that that gives them an advantage in terms of knowledge and

research skills that they are going to have over people who will have a journalism degree and learn the basics of journalism, which I believe they will learn on the job anyway,” he says.

Erbacher does not have bias towards a journalism degree. “I will have to see where the journalism degree came from and what the degree-holder had specialised in. Some journalism courses are almost antagonistic to the profession of journalism and some of the proprietors and it is very much a question of them and us,” he says.

The university versus industry, theory versus practice, reflection versus action dichotomies begin to take shape at this point. All the interview subjects showed a heightened awareness of the polarities inherent in a discussion in which classroom appeared helplessly pitted against the newsroom. It was as if both the classroom and the newsroom wanted a positional advantage as a centre of learning. Each was poised for primacy over the other in a war for the minds of journalists. The issue of the relevance or otherwise of a journalism course invariably triggered a defensive response from the interview subjects – either in defence of the university or in defence of the newsroom. Memories of past battles lurked like ghosts in the background.

Henningham says it is easy to spend a great deal of time studying about journalism than practising it, which is what journalism courses should primarily be about. “I rather like the concept of journalism as a one-year standalone postgraduate course, like the Columbia model in the US, building on a good solid general degree in any field. It could be a science or law degree or political science or whatever, probably not a communication degree. Because you can spend too much time studying the intricacies of communication theory and advertising and television and movies. There is so much else there that you should know as well,” he says.

Knight sees a qualification creep in journalism with practitioners acquiring more formal qualifications. Postgraduate degrees in journalism are becoming popular, he says. In his view, an undergraduate degree in a subject other than journalism, such as science, law or the liberal arts, is a desirable course of action for aspiring journalists as it would give them a knowledge base. A journalism masters course on top of that would give them interviewing and writing skills. “I think a journalist now has to be defined as a person who writes non-fiction and who operates within a recognised code of ethics and applies professional practices which include requirements for accuracy and also sourcing,” he says.

An undergraduate degree in a subject other than journalism gives a knowledge base and analytical skills. A postgraduate degree, particularly in journalism, gives these two advantages in addition to some journalism skills. The interviewees indirectly point to the newsroom as the main arena for skills development.

### *Attributes of a beginner*

Curiosity and passion for communication are outright winners as desirable attributes for journalists stepping into the newsroom for the first time. None of the interview subjects would consider someone who was not curious to know more about other people, events beyond their immediate surroundings and phenomena and trends they had not encountered before.

“You need a curiosity about the world, the ability to critically evaluate, a passion for truthfulness, common sense, and a dedication to accuracy and reliability,” says Erbacher. Journalists will benefit with the “ability to have a mature reflection on things”.

Knight would like to see journalists with “intelligence, courage, curiosity, and you would rather hope, compassion”. Bennett believes journalists must ideally have an inquiring mind and an interest in other people. A strong news sense is also important. “People who are street smart and have natural instincts will often do quite well in journalism, even if they don’t have high-level academic understanding and background,” she says.

Entry-level journalists need to show evidence of a commitment to being a journalist, says Gawenda. They need to show passion for the job, be flexible and be interested in a range of media. Warren believes journalists ought to be committed to truth. “It is not enough to know the truth or to respect the truth, there is an obligation to share that truth,” he says.

As an educator and as a former journalist, Henningham endeavours to develop persistence in students who wish to be journalists. The qualities of curiosity and persistence may be innate but they can be developed. “You can foster them and encourage people not to be discouraged. “You can be discouraged when you are a student and when you are a young journalist. People won’t answer your calls or they won’t comment meaningfully. So just encouraging people to having a go or think of another way, another angle or think of another source they could contact – they are the things that we can do that will be useful. Helping them to work hard really, to do

the research, to make the calls. All those frustrations – it is really a matter of encouraging them to keep at it. (Telling them) if you are bruised and bloodied, get back up and continue the game.”

Trinca would like to see an enhanced curiosity in journalists. They should be “excited, intrigued and interested in either people or ideas” very strongly to get through in journalism. “We are the filters, we are the conduits. Unless you are interested in what makes people tick, a long-term career (in journalism) is unsustainable.”

Being street smart and being conceptual in one’s approach are important, she says. “For a long time, in the 1940s, and ‘50s and ‘60s, street smart journalism was what was required. You needed to be able to pop down to the cop shop, talk to the police, and know what was going on and get those sorts of contacts. Increasingly journalism has changed quite dramatically... And being street smart is still very important. But being conceptual is very important. I think there are two sorts of people – there are people who get concepts and those who don’t, there are those who are street smart and those who aren’t. And sometimes you are lucky to get both – that’s a gift.”

Cheetham says critical thinking is an important. And in order to interact with people and interview them, an engaging personality helps.

Although an exhaustive list of attributes did not emerge from the discussions with the experts, a top-of-mind array of categories made its presence felt. The interview subjects did not always make the distinction between attributes and knowledge areas or between attributes and skills. The questions and the discussion steered them towards these conceptually different areas.

It is reasonable to assume the categories of attributes that the interviewees mentioned reflected their considered view on the subject.

The interview subjects acknowledged it was impossible for every beginner to possess all the desirable attributes. Organisations and recruiters could choose to emphasise some at the expense of others.

**Table 8.1: Summary of experts' views on desirable attributes for beginners**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Related attribute</b>
Curious	Interested, excited, intrigued
Passionate	Committed
Persistent	Diligent, hard-working
Courageous	Bold
Compassionate	Empathetic
Inquiring	Sceptical, analytical, conceptual, intelligent, mature, investigative
Street smart	Worldly wise, active
Research-oriented	
Accurate	Truthful
Flexible	Adaptable
Engaging	Friendly, personable, networking
Showing news sense	Nose for news, interest in current affairs
Showing common sense	Practical

*What a beginner must know*

Many knowledge areas are better categorised as skills. For example, when an interview subject says journalists must know about social media, it could be assumed they are talking about a skill, the skill to use social media. There is thus a sense in which “knowing” something becomes doing a task or knowing how to do a task related to that sphere. Knowing shorthand is knowing how to use it, or the skill to use it. Many technology-related knowledge areas are capable of being interpreted as doing-related knowledge in a practical sense or skills. This study uses knowledge as a conceptual understanding of the topic, as for example, economics or politics can be an area of knowledge without any “doing” necessarily being attached to it.

Irrespective of whether a category is a skill or a knowledge area, this study has focused, wherever possible, in capturing it. Once captured as a category, it is easier to shift it from one area to another depending on how one wishes to argue over it.

“I would urge journalists nowadays to have a good specialised knowledge in the areas that they cover,” says Gawenda. “Because you are increasingly confronted with new research, new information, new debates. I don’t see, for instance, how you can be a good reporter of climate change if you are not across the basic science, and the basic scientific arguments and understand them. Now that is true across a range of areas. I would urge young journalists to develop knowledge. And that’s where universities can come in. They can help provide that specialised knowledge.”

Liz Bennett believes journalists must know the kind of subjects that increase their understanding of society. This includes history, politics, current affairs and arts. Knowledge of science “can be useful” in the newsroom, especially in dealing with issues like climate change. “Quest for knowledge counts. If you have studied something, it shows an interest and then you can build on that,” she says.

Henningham expects journalists to be well-rounded in their knowledge across a range of areas, “which are the core and the underlying capacities of a reporter – getting information, being able to interview people and then being able to put it together as a story”.

“To me, that’s what a journalist does. That’s what it’s all about. That’s the bedrock,” he says. His ideal journalist will possess knowledge of the practical and academic kinds: “street smartness, being savvy, common sense, a wide knowledge of not just academic areas but of how the world works, what is going on, where the bodies are buried – all of that”.

Knight commends a well-rounded knowledge in areas represented by the liberal arts. “People hoping for a career in mainstream journalism – this is wishful thinking – would have knowledge of literature, history, economics, geography,” he says.

Cheetham would like journalists to possess a wide general knowledge of the world.

The knowledge bar has been raised in the past few decades, says Trinca. “In journalism, we have seen an increase in the demands on journalists to be able to write at an intelligent level. The standards of journalism in areas like finance has just extraordinarily improved. Nobody did it much years ago and it was not required.



Now economic knowledge of some sort – the basics – is required of all journalists really,” she says. Knowledge rather than know-how will drive journalism because people will pay for context and “value comes from providing context to events”. Graduates of subjects other than journalism have specialist knowledge rather than the know-how of journalism and have an advantage over those who have only studied about the processes of journalism. “It’s all we have got left – the knowledge and understanding we bring to the world,” she says.

“What we are missing a lot is cultural knowledge,” says Erbacher. “You need knowledge of history. Because of the complexity of stories, there has to be a numeracy skill, scientific analysis. Business used to be a back-of-the-paper concern, but now business, politics and economics merge into many stories. A good academic knowledge is therefore important.” Along with knowledge, journalists need to be savvy about things and be street-smart. They have to “instantly assess what is good what is bad, what is in what is out, what is worth pursuing and how do I cover my bases”.

### *Specialisation v jack-of-all-trades*

Journalists need an all-round knowledge of various subjects but specialization is an advantage. “Deep specialised knowledge usually indicates a state of mind, an ability to harness your mind into a particular area,” says Erbacher. “You would think that the skills you develop to have a deep specialised knowledge, of Australian history or whatever subject, will be able to be transferred across the field.”

Journalists know a little about a lot, says Warren. They are interested in “almost anything”. “That broader and admittedly shallow knowledge of the world informs the reporting of those things where they have a very deep understanding,” he says.

Gawenda believes journalists need to be generalists who specialize. “They need to know a little about everything and a lot about something, because in my view that is the future,” he says. “Specialisation doesn’t disappear. Specialisation is important. One of the things you can bring to your media organisation is outstanding special skills and knowledge.”

Knight believes specialization can be taught at the university. “At entry level, it’s good to know a little about a lot,” he says. There is scope to specialise later on in their careers. “We are already changing the way the master programs work to

accommodate more advanced specializations,” he says. He sees mid-career journalists taking a study break to specialize.

Trinca sees specialization opportunities in the newsroom, especially for those who are pre-loaded with university-given knowledge, especially in areas like finance. She considers the knowledge base to be important. “The trick is not to specialize too early” and it is equally important not to leave to too late. Mid-career specialization is how it is done, in her view. “We need to think whether a generalist approach for journalism is enough to keep people in the job for 20 or 30 or 40 years. I think specialization is very important.”

Henningham would require a journalist to start as a jack of all trades. Specialization comes from doing a round so thoroughly that the journalist’s contacts and knowledge of the round create expertise that can be relied upon by others, including professionals in other fields. “So having a good solid immersion in a round is very important. It is on top of having been a generalist, being able to cover anything that is happening. Having areas that you do know a lot about is very important.”

Cheetham would like media to have a choice and be able to recruit those who bring a great deal of knowledge and skills. “The more skills, attributes and knowledge you can bring, the better,” he says.

Specialization can be sourced from the university, one’s own reading or from a positional advantage, such as living in an area long enough to gain local knowledge about it.

**Table 8.2: Summary of experts’ views on how specialized knowledge is acquired**

<b>Knowledge area</b>	<b>Specialization gained</b>
Politics, economics, history	At university
Maths (numeracy)	At school and university
Science (at least basic level)	At school and university
Culture, society, common sense	Acculturation at school, uni and society
Geography	By reading, living at a location
Arts	At school, uni and by reading
Language, grammar, spelling	At school, uni
Finance	At school, uni
General knowledge	By consuming news media
Current affairs, news sense	By consuming news media

Those interviewed see value in specialized knowledge gained from the university or through industry experience, but a strong all-round knowledge base in the beginning is recommended. Organisations or recruiters can emphasise some knowledge areas over others.

### *How journalists learn skills*

Skills form an important component of competencies, the other two considered in this study being attributes and knowledge. A skill by definition relates to a journalist's ability to do a task.

The issue of skills was the overarching theme of the interviews. How are they acquired and how can they be developed? What specific skills are required in a multimedia newsroom? The answers to these questions will determine how a newsroom can proceed to audit the competencies of its journalists and how those competencies can be adapted for a changing industry.

The acquisition of skills and their development is part of the learning that journalists undergo. Many skills used in the newsroom are either acquired or developed in the first few critical years in journalism. Since skills relate to doing or knowing how to do a task, one of the important ways of acquiring a skill is to participate in the action, not just as an observer or as a co-participant, but as the main doer who produces a journalistic output, such as a story or an edited story with a headline.

Learning by doing – the operative learning technique employed in the newsroom – is largely an implicit learning method. University courses, however, combine it with learning by studying, which uses explicit knowledge.

Those interviewed for this study favoured both kinds of learning.

To the question, “How can newcomers acquire journalism skills in the newsroom?”, Henningham points to the advantage of practical learning. “I think experience really is a magnificent teacher,” he says. “It’s not the only teacher but it is a great teacher. You learn things by doing, by writing stories.” He emphasises that his journalism school in Brisbane teaches reporting by making the students write a number of stories, often more than 100 during the course of a year. “Every knock-back you get in an interview, every new lead that you get or every idea – it’s a brick

wall but you can develop into something else. Every good interview, and every less successful interview, you learn from that. You learn all the time.

“And then bringing this information together and writing it as a story and finding that the subs have torn it to shreds and have totally rewritten it, and then comparing your raw story with what actually appears in the paper, you learn a great deal from that about the process, writing style, emphasis and news value.”

The learning Henningham refers to is a silent internalisation of observations on the part of the learner. It is implicit learning, the kind that is derived from practice or “doing”. Another significant contributor to implicit learning in the newsroom is the technique of learning from others, who could be colleagues at the same level or mentors at a far higher level of experience or rank. Learning from others takes place through informal conversations, gossiping about work and through observation of others at work.

“You must learn from others,” says Henningham. “Some people in the newsroom are very helpful and very good at mentoring. Others are less so. But you learn by observing, just chatting. But then, (new) recruits should never feel inhibited in showing their copy to established journalists – to a good reporter and writer – and say, what do you think, have you got any ideas. Most are pretty happy to share that information.”

Henningham also advocates mentoring and recalls the use of external mentors and educators, a process that externalises implicit learning through discussions. “I like to see mentoring schemes. I was involved in a mentoring scheme for newspapers set up a couple of years ago that assigned an early to mid-career journalist to a mentor. It was often an editor for another newspaper within the group. In some cases they chose educators to be mentors. We would look at their stories and give advice. This went on for a year. I thought it was a magnificent concept... Sometimes there are issues that they (the mid-career journalists) couldn’t talk to someone within the organisation, just some general advice on how they could handle something, whether they were doing something wrong or they didn’t understand what was expected of them.”

Henningham’s view is that beginners could learn skills:

1. By course work at a university or journalism college.
2. By doing (practice or active implicit learning).
3. By observing (passive implicit learning).
4. Through mentorship (by implicit and explicit learning).

Knight advocates the explicit method of skilling up for beginners. “If you do a degree from a reputable institution, you will get a package of skills appropriate to entry-level employment,” he says. “Beyond that, you would hope that (new journalists) would have intellectual skills to carry them through their career.” There are skills that cannot be taught effectively in the university. These are best learnt in the newsroom. Deadline pressure is an example. Another example is political nous and learning about how organisations operate. “We can’t reproduce that (in the university). How do you deal with aggressive editors, loopy sub-editors? Essentially you learn those things on the job... And networking. We can teach a little about networking. In fact, the long-term networks that you develop in universities are very valuable in your career. But the short-term networks you learn in the newsroom.”

Knight believes on-the-job training is not enough. “Because one might be blessed by being next to a fantastic reporter,” he says. “On the other hand, you might be sitting next to someone who has been doing it badly for a long time. You just reproduce (the bad habits of other people). The great advantage of a good university course is that it critically analyses best practice and the worst practice. That is if the course is working properly.”

Thus it’s a combination of classroom and newsroom for beginners. “Essentially a newsroom is a mixture of skills,” he says. “If I wanted someone to plug into the newsroom straightaway, to do general reporting, I would probably take someone with a degree from a good university. If I was prepared to invest in the basic training – have a meaningful cadetship program – I would think about taking someone with an arts degree or science degree. Or you can get someone with a science degree who has done a masters in journalism and thus save on all the training.”

Both Trinca and Erbacher prefer the implicit learning in the newsroom to be supplemented by formal training, either through mentorship, training provided by the news organisations or some form of education provided by universities. They observe that mentorship – the process of learning from the more experienced – is in decline.

“Years ago, we learned at the feet of our elders,” says Trinca. “Sitting in a newsroom, you overhear (and see) what they are doing. You go out on jobs with them. And you go out on jobs with photographers who often knew more than you did about how to get and you learnt by osmosis. I think a certain degree of that still happens. I think there is a bit more room for formal training on the job. It is expensive and I don’t know that it is going to happen...I would say the best thing that can

happen is to have younger journalists sit next to older journalists, not even necessarily as mentors. Journalism is too busy for mentorship on the job.” News organisations have to find a way of enabling journalists to learn from others, she says.

Journalists learn by doing, says Warren. The newsroom feedback they get for their work informs them and guides them in their learning. Team work benefits them because it facilitates feedback, either directly or indirectly through decisions made on whether or not to publish their stories and to what extent. “It’s difficult when it (feedback) is not explicit. You write a story and it’s not run in the paper, for example. There could be a whole lot of reasons for that. It could just have been squeezed out, it might have been superseded by another story, it might not have been right for the news of the day, or you didn’t write it very well, you didn’t prepare it very well – but you don’t know that unless you get that regular feedback.” Rejection is a powerful teacher, in his view.

In Cheetham’s perspective, newsroom interaction and feedback on a continuous basis are vital ingredients in the learning process. Journalists must be involved with the content generation processes in the newsroom. “They need to consume that media outlet (where they work) hugely,” he says. “And they need to engage with the people who create the content. And they need to do the work and reflect on the work they are doing as they start to do more and more of it. Hopefully as a part of that process, they are getting feedback from the newsroom too.” The feedback will “aid their reflection and learning”. Mentorship can be beneficial, but in a less important way than specific newsroom feedback on their work. A mentor, he says, is “like an extra security and a safety valve, a touch point, just another place to seek information and insight”.

Bennett sees value in both explicit and implicit learning. “A combination of training and on-the-job is required for skills development,” she says. “What they come with from universities plus mentoring on the job will work.” She also believes a journalism degree prepares journalists on the skills front, although from a knowledge perspective a non-journalism degree could be useful as it broadens the knowledge base. Journalism skills are ideally given in the final year of a university course. They can also be learnt in the newsroom through practice.

Gawenda does not think basic journalism skills are enough. Journalists need to see themselves as a brand – they need to bring something unique, such as knowledge or specialisation or a way of connecting with their audiences. This is why an

undergraduate degree in journalism may not work. Ideally, beginners are better off doing a degree in any subject other than journalism and then opting for journalism training at a higher degree level. “Increasingly the beat journalists and the general reporters are going to be under pressure,” he says. “Because they are the numbers that are first going to be cut. And that includes outsourcing sub-editing.” Even though newsrooms can provide the basic competencies, they won’t be enough.

**Table 8.3: Summary of experts’ views on how beginners acquire skills**

<b>Skills acquisition method</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Explicit or implicit</b>
Learn by doing	At uni, in newsroom	Mainly implicit
Learn from others, hearsay	At uni, in newsroom, from mentors, from documented sources	Explicit and implicit
Observation	In newsroom, at uni	Mainly implicit
Training	Outside newsroom	Mainly explicit
Coursework	At uni	Mainly explicit
Books, documents, videos	Outside newsroom	Explicit
On-the-job	In newsroom	Implicit
Mentorship	In newsroom, outside	Explicit and implicit

#### *Must-have skills for the newsroom*

Skills are capabilities for doing tasks. In this study, skills are divided into foundational skills and functional skills. Foundational skills are basic skills that are required across all media platforms. Examples are interviewing skills, networking skills, ability to manage people and tasks (for those in supervisory roles). For print media, writing skills are foundational skills. Functional skills are platform-specific.

In a multimedia newsroom, content is generated and published throughout the day. Working across media platforms creates the need to meet deadlines speedily and accurately, says Erbacher. “There is a rolling process throughout the day. There is a constant readiness and speed. At the same time you have to achieve the same results. It’s no good being the first online if you are not accurate. The same demands and pressures on people exist, but with shorter turnaround time,” he says. Multimedia platforms require the versatility to deal with old and new media such as Twitter and

Facebook. It is important, Erbacher says, to maintain maturity of reflection whatever the platform. With social media, the personal and professional sides merge. Journalists need to be alert about what and how they are communicating with their audiences.

Skills relating to socialisation among professionals are only learnt in the newsroom. These skills include networking within the newsroom and in the outside world in order to develop the contacts for reporting news stories relevant to their audiences. These traditional skills haven't disappeared from journalists' must-have list even as new skills in social media and technologically advanced applications are being added. Journalists add value in the long form formats such as magazines and in-depth analysis in newspapers while simultaneously showing their proficiency in the shorter formats such as Twitter, says Warren. "In terms of getting a more nuanced, detailed understanding of what is happening in the world, journalism remains absolutely critical. When we talk about social media taking over the breaking of daily news, or taking over the reporting of breaking news, we shouldn't forget that it's mainly journalists who are doing that. Twitter has actually become a journalistic medium. It has been more of a journalistic medium than any other social media. It reminds us of the fundamental journalistic principle of getting it right, getting it first and getting it short," he says.

Multimedia skills are becoming must-have skills, says Warren. Social media such as Twitter and Facebook allow journalists to manage their own brand, a function that used to be the preserve of the organisation but increasingly the responsibility of individual journalists.

Trinca says mere technological skills are not enough, despite the vast advances in technology and the increasing use of new media in multimedia newsrooms. "I am not interested in young people who just know how to use a database. They have to have an understanding beyond that. It (technology) can be a distraction also," she says.

Cheetham mentions grammar, spelling and writing ability as basic skills. Writing accurately and concisely is a must-have skill for the entry-level. People skills – being able to engage with people and getting information from them – as well as online search and research skills are foundational. Time management is increasingly important, he says.



Henningham says getting the story is a basic skill. Writing to deadline and being able to write well while facing time pressure is equally important. He also mentions multimedia skills, which are increasingly assumed to be part of the repertoire of journalists as they come into the newsroom.

Bennett includes new media skills as essential for all journalists. “For a long time now, the must-have skill has been the ability to file quickly for online and for other devices such as mobile. Also important are social media skills, such as the ability to find out what is trending and to find contacts or news sources and also as a promotional tool for their stories where appropriate in accordance with the social media policy of the company. So they must be able to use social media for sharing news, and for finding content and contacts.” In effect, these capabilities include the skill to break news and deal with news across many platforms.

“Also important is the ability to work in a broadcast environment – with video, for instance – whether they work with a video journalist who records on location. They need the ability to think visually,” she says. “Also useful will be the ability to record with video if they happen to be the only journalist on location or, take still images with their smart phones and send it back to the office. Also important is being aware of media law across the platforms, there are some traps for digital platform use for media law.”

***Table 8.4: Summary of experts’ views on essential skills for beginners***

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Related skill</b>
Write to deadline	Time management, handle pressure
Writing	Reporting, language skill
Multimedia, new media, broadcast	Twitter, Facebook, social media, net
Research	Online search
Socialisation	Networking, keeping contacts
Interviewing	Sourcing news
Breaking news	Online work, cross-platform work
Edit copy, video	Sub-editing

### *Functional or platform-specific skills*

Sub-editing is a good example of a skill that could be considered as either foundational or functional. Many experienced journalists would like to consider it fundamental to journalism. But many reporters, correspondents and senior columnists in a newspaper spend their entire careers without acquiring many of the sub-skills involved in sub-editing, such as headlining, caption-writing, micro-editing a story or page layout.

Other platform-specific skills for print include the use of technology such as page design software or copy editing software or photo editing software.

Henningham says his journalism courses teach “specific skills like subbing, photography, internet use, HTML, web design to a limited degree, multimedia skills like video and audio skills”. Shorthand is another skill he teaches. “It’s a good skill. No one has ever complained about being able to do shorthand.” Trinca echoes this view, saying shorthand is making a fashionable comeback as a good skill to have in the newsroom.

Knight does not think university courses should deal with technology-specific platform skills used in particular organisations. He considers editing to be a basic skill. “Entry-level journalists must be multi-skilled,” he says. “They must be able not only write in text, not only edit and understand how sub-editing operates, but they need to be able to do basic-level television interview, basic-level radio interview. They need to understand how that material can be incorporated into online platforms, which are multimedia.”

Many skills are embedded within a skill often, according to Bennett. Journalists need more specialised skills, and news organisations are slow to recognise it. “We think that because someone is a good print journalist they can then become a good person to pop up on TV and talk about their stories or do the same on video, not only to talk, but to write their own script and voice it,” she says. “Each of those individual subsets of skills is a different skill. In terms of appearing in front of a camera, writing a script is a different skill to writing a story for print. Voicing is again another skill. Supervising any edit process is yet another skill on top of that. So, it’s greater generalisation but with new specialisations.”

**Table 8.5: Summary of experts' views on functional skills for the convergent newsroom**

Functional skill	News delivery platform
Sub-editing	Print
Page layout	Print
Shorthand	Print
Photo editing	Print
Editing, layout software	Print
Video editing, production	Online, TV
Audio editing, production	Online, TV, radio
Web design	Online

#### *What newsroom leaders need*

Newsroom leaders – editors, their deputies and those who make key decisions for them and hope one day to step into their shoes – represent the top end of the spectrum of competencies in the newsroom. This does not mean that they excel in every competency. But they have more of what it takes to be competent in important areas, such as people management, strategic management (setting policies and guidelines), and daily agenda setting. The attributes, knowledge and skills required of them set standards for the newsroom. They create expectations for others' performance.

Newsroom leaders need courage, says Knight. "I expect that of journalists. What you expect from journalists, you expect more of it from editors," he says. "You would expect more integrity. You would expect a greater intellect – ability to absorb broader issues. You expect the same sort of things (as from journalists) but more of them (from editors). You would expect editors of major news organisations to have all those attributes. And you would expect high-level skills as well. I am a great believer that you don't ask people to do what you can't do yourself. If I am an editor and sending a reporter out on a job, I should know what reporting is." Knight believes editors must be able to do what their journalistic staff do: interview, report, write and edit.

Leaders need commitment to journalism, vision (a roadmap of the future for the newspaper or the website they edit), energy, honesty and the drive to motivate their staff, says Gawenda. “I don’t know what good people skills are, but you have to be honest with people, be honest with the people you work for and with.”

Editors must make a difference to the community, says Henningham. “You have to make an impact, to have a newspaper that is talked about in the community, that is making a difference, that is one of the major institutions in the community, and a source of good journalism by exposing corruption and incompetence, or suggesting new directions that could be taken within a city or a country, to challenge what is going on, to be a kind of an opposition, an opposition not just to the government but an opposition to the parliamentary opposition, to show their weaknesses as well. There is not as much of that as there should be at the moment.”

Managing people is a top-level skill, in Henningham’s view. “Supporting that staff management role is very important – getting the best from people, having loyalty, dedication, rewarding them appropriately for going good work, all those things are very important.”

Editors must use the internet version of the newspaper to complement the print version by offering extra material that might not be available in the print edition. “It is important for them to be saying, we are not simply commentating, we are not blogging about things, we are not giving a whole lot of opinion, we are giving you news, new information, we are not accepting the official line from governments or from other politicians, we are doing our own research,” Henningham says. The print version – the traditional media – needs to stand out as an exceptional offering that consumers can’t get anywhere else as one package, he says.

Newsroom leaders need decisiveness, says Trinca. “An editor has to make a lot of decisions everyday. Having to make those decisions while others stand by them is the biggest thing in the newsroom. It is a very hard thing to do... The leadership jobs are best done by people who can make decisions and stick by them. It is a factor of speed and the difficulties of meeting deadlines.” Trinca believes they need subtlety. “By subtlety, I mean a breadth in their imagination so that they don’t follow a template of the news. The notion that you can construct the front page or the first few pages of news with a formula (or a template) is not going to work. We have a very literate, sophisticated audience, even if they are not highly educated formally. What we are seeing are people who absolutely get what is going in the media – the notion of

surprise, the notion of difference, imagination, subtlety – you have got to have all those things, as well as the ability to decide.”

Managing people becomes a more important skill as journalists progress to leadership roles, according to Bennett. From task management to people management and being on top of a whole range of strategic issues consists of a series of leaps in skills. There is a steep learning curve of skills on the pathway to leadership.

Leaders must be good journalists and good managers, according to Cheetham. They need technical knowledge and skills. They must work hard and put their news sense to the test constantly.

Managing people is one of the subset of skills for newsroom leaders, albeit an important one, says Warren. Like football coaches, they need to get the best out of their staff today and see where the bright stars are going to be in the future. They need empathy and must convey enthusiasm. Editors will be judged by what their staff do. The reflected glory is theirs. Apart from people skills, they need courage and excellent news sense and task management skills to produce their paper.

An editor manages people and hence needs an effective reporting team, says Erbacher. Editors must be courageous and be willing to face the pressure of managing tasks, people and time. They must take responsibility for their own as well as other people's work. They also need knowledge of the wider world and the ability to present facts well. “I don't think the newspapers are here to reshape the world,” Erbacher says. “We are here to reflect the world. There has to be a dedication to truthfulness, objectivity – using a word that has gone out of fashion quite a lot – and fairness. That gets back to that skill to sort, select – there is so much information out there – in a way that has to be fairly, objectively presented.” They also need to manage resources.

**Table 8.6: Summary of experts' views on essential newsroom leaders' competencies**

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>
Courage	Technical knowledge	Manage people and their performance
Decisiveness	Wide knowledge of the world	Manage tasks, resources
Commitment to journalism	Different delivery platforms	Sort, select news, manage news agenda
Honesty, integrity, truthfulness, objectivity	News sense	Interviewing, writing, reporting and editing
General attributes of newsroom staff	Key knowledge areas of newsroom staff	Most skills of newsroom staff
Energy and power to motivate others		Strategic planning, vision
Empathy for staff		Community interaction
Subtlety, breadth of imagination		

### *Role of reflection*

Reflection, discussion and documentation of procedures are part of the learning processes involved in skills acquisition and development. They are important steps in converting implicit knowledge gained through practice into explicit knowledge.

Those involved in doing, however, do not get adequate time to reflect or document what they know. They impart their knowledge to others through implicit methods. Others learn from them by observing and by getting involved in team work. While it is beneficial to others and to the practitioners to take the time to reflect, the rigours of work do not allow reflection to occur consistently or with any regularity.

Journalists are not in a unique situation about the inability to find time to reflect, says Trinca. Lack of time is a central issue. "The medical profession has it, we

have it, academics, teachers, but I think we do need to reflect on it (practice) a little more,” she says. “Trying to get people within the profession to talk about news is complex. It ought to be done in the language of journalism, not in the language of the academy. People (in the newsroom) reject the kind of conceptualisation that is done in the academy. It is difficult to access that language. It is language that doesn’t have any connection with the people who are doing the job. Therefore then it is easy to be dismissed.”

Reflection, thus, has little value if it is outsourced. Practitioners need to reflect – it is not enough if they take part in the reflective processes set in place at the university. Newsrooms must find their own discourse of reflection; classroom language may not suit them.

The reluctance to accept classroom lessons does not diminish the role of universities. Reflection is a requirement even if the practitioner makes an unwilling student. When asked if there are things that are best learnt at a university rather than in a newsroom, Knight points to ethics and reflective learning. “We teach people how to analyse their journalism. The office doesn’t give time to do that. Good journalists are always thinking about not only what they do, but also how they do it and why they do it,” he says.

Journalists need some time away from the newsroom, says Henningham. Much of the initial knowledge that graduates gain through coursework is lost in the first few years of practice, but some of it gets reinforced. A mid-career education is essential to make more meaning out of practice, he says. “I certainly encourage anyone I know to apply for scholarships or study opportunities.”

Bennett is a believer in reflection outside the work area. “I suspect you only get deeper reflection when you take someone out of the newsroom either for training or for a session where you reflect upon things deliberately,” she says. “Otherwise, the day moves on and the following day there may be another story and the cycle starts again, and the reflective moment passes.” Reflection needs a separate environment and some deliberation.

That journalists do not reflect on their practice is not true, says Warren. “I think journalists do reflect in the sense that journalists are themselves the greatest consumers of journalism. They will be reading papers, magazines and books, they will be monitoring the internet, they will be watching documentaries. Journalists are in a continual process of keeping themselves informed. Journalists know a little about

a lot and then a lot about whatever their area of expertise is. So I think journalists do do that process of reflection, but it does often need to be a more detailed process of reflection.”

Gawenda says journalists must find the time to reflect, if only because they are accountable for what they do to their audiences. They need to be able to know what they are doing and explain it to others. Universities provide a platform for reflection, he says. Cheetham says reflection takes place over coffee with other journalists. It happens just outside the newsroom when journalists meet and talk about their job. More formal discussions will aid the process. Erbacher says newsrooms have traditionally been time-poor, but the wisdom of reflection comes with experience.

#### *Mid-career training: newsroom v classroom*

Apart from providing time out for reflection, there is a strong case for mid-career training. The knowledge base with which journalists start their career gets eroded with time, says Warren. “As a craft, we make a mistake in underestimating the importance of ongoing training,” he says. “No other profession, no other craft, says, you know everything you need to know by the time you are 25, and thereafter for the next 40 years you just live off that. What you put in by way of training by the time you are 25 is what you draw down for the next 40 years.”

Newsrooms are taking on the training function that would normally be assigned to universities. This is their verdict on the inadequacy of university curriculum in journalism, says Henningham. He points out many reasons for the disconnect between universities and newsrooms and why journalists do not automatically think of the university as a training ground for skills development and knowledge acquisition about journalism practice. “A great deal of journalism canon is taught in the newsroom. That is why industry has taken on training itself. It is a little bit of a putdown in a way to universities. If universities were really doing their job well, then Fairfax and News (Ltd) wouldn’t have to develop their own training except as something like icing on the cake, to refine the basic training and education.”

Journalism courses also tend to critique practice rather than develop it. Journalism educators fail to stress the positive aspects of journalism. “A cyclical approach, yes, in and out of education and industry would be good for both parties,” says Henningham. Just as journalists return to the university for a break from implicit learning, educators must pursue practice to keep in touch with industry’s concerns.



“Changes have happened in the industry that have been independent of anything that has been said in the academy.” Hence industry tends to ignore what happens in universities. A two-way exchange – from the newsroom to the classroom and vice versa – will be beneficial for both. He advocates a partnership between the two.

Mid-career training must encompass all areas of journalism, says Cheetham. “I would have thought that journalists would have 99 per cent competency in a metropolitan newspaper. I would have thought they would be above industry average, that they would be above the competent level, almost brilliant, but that is not the case.” Their competencies leave much to be desired and only training can fill the gaps.

Mid-career training can be administered either online or face-to-face, says Bennett. News organisations can make a decision on the mode of training on a case-by-case basis.

In-house training is ideal for legal issues and for ethics, Erbacher says. For externally given training or education, the level of understanding and relationship between universities and newsrooms has to improve and mature. “There is a bit of a them-and-us between some academics and journalists who like to think they can’t be told anything in the world. You get a lot of resistance from journalists who are prepared to critically evaluate other people’s work but then who go to ground if someone wants to turn the attention back on them. I have seen it so often.”

Newsrooms provide opportunities for mid-career journalists to specialise, Trinca says. Some areas of specialisation are built on knowledge gained in the university, but there are others – such as court reporting, industrial rounds, education reporting, editing and news production – that are built up in the newsroom. The knowledge required is implicitly learnt or gained through patchwork reading and conversations with subject experts during interviews.

**Table 8.7: Summary of experts' views on journalism training and education**

<b>How administered</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Drawbacks</b>
<b>In-house training</b>	Uses practitioners' language	Tends to be platform or organisation-specific
	Uses available time	Time is often scarce
	Uses known experts	Misses outside input
	Uses known frameworks	Misses news frameworks
<b>University education</b>	Dedicated learning environment	Costly in terms of time, money for organisation, and individual
	Expertise available	Industry input missing

### **Implications of findings**

The interviews with subject matter experts clarified the underlying concepts behind the competency components. The interviewees advocated a strong set of competencies for beginners and newsroom leaders. Divergences among their viewpoints showed the difficulties in arriving at a consensus on required competencies in the newsroom. But progression through the newsroom was seen as an essential stage in mid-career competencies development. Learning by doing and situational learning evolved as aspects of mid-career training that reinforced and developed a range of foundational and functional competencies.

The competency framework evolving from the interviews, shown below, emphasises a wide range of competencies. It confirms the model emerging from the survey, discussed in the previous chapter. In the view of experts, the newsroom is an essential part of a journalist's career development. Team work, in their view, ensures professionalism and adherence to ethical principles and minimum standards of acceptability for the audiences. Team work, learning by doing and mentoring in the newsroom develop the competencies of mid-career journalists to appropriate levels. However, the community of practice, while being an essential requirement, is not a sufficient condition for the development of mid-career competencies. Deep specialisation and reflection are two competencies that will benefit with external help, especially from universities and training programs.

**Table 8.8: Competencies framework incorporating experts' perspective**

	Attributes	Knowledge areas	Skills
<u>Newsroom leader or editor level.</u> <i>Development through practice, training, short courses or university-level courses.</i>	Decisive	Know a lot about many areas, people	Plan for newsroom's future
	Charismatic	Know about staff and staffing needs	Budget for newsroom, recruit
	Courageous	Audience knowledge	Articulate vision
	Inspiring	Advertising, circulation	Lead, decide, influence
	Show subtlety / breadth of interest	Organisation knowledge	Manage people, resources
	Honesty, objectivity	Deep specialisation	Plan news agenda
<u>Mid career competencies</u> – largely developed in community of practice. <i>Development through learning by doing and with help from mentors, co-workers and short courses.</i>	Committed to journalism	Media industry knowledge	Mentor
	Empathetic	Wide knowledge of world	Reflect
	Interested in issues	Specialised area knowledge	Specialisation skills
	Keen to specialise, details-oriented	Functional areas knowledge	Platform-related functional skills
	Lateral thinking, imaginative	A little knowledge of many areas	Manage many tasks, multimedia
	Hard-working	Technology, software, multimedia	Edit
	Persistent	Finance	Break news
	Responsible, accountable	Local, national government	Network / develop contacts
	Deadline-oriented	National culture – music, arts, literature	Social media skills
<u>Beginner - Pre-newsroom, acquired at university. Foundational.</u> <i>Learning by doing.</i>	Adaptable	Legal knowledge, courts	Social skills, interact, listen
	Accurate	Liberal arts – history, politics, economics	Manage sources, reporting
	Showing initiative	Current affairs, broad reading	Research
	Enthusiastic	Grammar, spelling	Interview
	Curious	Common sense, media knowledge	Write, communicate

Experts emphasise the simultaneous need for specialisation and a varied spread of skills and knowledge areas as increasingly relevant in multimedia newsrooms. Know-how has to deepen and widen, in their view. Convergent newsrooms require it and to some extent develop it.

Beginners include those with 0-2 years' experience. At entry level (level zero), their competencies are largely pre-newsroom, presumably having developed them at the university. The ideal beginners, according to the experts, enter the newsroom with many attributes (curiosity, enthusiasm, adaptability, initiative, and accuracy), some knowledge (current affairs, grammar and spelling, history, politics and economics) and a few skills (write, interview and research). It is important to note that beginners are not viewed as being merely street-smart and enthusiastic, ready to be developed into journalists in the newsroom. Many competencies, especially attributes and knowledge areas that are seen as foundational and staying with them throughout their career, are expected of them even before they enter the community of practice, as indicated in the table above. Fewer skills are expected, except the foundational skills of writing, communicating, interviewing and researching.

Knowledge areas and skills of newsroom journalists are largely developed in the newsroom. But, as indicated by some of the experts interviewed, beginners are in a stronger position in a competitive situation against others vying for the same position when they are equipped with more competencies, such as multimedia skills and reporting skills.

The interviews reveal that the newsroom is a learning centre and team work a teacher, approximating and often rivaling the universities or other dedicated centres of knowledge. This has implications for both newsrooms and universities, as discussed below.

Immersion in the newsroom develops the competencies of mid-career journalists. A large number of skills and knowledge areas are added to their competencies sets in the newsroom, where they learn by doing and from mentors and colleagues as they progress through mid-career roles. These include competencies relating to legal knowledge (related skill being court reporting), specialisation (finance, editing, multimedia) and breadth of knowledge and skills (being able to do a bit of many things relating to news journalism).

Although the table above shows an ascending order of competencies through mid-career development in the newsroom, it is only an indication. The order in which

the competencies are developed is dependent on the emphasis placed by newsroom priorities. As shown in the previous chapter, it is possible to calibrate the competencies for specific newsrooms, outlining the requirements for every stage of a journalist's experience in the newsroom or every position. Such detail-rich competencies modeling can only be developed with practice. It is a recommendation of this study that models be developed to a high level of details so that the models become useful instruments in the planning process.

As the table points out, the competencies developed in the newsroom are accretive – they are added incrementally over the years on top of in-use competencies. The over-layering of competencies is one of the implications behind the term “experienced”. It is also an indication of the tacit knowledge accrued by individuals and by newsroom teams. The community of practice derives a collective benefit from “experienced” journalists, as they mentor others and take on an informal training role.

The competencies of newsroom leaders, like those of beginners, are developed both within the community of practice and outside it, through educational institutions and other life experiences. The interviews with experts indicate that the progression of newsroom journalists into a leadership position is not automatic or seamless. The leaders' required attributes (courage, charisma, decisiveness, subtlety, for example), knowledge areas (audience knowledge, knowledge about staff and staffing, for example) and skills (lead, plan, influence, for example) are often beyond the scope of newsrooms and newsroom trainers to provide. By inference, this could mean that newsroom leaders, like beginners, benefit the most from externally provided training and education. Learning by doing and the community of practice as training instruments are of limited use at the beginning and at the top end of the career in the newsroom.

Besides, the infusion of new knowledge and skills in the community of practice, as when multimedia platforms are introduced in a convergent newsroom, requires external inputs.

These aspects of training requirements for beginners and newsroom leaders, outlined above, and the requirements of convergent newsrooms need careful consideration by universities planning changes to their journalism curriculum. News organisations setting out to embark on in-house training programs too need to factor in the limitations of “experienced” journalists within their communities of practice.

The research question posed in this study about the development of competencies (RQ3) is answered to a large extent by the findings of the interviews. In conjunction with the survey and content analysis, discussed in the previous two chapters, this study now has three perspectives on newsroom journalists' competencies that emphasise the relevance of the competencies model.

## 9. CONCLUSION

By seeking to answer the three research questions posed in this study, an analysis of the findings of the three methodologies, outlined in the previous three chapters, produced a competencies framework that categorised and listed the competencies of journalists and outlined how they could be developed.

This chapter summarises the findings of this study and examines them against the research questions. It analyses the implications of the findings for journalists and suggests areas of future research on newsroom competencies.

Although the literature review notes that studies in journalism have separately dealt with the skills (Fahmy, 2008; Berkeley, 2009; Mensing, 2010; Nordenstreng, 2008; Singer, 2008), knowledge areas (Pew Research Centre project, 2010; Butt, 2003); and values or attributes of newsroom journalists, they do not show any evidence of a newsroom model that draws these competency components together and explains how the framework can benefit journalists. As industry-wide technological changes affect traditional print and other single-platform newsrooms and transform them into multimedia production platforms (Lawson-Borders, 2003; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006), journalists working in them have to adapt and acquire new competencies, while developing those that served them well in the past.

### Research questions

The research questions for this study arose out of a quest for a new framework that could address this need:

*RQ1: How can traditional newsrooms transforming into converging newsrooms benefit from a competencies model in preparing for the immediate future?*

*RQ2: What are the competencies required for a journalist in a traditional print newsroom that is being transformed into a convergent newsroom in Australia?*

*RQ3: How can competencies be developed for a journalist in a transforming newsroom in Australia?*

A combination of three methods was used in this study so that the shortcomings of any single methodology will likely be minimized by the other methodologies. The three methodologies were:

1. Content analysis of job descriptions stating requirements for specific roles.
2. Survey canvassing the viewpoints of newsroom journalist in Australia. This survey was also incorporated open-ended interview-format questions.
3. Interviews with subject matter experts (SMEs), who had proven long-standing involvement in the newsroom that equipped them with experience and expertise on matters relating to the newsroom.

The findings from the three methodologies used in this study showed how a competency model would provide a guiding framework for newsroom journalists facing the uncertainties of a technologically challenged industry. RQ1 focused on the competencies aspect of the newsroom, which is undergoing changes in order to incorporate multimedia platforms.<sup>25</sup>

A competency model provides a framework that enables organisations to identify the competencies they require in the newsroom and develop them by building their own competency model using methodologies similar to those used in this study.

RQ2 demands a three-part response about the competency components required for a newsroom journalist. The three chapters on the findings of the three methodologies used in this study provide this response. A unified response to RQ2 is the competency model itself (Tables 7.17 and 8.8) described at the end of chapters 7 and 8, with the components identified. The model collates the competency components – attributes, knowledge areas and skills – through the three methods.

The three methods reveal competencies across two dimensions – foundational and functional. A third dimension implied in the findings is the experiential dimension, referred to as stages of professional development (Rodolfa et al, 2005) or levels of maturity (Gillies & Howard, 2003). The content analysis divides the experiential dimension into six levels, but the analysis of the interviews with subject matter experts assumed a three-level division – beginner, mid-career and newsroom leader. For the competencies model, it is convenient to think of experiential dimension as a continuous progression from a base level to the top.

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<sup>25</sup> Ryfe (2009) observes in his study on changes affecting traditional media that “the culture of professionalism in the newsroom is remarkably resilient and resistant to change”.



The model leads to RQ3, which is about the development of competencies. Where and how can they be developed? As discussed earlier in this chapter, the foundational competencies are a function of school and university education coupled with personal striving prior to work. However, these competencies are reinforced through constant interactions within the community of practice.

Throughout this study, an analysis has been made of the distinction between tacit knowledge produced through implicit learning in a community of practice and explicit knowledge gained through methods of explication such as those practised in a classroom or through training sessions. It has also been observed earlier in this study that tacit knowledge needs to be made explicit through various means if it has to be transmitted to those who are not within the community of practice. Constructing a competency model for the newsroom, it has been argued, is one way of identifying and externalising knowledge discovered within the community of practice. Identifying it is the first step to documenting, developing and transmitting it. Externalising knowledge involves a series of steps that cohere into a developmental program that news organisations may devise for journalists. Training and development become possible only if competencies are identified first.

The capability of competency models to reveal the components of tacit knowledge and provide a structure for its use within the community of practice provides the rationale for its use in the newsroom and thus addresses RQ1.

### **Mid-career learning strategies for journalists**

The competency model at the end of the previous chapter (Table 8.8), incorporates the results of the three methodologies in this study. It provides the attributes, knowledge areas and skills for a traditional print newsroom transforming into a multimedia newsroom. They have been collated from the findings of the three methodologies used in this study. A possible observation about the attributes is that most professions require them. But it is not attributes alone that constitute the competencies set of a journalist. Knowledge and skills are equally important, as well as the combined strength of all the competencies. All journalists require a minimal set of foundational competencies (Chu et al, 2012) which drive journalistic performance at all levels, contributing to best practice in combination with the requisite functional

competencies<sup>26</sup>. Although foundational competencies are essential requirements, they are not enough. Any mid-career role in the newsroom also requires other competencies, commensurate with the role and experience, which determine the expectation of performance.

“Mid-career” encompasses a large time frame, from the beginning stages of a career when a newsroom role is assigned to the end of a journalist’s career in a community of practice. This broad definition includes beginners with just a year’s experience to those in leadership roles with many decades’ experience as well as those in between. The training and development of mid-career journalists, therefore, becomes an activity that involves every journalist in the newsroom. Even though time is set aside for training programs – i.e. those using documented knowledge – implicit learning is a continuous process in the community of practice and addresses many training requirements for journalists. Implicit learning contributes to the acquisition and refinement of both foundational and functional competencies.

Functional competencies, as defined earlier in this study, are role-specific and platform-specific. Unlike foundational competencies, which relate to tasks and activities that cut across all platforms of news delivery and which are largely transportable from one organisation to another, functional competencies have a specific relevance in relation to organisational, contextual, platform-related and role-related needs. They may or may not be transportable. They are largely developed in the community of practice and transferred from an adept to a novice implicitly and during the process of doing work. This mode of learning by doing is incorporated in the terms “experience” and “experienced journalists” as used in this study. Experience levels, therefore, can be as detailed as the organisation wishes them to be. Journalists may be classified simply as “novices” and “experienced”, or finer distinctions and experiential levels could be created. Two methodologies in this study – content analysis and survey of journalists – use experiential levels based on years spent in the newsroom. This is a commonly understood division but it must be emphasised that years of experience do not automatically translate into the existence of specific competencies. A competencies-based division of experience levels is, therefore, more appropriate to distinguish the capabilities of journalists. This can only be made

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<sup>26</sup> Chu et al (2012), outlining a competency model for professional psychologists, observe that “foundational competencies create the underpinnings for functional competencies”.

possible through the continued use of a competencies model. Richness of detail and greater granularity accrue to the model with the creation of many experiential levels based on competencies.

Mid-career journalists need many functional competencies – mainly knowledge areas and skills – that are closely related to their areas of specialisation. Knowledge of specialized areas, such as financial markets or page layout or section editing, is a notable feature of the knowledge areas requirement of mid-career journalists. Specialised skills required also include publishing software-related multimedia skills.

Although the competency model presents editors and newsroom leaders (those who perform an executive function in the newsroom) as a separate group, all newsroom leaders are not the same. A newsroom leader often brings unique attributes, knowledge and skills. Differentiating between routine expertise, which “enables people to solve problems quickly on a daily basis”, and adaptive expertise, which “enables people to solve novel problems” (Carpenter, 2009, pp 292).

The competency model presented in this study is a generic model that requires adaptation and modification to suit individual newsrooms and journalists. It is recommended that newsrooms construct their own models using methodologies similar to those used in this study and deriving their own model.

### **Implications of findings**

Since the aims and direction of this study were informed by the researcher’s “newsroom insider” experience as a participant observer, a preliminary reading of job advertisements for newsroom positions had the effect of either confirming or correcting newsroom experience-based assumptions. The **content analysis** was designed as a preliminary inquiry into the competencies required for a traditional print newsroom in transformation. It had some advantages as the first of the methodologies to be used. The coding of data yielded categories that suited the purposes of this study by establishing the relevance of competencies as practical and useful concepts in a convergent newsroom. The competency categories that emerged from the content analysis laid the foundation for the study.

Content analysis showed that job advertisements, on which the content analysis was based, reflected the requirements of newsrooms along competencies-

based formats that were implicit in the job description and stated criteria of requirements. It is one of the key aims of this study to elicit the criteria and forge them into a framework that can be used in newsrooms for the development, training, grading, progression, assessment, classification and recruitment of journalists.

The demand being concentrated for mid-career professionals identified them as the most mobile and most in need of updating their competencies. Mid-career, as stated earlier in this study, covers all those who are not beginners or newsroom leaders. It encompasses a broad experiential spectrum – from about two years to two decades or more.

Although the advertisements were not selected for analysis on the basis of their multimedia requirements (the key determinant was that the newsroom requiring the journalists be metropolitan and large – containing more than 100 journalists), multimedia-related terms were mentioned oftener than traditional media requirements. Content analysis also showed journalists seeking employment at any level in newsroom were required to show an adequate knowledge of media industry, media processes and social media. Whether or not a university degree was a prerequisite for journalism roles emerged as a newsroom issue during the analysis of data. Also significant was the importance of specialisation in an area of journalism, such as economics and national affairs. Both these issues were discussed through interviews with subject matter experts.

The results of the **survey** were more detailed than those yielded by the content analysis. The questions were specifically designed to elicit competency components for the various experiential stages in the newsroom.

The qualitative questions aimed to expand the list of competencies for journalists. As a consequence, the open-ended part of the survey yielded a large list of competencies that were not mentioned in the tick-box questions. It could possibly be incorporated into a library or master list of competencies for newsroom journalists, with scope for expansion if more journalists' responses are included. It showed newsroom leaders attempting to create a master list of relevant competencies for journalists could easily obtain it by asking the practitioners working within it to complete a quick 20-minute survey of questions.

The survey's responses were useful in creating idealized profiles of journalists at various experiential levels, once again demonstrating that a newsroom creating its

own competency matrix could survey its journalists to efficiently construct competency profiles of journalists at different levels in this manner.

A beginner with 0-2 years' experience, as the survey showed, required a number of attributes, knowledge areas and skills that could be immediately usable in the newsroom. The large number of attributes, knowledge areas and skills suggested by the newsroom journalists for beginners required them to be equipped with some competencies prior to joining the community of practice. The beginner must be university-educated with all the attributes and knowledge areas the term minimally implied: eager to learn, keen to network with people; quick with ideas; versatile communicator in speech and writing; a multi-tasker; a deadline-oriented writer (an attribute that transfers from assignment-writing); a person of wide reading with the potential to become a specialist at least in the subject of choice at the university; reflective and thoughtful in the choice of words (another attribute fostered at the university through assignment-writing and long-form writing); and adept at the use of technologically driven multimedia systems.

The survey indicated that a mid-career journalist must handle various newsroom tasks (such as generating ideas, finding news sources, interviewing, writing, editing and managing edition-related issues and people) with accuracy and reliability, communicate well, be curious and interested in a wide range of subjects as well as be capable of dealing with some specialized areas such as economics, business or the arts. They should be resourceful generalists and specialists in some areas. The more experienced among the mid-level journalists were expected to mentor and train others as well as undertake more responsible newsroom roles that involved managing production schedules and junior journalists. As mid-career journalists – those who fill the bulk of newsroom roles except the top leadership roles and the beginners' – contribute more to the community of practice and derive more training and development out of it, the competencies framework would benefit from their inputs and be of benefit to them. The survey responses indicated that a community of practice could serve as a valuable source of knowledge about itself. The practitioners' reflection on practice was evident in the survey results. It was an outcome that externalized the knowledge implicit within the community of practice.

The profile of a newsroom leader, the survey showed, was that of a journalist who, whether emerging from within the organisation or “imported” from another, combined the practical experience of working in a newsroom with people

management skills (to hire new staff and exact high quality output from the staff) and the all-round knowledge of world affairs as well as processes within the news organisation, including aspects of circulation, marketing and advertising. The leader would be a constant teacher and learner, a doer and thinker, an overseer of (short-term) tasks and (long-term) strategies, and one who could view the newsroom from the news producer and audience perspectives, reflecting deeply on the origination and effects of producing news. Whatever the leadership style – whether authoritarian or consensual – the newsroom leader would need a vast array of competencies, matched only by those expected of a newsroom beginner.

The survey yielded detailed information about competencies: it related the competencies to the experiential stages so as to provide a coherent competency development perspective. With the combination of the two methodologies, it was possible to construct a competency model for the traditional print newsroom becoming a convergent, multiplatform news delivery centre.

The development from the novice stage to the mentor level, the survey showed, was a progression of competencies. Attributes and knowledge areas, in the pre-newsroom stage, are acquired from the contexts of upbringing, personal learning and formal education (school and university). Some skills too are acquired in the pre-workplace stages of life, such as writing, researching, teamwork, listening, asking questions (interviewing to elicit answers for a news story), generating ideas and writing to deadline (which is inculcated from student days). The survey indicated many competencies are learned during a journalist's progression through the community of practice.

The eight **SMEs interviewed** presented a diversity of viewpoints, having been selected from rival news organisations and from across a spectrum of stakeholder perspectives.

They differed in their views on:

- The sustainability of traditional print media newsrooms and the future direction of news industry;
- The mode of journalism education required for newsroom journalists;
- The specific functional competency components for journalists in the multimedia newsroom at various stages of their career.

They agreed on:

- The value of a university degree for journalists;
- The foundational competencies required for all journalists;
- The role of reflection, whether through training or discussion groups, in instilling and developing competencies during the mid-career stage;
- The combined influence of the twin processes of learning – learning by formal procedures and learning by doing in a community of practice – on competency development in the multi-platform newsroom.

The SMEs in this study acknowledged the strong role of communities of practice as guardians and nurseries of competencies. The symbiosis between communities of practice (where tacit knowledge is produced through implicit learning and learning by doing) and universities or other centres of education (where explicit knowledge is gathered, stored and dispensed) was considered by them to be a desirable outcome, but the classroom-newsroom dichotomy, in their view, was bound to persist. The SMEs emphasised the benefit of an osmotic exchange between universities and newsrooms, but observed the newsrooms were reluctant to relinquish the notion of primacy of the newsroom in educating the mid-career journalists. Newsrooms still preferred implicit learning as the most relevant method for journalists to acquire skills and knowledge – learning at the feet of more experienced journalists while working, as one of the SMEs opined – but there had to be a continuous search for more time-efficient and cost-effective methods of acquiring and imparting both skills and knowledge.

Newsroom journalists were not perceived by the experts as being averse to learning through classrooms and classrooms had much to learn from newsrooms about creating a more relevant curriculum. The relevance of competencies acquired in the classroom for beginners in the newsroom was seen as self-evident, but mid-career education was still entrenched in the communities of practice, as the SMEs acknowledged. The experts interviewed from the academic side pointed out that competencies in the newsroom could become obsolete, especially with technological changes. Without the infusion of competencies from outside, newsrooms could be faced with their own inability to innovate. New platforms of multimedia delivery required the power of new skills (software skills, for example), attributes (innovation, for instance) and knowledge (that could be transferred quickly before practice became widespread).

The three methodologies in this study demonstrated how convergent newsrooms required a mixture of old and new competencies at different levels. These competencies were shown to be evolutionary and accretive, built on top of each other over many experiential levels. Many competencies were indicated as pre-existing the journalist's initial stage in the newsroom. This demonstrated the importance of university or classroom education.

### **Contribution of study**

The concept of competencies is not new but it has rarely been applied to the newsroom. It enables the assessment of journalists' performance in terms of their attributes, knowledge and skills – their capabilities as well as their intent and willingness to undertake and execute a journalistic task. While it has a role to play in a performance review, its utility in the newsroom planning exceeds its value as an index of personal capabilities. It is also a collective index of a group of professionals in an ever-changing community of practice. A competencies audit can reveal the tacit knowledge within the newsroom – the know-how of its members that they do not know how to express. The competencies audit process through its transparent inquiries unfolds the hidden areas of a community of practice. It documents and makes explicit the competency components implicitly followed in practice which contribute to performance despite being subliminal and invisible. It converts know-how into documented knowledge. A competency model in practice is the first step towards mid-career development of journalists, and of the newsroom as a collective performance unit. It contributes to and becomes a part of what the newsroom knows about itself. It is an act of self-reflection that instantly illuminates.

When a competencies audit, whether annual or periodical, is integrated into a newsroom's routine ways of organising its staff, it can become a useful planning tool and a guide for the future by enabling a comparison of the snapshot of current competencies against the ideally required competencies for a forthcoming phase. For a convergent newsroom, which is involved in managing the change of work practices resulting from the addition of multimedia platforms of content delivery, the competency model and the audit undertaken with it can become important change management tools. The model, if used with strategic intent, becomes a compass for the future, a directional instrument that enables forward planning for competencies.



At the simplest level, the competencies model, if adapted to individual newsrooms, can indicate the competencies that need to be developed for a convergent newsroom. For individuals, it can indicate the areas that require training. The model, when used as a competencies audit, can indicate the direction for curriculum development. As an educational tool, it can be used by trainers and newsroom executives involved in planning competencies training for journalists.

When the competencies required for performing a newsroom-specific role are completely described in a model, it can become a recruitment aid. The role descriptors in terms of competencies can be used in job advertisements and applicants can be checked against the requirements. A similar use is possible for career progression interviews.

For journalism research, the competency model hopefully opens up a neglected area of study by focusing on the talent aspect of journalists.

In presenting the competency model as a composite answer to the research questions, this study intends to stimulate its use in newsrooms and journalism classrooms. Universities can use the model to develop aspects of curriculum targeting the competencies of newsroom journalists at mid-career levels. This can result in an exchange of knowledge and skills between the newsroom and the classroom, with experienced journalists contributing their expertise to courses aimed at competencies development and mid-career journalists benefiting from them. Ideally, the learning loop that started with cadet-level journalists entering the newsroom as beginners fresh from the university will be closed with the journalists returning to university for curriculum development and for further study.

### **Limitations of this study**

The model presented in this study as an answer to the research questions is preliminary in nature. It requires more details and descriptions of competencies. However, these can only be furnished by the newsrooms adapting the model for their use. The study could have benefited from the assistance of more researchers, as team work would produce a more robust competencies framework capable of being used in different newsrooms.

Validity and relevance of the model would improve vastly with contributions from many researchers representing geographical diversity. It is most likely that

different stages of convergence in the newsroom require adaptable and flexible models. The model's adaptability requires to be tested by actual use. Until then, it remains just a possibility. However, if adopted widely by newsrooms, its limitations can be overcome by constant refinement and improvement.

A fundamental hurdle in its adoption would be the question of industry scepticism, with newsrooms having survived this long without the use of a competency model. This, however, is a question convergent newsrooms will have to answer for themselves as the old rules of survival no longer apply and new solutions are warranted during times of change.

### **Future research areas**

The competency model presented in this study is a powerful tool for discovering knowledge about the communities of practice within newsrooms. It sheds light on implicit learning by indicating the performance outcome of journalists working in newsrooms. However, many aspects of competencies and their transference from one member of the community to another are yet to be studied. Further research can also reveal how specific knowledge areas and skills can be developed in a newsroom.

The model can be explored as a tool for curriculum development in universities. Further studies may indicate knowledge areas and skills that universities can focus on that may make their course offerings more industry-specific or more comprehensive.

In the light of changes occurring within newsrooms, the contribution that universities can make to journalistic performance in newsrooms deserves further attention from researchers, practitioners and educators. Only then will the learning cycle that begins at universities and traverses through newsrooms be complete.

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## APPENDIX A - SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

*This appendix provides the survey questionnaire, which was the focus of analysis in Chapter 7. The questions were posted on a website and a link was emailed to prospective respondents.*

Survey on changing newsroom capabilities - queries to [pi971@uow.edu.au](mailto:pi971@uow.edu.au) or [padmaiyer7@gmail.com](mailto:padmaiyer7@gmail.com). Every question needs an answer. If skipping a question, write "Sorry, can't think of a response". Email Padma Iyer about technical issues.

### I. VIEWS ON BEGINNER LEVEL JOURNALISTS (0-2 YEARS' EXPERIENCE)

These questions relate to qualifications, attributes, knowledge levels and skills or capabilities of a beginner.

1. Ideally, what should be a beginner's academic qualification, in your view? Click one of the boxes below.

- a. High school
- b. High school + diploma
- c. Graduate (any)
- d. Postgraduate (any)
- e. Journalism degree
- f. Other (please specify

2. Curiosity and a nose for news are commonly identified as essential attributes for a beginner. What other attributes are essential for a beginner? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Essential and 5 for Most Essential.

Least Essential      2      3      4      Most Essential

- a. Enthusiastic  
about assignments
- b. Fearless with  
news sources
- c. Eager to learn  
from other journalists
- d. Accurate with details
- e. Flexible with time

3. Please suggest at least two attributes not mentioned above that you think are essential for beginner journalists. This will greatly help the survey.

---

4. Beginner journalists are expected to be well-informed in various knowledge areas. Which of these knowledge areas are most needed for a beginner? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

Least Required      2      3      4      Most Required

- a. Media law / ethics
- b. Grammar/ spelling
- c. Know about local  
community
- d. Specialised knowledge  
(such as sports/ finance/  
arts)
- e. National history

5. Please suggest at least two knowledge areas that are not mentioned above but which you think are most essential for beginner journalists.

---

6. Beginners are expected to show an ability to write a good first draft of a news story. What other capabilities are required from a beginner? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

Least Required      2      3      4      Most Required

- a. Use Facebook/ Twitter  
and other social media
- b. Write blogs
- c. Work with video camera
- d. Learn and use shorthand
- e. Suggest story ideas
- f. Find and manage  
news sources

7. Please suggest at least two capabilities missing in the list above that you think are essential for beginner journalists.

---

8. In which areas does a beginner need intensive training? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Needed and 5 for Most Needed.

Least Needed                      2                      3                      4                      Most Needed

- a. Manage sources
- b. Generate story ideas
- c. Write news
- d. Manage time
- e. Shorthand

9. Please suggest at least two areas not listed above that you think are essential for beginners to be trained in.

---

10. What is the best source of training for a beginner? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Ideal and 5 for Most Ideal.

Least Ideal                      2                      3                      4                      Most Ideal

- a. Newsroom mentors
- b. Others at same level
- c. In-house training program
- d. University courses
- e. Others (please write your suggestions below)

---

## II. VIEWS ON EXPERIENCED JOURNALISTS (2-8 YEARS' EXPERIENCE)

11. Experienced journalists are expected to show initiative at work. What other attributes do you expect from an experienced journalist? Select a number on a scale, with 1 for Least Essential and 5 for Most Essential.

Least Essential                      2                      3                      4                      Most Essential

- a. Deadline awareness
- b. Initiative with  
story ideas
- c. Flexibility with time
- d. Courage in tackling  
bigger issues
- e. Accuracy with details

12. Please suggest at least two attributes not listed above that you think are essential for experienced journalists.

---

13. Which of these knowledge areas are required from an experienced journalist?

Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

- |   | Least Required | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Required |
|---|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| a. Media law / ethics   |                |   |   |   |               |
| b. Specialisation in<br>sport/business/<br>arts or a major<br>news beat |                |   |   |   |               |
| c. National history   |                |   |   |   |               |
| d. Media business<br>knowledge  |                |   |   |   |               |
| e. Online production  |                |   |   |   |               |

14. Please suggest at least two other knowledge areas not listed above that you think are essential for experienced journalists.

---

15. Experienced journalists are expected to find their own news sources and write stories. What other capabilities are required from an experienced journalist? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

- |   | Least Required | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Required |
|---|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| a. Write blogs  |                |   |   |   |               |
| b. Work with Facebook/<br>Twitter and other<br>social media |                |   |   |   |               |
| c. Work with video<br>camera                                |                |   |   |   |               |
| d. Resolve issues<br>with news sources                      |                |   |   |   |               |
| e. Maintain network of<br>contacts                          |                |   |   |   |               |
| f. Initiate investigative                                   |                |   |   |   |               |

stories

- g. Reflect about  
newsroom issues

16. Please suggest at least two capabilities not listed above that you think are most required for experienced journalists.

---

17. In which areas does an experienced journalist need more training? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Needed and 5 for Most Needed.

Least Needed                      2                      3                      4                      Most Needed

- a. Facebook / Twitter  
and other social media
- b. Deal with news  
sources
- c. Video/ audio  
production
- d. Develop specialisation  
in an area
- e. Media law / ethics

18. Please suggest two areas not listed above that you think experienced journalists need training in.

---

19. What is the best source of training for an experienced journalist? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Ideal and 5 for Most Ideal.

Least Ideal                      2                      3                      4                      Most Ideal

- a. Newsroom mentors
  - b. Others at the same level
  - c. In-house training program
  - d. University courses
  - e. Other (please write your suggestions below)
-

### III. VIEWS ON MENTOR OR TRAINER-LEVEL JOURNALISTS (9+ YEARS' EXPERIENCE)

20. Mentor or trainer-level journalists are expected to impart knowledge and skills to the less experienced journalists. What other attributes are required from a trainer-level journalist? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Essential and 5 for Most Essential.

Least Essential      2      3      4      Most Essential

- a. Articulate
- b. Analytical
- c. Innovative
- d. Courteous
- e. Inspiring

21. Please suggest at least two attributes not listed above that you think are essential for mentor or trainer-level journalists.

---

22. Which of these knowledge areas are required for a trainer-level journalist? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

Least Required      2      3      4      Most Required

- a. Media law / ethics
- b. Media production
- c. Facebook / Twitter  
and other social media
- d. Deep knowledge in  
at least one or two  
specialized areas
- e. Know a little about  
many specialized areas

23. Please suggest at least two knowledge areas not listed above that you think are essential for mentor or trainer-level journalists.

---

24. Mentor or trainer-level journalists are expected to teach other journalists. What other capabilities are required from a mentor or trainer-level journalist? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.



- |                |   |   |   |               |
|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| Least Required | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Required |
|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
- a. Trouble-shoot with computer problems
  - b. Resolve ethical issues
  - c. Work with Facebook / Twitter and other social media
  - d. Make presentations to an audience
  - e. Work in any section as and when need arises
  - f. Reflect about journalism's requirements

25. Please suggest at least two capabilities not listed above that you think are essential for mentor or trainer-level journalists.

---

26. In which areas does a mentor or trainer-level journalist need more training? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Needed and 5 for Most Needed.

- |              |   |   |   |             |
|--------------|---|---|---|-------------|
| Least Needed | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Needed |
|--------------|---|---|---|-------------|
- a. Facebook/ Twitter and other social media
  - b. Online production
  - c. Video journalism
  - d. Manage people

27. Please suggest at least two areas not listed above that you think are essential for mentor or trainer-level journalists to be trained in.

---

28. What is the best source of training for a mentor or trainer-level journalist? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Needed and 5 for Most Needed.

- |             |   |   |   |            |
|-------------|---|---|---|------------|
| Least Ideal | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Ideal |
|-------------|---|---|---|------------|
- a. Other newsroom mentors
  - b. In-house training program

- c. External training providers
  - d. University courses
  - e. Other (please write your suggestions below)
- 

#### IV. VIEWS ON NEWSROOM LEADERS (EDITORS)

29. Newsroom leaders are expected to be decisive. What other attributes are required from a newsroom leader? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

- |   | Least Required | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Required |
|---|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| a. Strong personality / charisma                |                |   |   |   |               |
| b. Outgoing                                     |                |   |   |   |               |
| c. Demand high quality work from staff          |                |   |   |   |               |
| d. Keen to run political campaign-style stories |                |   |   |   |               |
| e. Willing to work 24/7 if necessary            |                |   |   |   |               |
| f. Considerate to staff                         |                |   |   |   |               |
| g. Courageous and independent in thinking       |                |   |   |   |               |

30. Please suggest at least two other attributes not listed above that you think are essential for newsroom leaders or editors.

---

31. Which of these knowledge areas are required from a newsroom leader? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Needed and 5 for Most Needed.

- |                       | Least Needed | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Needed |
|-----------------------|--------------|---|---|---|-------------|
| a. Media law / ethics |              |   |   |   |             |
| b. National history   |              |   |   |   |             |
| c. Media business     |              |   |   |   |             |

- d. World politics
- e. Online production

32. Please suggest at least two knowledge areas not listed above that you think are needed for a newsroom leader or an editor.

---

33. Newsroom leaders or editors are expected to be able to get the best out of their staff. What other capabilities are required from a newsroom leader or an editor?

Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

- |  | Least Required | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Required |
|--|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| a. Resolve staff conflicts                           |                |   |   |   |               |
| b. Make presentations<br>to advertisers              |                |   |   |   |               |
| c. Take part in<br>community events                  |                |   |   |   |               |
| d. Work with new media<br>(Facebook, Twitter, video) |                |   |   |   |               |
| e. Select the key news<br>stories of the day         |                |   |   |   |               |
| f. Publish investigative<br>stories                  |                |   |   |   |               |
| g. Reflect on newsroom<br>practice                   |                |   |   |   |               |

34. Please suggest at least two other capabilities not listed above that you think are essential for newsroom leaders or editors.

---

35. In which areas does a newsroom leader or an editor require most training? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Required and 5 for Most Required.

- |                                   | Least Required | 2 | 3 | 4 | Most Required |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| a. Use new media                  |                |   |   |   |               |
| b. Manage people                  |                |   |   |   |               |
| c. Balance revenue<br>and expense |                |   |   |   |               |

- d. Manage time
- e. Reflect on long-term

36. Please suggest at least two areas not listed above that you think newsroom leaders or editors require training in.

---

37. What is the best source of training for newsroom leaders or editors? Select a number on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 for Least Ideal and 5 for Most Ideal.

Least Ideal      2      3      4      Most Ideal

- a. University courses
  - b. Others at same level
  - c. In-house training program
  - d. Externally provided training
  - e. Other (please write your suggestions below)
- 

## V. YOUR BACKGROUND

38. What is your main area of work?

- a. Print
  - b. Online
  - c. Other – please write below
- 

39. How long have you been a journalist?

- a. 0-2 years
  - b. 2-5 years
  - c. 5-10 years
  - d. 10+ years
  - e. Other – please write below
- 

40. What is your current main function?

- a. Editing / layout
- b. Reporting
- c. Editing a section

- d. Managing reporting
- e. Other – please write below

---

41. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- a. Higher school certificate
- b. Diploma
- c. Degree
- d. Postgraduate degree
- e. Other (please specify)

---

42. What formal qualification in journalism do you hold?

- a. None. I'm trained on the job
- b. Diploma
- c. Degree
- d. Postgraduate degree
- e. Other – please write below

---

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your responses will be most useful for future training and education of journalists in the changing newsroom.

## APPENDIX B - SURVEY CONSENT FORM

### Competencies for future newsrooms in Australia

Researcher: Padmanabhan Iyer (Padma Iyer)

I have been given information about “Competencies for future newsrooms in Australia: A mid-career learning strategy for journalists” and discussed the research project with Padma Iyer, who is conducting this research as part of a research degree supervised by Dr Eric Loo in the journalism faculty of Creative Arts Department at the University of Wollongong.

I have been advised that, apart from the time taken to answer the questions, potential risks are minimal. I have had an opportunity to ask Padma Iyer any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with my organisation or with the University of Wollongong.

If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Padma Iyer on 02-42271472 or Dr Eric Loo on 02-42214487. If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is being conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 02-4221 4457.

By signing below, I indicate my consent to:

- My questionnaire responses being used in an unidentified manner (without my identity being revealed) in a study for academic purposes.

I understand that the data collected from my participation may be published as research findings in a thesis and used in academic presentations.

Signed .....

Date ...../...../.....

Name (please print) .....

## APPENDIX C - EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS

*This appendix features excerpts from the interviews conducted for this study with the eight subject matter experts (SMEs). Their views were analysed in Chapter 8 and some excerpts are provided in a video format in the DVD. The excerpts below, selected from the transcripts of the interviews, are included in the appendix for possible use by future researchers on this subject. The questionnaire given to the experts is provided in Chapter 8.*

### **Excerpts from interview with Alan Knight, head of Graduate School of Journalism, UTS. The interview was conducted on 28 May 2012.**

*Do print media have a future?*

The analogy I'd like to use is the Hong Kong tram system. If you go to Hong Kong, you will see that they have a state-of-the-art subway, which most people use. The trains are air-conditioned and they arrive every minute. But up on ground level, there is a 1903 tram system, which still operates. And the reason it still operates is because people actually like the trams. Newspapers will continue to operate not because they are the most efficient way of distributing information, but simply because people like them. There will be a proportion of population who will actually pay a premium to get that information (through newspapers), but what that will mean is that the number of newspapers is going to shrink.

Already we are seeing in the regional press, 150-odd newspapers being reduced to a template, controlled remotely and filled with some local copy. Clearly those newspapers have a diminishing future.

*Do you think newsrooms have a future – newsrooms where large numbers of journalists will congregate and produce something like a newspaper?*

That's the industrial model. It's like a factory. It's the factory floor approach to news. It's based on that idea. If you look at the way news was produced – essentially the reporters created the raw material, which was then refined by sub-editors, who will then pass it on down the production chain. Clearly with computers we are already seeing that that process is atomising. The ABC has been for the past 3 or 4 years playing on the system called field reporting, where they essentially provide young journalists minimum training, give them a laptop, a digital camera, a digital

recorder and send them to remote locations. So in actual fact, they are doing the basic editing to be sent elsewhere. In theory you don't need newsrooms.

*What about newsrooms being cannibalised to the extent of 3-4 people operations?*

When I think of newsrooms, I think of large open rooms, almost an industrial model for processing news. I think that that model is already disappearing. I think that it will persist in major newspapers for some time. In places like the ABC it is already being rethought.

*The other side is decline of advertising, which subsidises news...*

If you look at the Pew Center report, the decline over the last 10 years in revenue in American newspapers is more than 40 per cent. It's absolutely been huge. Not quite the same, here, because of highly concentrated media. News Ltd basically controls 60 per cent of the metropolitan distribution (of newspapers). There is less competition here. (Having said that, one can expect that (the situation) is changing. If you were to buy a motor car for example, you don't go to a newspaper. You go to a website. It's also true of real estate.) It used to be a major source of revenue (for newspapers), although there are very healthy colour supplements (for real estate). I suspect it has more to do with the vast profits brought in by real estate agents than the actual need (from consumers).

*Bloggers call themselves journalists. How do we define a journalist?*

Journalism has been redefined by the net.

*Would you say that a blogger is a journalist?*

Depends on the blogger. Journalism used to be... when I joined the industry, the way you defined a journalist was:

1. Did they work for a newspaper or a recognised institution?
2. Were they a member of the journalist association?

Both of those definitions really don't work any more. In actual fact you find people who work for newspapers who simply do refined ads basically. Let's not look at newspapers, let's look at women's magazines. Gossip, which is just press releases. Are they journalists? Probably not. Yet you will find a few bloggers who are either journalists in the traditional sense or moonlighting as bloggers. (obviously there are some bloggers who are journalists.)

I think a journalist now has to be defined as a person who writes non-fiction and who operates within a recognised code of ethics and applies professional practices



which include requirements for accuracy and also sourcing. If you applied that broad definition of journalism, most of the people who work for The Australian, for example, would be journalists. And most of the people who work for Woman's Day may not be. And some people who are bloggers (are journalists).

*What about definition (of journalists) by values? Are there any basic values that journalists need?*

I think IFJ (international federation of journalists) code of ethics is really useful. Core value: respect for truth and public's right to know. That I think should be the core value of journalists who want to call themselves journalists.

*What characteristics, qualities would you expect of journalists?*

In terms of characteristics – intelligence, courage, curiosity, and you would rather hope, compassion. I think that's probably being rather too wishful. (apart from these) Intelligence is important. (Although compassion is not something we would like to stress.)

How would you expect a newcomer to learn about journalism in the newsroom?

There are two parts. One by doing some studying before becoming a journalist. If you do a degree from a reputable institution, you will get a package of skills appropriate to entry-level employment. Beyond that, you would hope that (new journalists) would have intellectual skills to carry them through their career.

People hoping for a career in mainstream journalism – this is wishful thinking – would have knowledge of literature, history, economics, geography... (liberal arts). Obviously it doesn't apply if you are going to be a fashion writer. Even so, a fashion writer needs to know something about economics, history, because fashion is not culturally isolated from those things.

Where journalism is going – 25 years ago, the most common route was an undergraduate degree which combined some of those things with some levels of technical training skills. The way industry is going with journalism education is, there has been qualification creep in just about everything in the last 25 years. Now we are getting people doing masters degrees.

*There is the thinking in newsrooms that they can create journalists out of street-smart people?*

There is a need for some street-smart people. Essentially a newsroom is a mixture of skills. It's horses for courses. I can see people coming through who are clearly going to be intellectual journalists. (People working for review sections, news review,

Four Corners – those people are going to be intellectuals.) There is always going to be a need in the newsroom for people who are tough, courageous, in-your-face, who just basically know where the criminals drink and sometimes drink with them.

*Are there certain skills and values which are best acquired in the newsroom than in a university?*

Obviously. Things like time pressures, being able to produce copy under pressure. It's hard to reproduce in the university and we will probably never do it properly.

And there are other things like political nous, things like office politics. Essentially, you learn about how organisations operate and how people are successful to a greater or lesser degree. We can't reproduce that. How do you deal with aggressive editors, loopy sub-editors, drunks? Essentially you learn those things on the job. Deadlines, power structures, dealing with people and networking. We can teach a little about networking. In fact, the long-term networks that you develop in universities are very valuable in your career. But the short-term networks you learn in the newsroom.

*Similarly, are there other things that are best learnt in a university rather than in a newsroom?*

Absolutely. Ethics. Reflective learning. We teach people how to analyse their journalism. The office doesn't give time to do that. Good journalists are always thinking about not only what they do, but also how they do it and why they do it.

*How can journalists be made to reflect, given the time pressures?*

We encourage them to do degrees. At the graduate school of journalism, we are encouraging mid-level journalists to come and do a PhD. It's an old-fashioned way of doing it but it works.

*If there were three candidates with science, arts and journalism degrees, how would you recommend the journalism degree holder to the newsroom (for a job)?*

Depends on what I am looking for, as a journalist. It also depends on the individual's personal skills as well. Do journalism degree holders have an edge? Depends on the university too.

If I wanted someone to plug into the newsroom straightaway, to do general reporting, I would probably take someone with a degree from a good university. If I was prepared to invest in the basic training, I would think about taking someone with an arts degree or science degree. Or you can get someone with a science degree who has done a masters in journalism and thus save on all the training.

*Do you think newsrooms can create journalists out of those with no previous knowledge of journalism?*

Depends on the journalists. You need some key attributes: curiosity, intelligence, persistence. It doesn't matter how many degrees you do. Some individuals are never going to get it.

*What kind of characteristics do you expect in newsroom leaders?*

Courage. I expect that of journalists. What you expect from journalists, you expect more of it from editors. You would expect more integrity. You would expect a greater intellect – ability to absorb broader issues. You expect the same sort of things (as from journalists) but more of them (from editors). You would expect editors of major news organisations to have all those attributes. And you would expect high-level skills as well. I am a great believer that you don't ask people to do what you can't do yourself. If I am editor and sending a reporter out on a job, I should know what reporting is.

*Would you say there is such a thing as implicit learning in newsrooms?*

There can be. For good or ill. They could be learning the wrong things.

People say learning on the job is a wonderful thing. Depends on who you are sitting next to.

*So they should go beyond on-the-job?*

On the job is not enough. Because one might be blessed by being next to a fantastic reporter. On the other hand, you might be sitting next to someone who has been doing it badly for a long time. You just reproduce (the bad habits of other people). The great advantage of a good university course is that it critically analyses best practice and the worst practice. That is if the course is working properly.

**Excerpts from interview with Liz Bennett, national trainer, News Corp. The interview was conducted on 3 May 2012.**

*(This interview transcript was in the format of salient points.)*

Key values that a journalist must have ideally: an inquiring mind is a key factor; interest in other people.

Other characteristics: strong news sense is important. It can be developed over time. Online courses help; mentoring is important too. They need to go hand in hand. A lot of people need coaching. Even if they don't get in the beginning, given time they can learn.

News sense – difference between an issue that has become a story and why it is a story. Timeliness, proximity and so on can be taught to people. But they must become innate, part of reflex action. As they spend more time on the job

Also important are range of information and ability to process it quickly, especially for reporters. They can improve over time too. New journalists from university cannot have the same skills as experienced journalists.

A combination of training and on-the-job is required for skills development. What they come with from uni plus mentoring on the job will work.

Other attributes are imp such as people skills. Writing is a core skill. It can be improved over time, as long as they have a good ability to start with. It's much easier to start with someone who has good basic skills.

Foundational skills such as writing come from school education. By the time they reach university, there is no time. It's too late for fundamental skills to be developed. University develops journalism skills (functional skills). School is a good starting point.

From my time as a lecturer at the university, there was no time to develop fundamental writing skills. Those who come in with good writing skills on the other hand go far during university education. It's harder at university level to train someone who has poor foundational writing skills. No time to revisit fundamental skills.

Other aspects of journalism. Writing for TV can be taught – writing tightly and in a simpler fashion, the methodology of it, can be learnt later. Although it appears simple, they are underestimated skills, particularly writing a TV script. “For the uninitiated, it can be quite challenging.”

A video journalist would often typically only deal with interviewing, writing the script, voicing the script and supervising overall. Writing a script can appear simple but it can be quite challenging for someone with another media background. On the other hand, some students may struggle with the higher level print media standards in writing a longer article. They might develop the TV script writing skills quite adequately.

Must-have skills for the multimedia newsroom: For a long time now, the must-have skill has been the ability to file quickly for online and for other devices such as mobile. Also important are social media skills, such as the ability to find out what is trending and to find contacts or news sources and also as a promotional tool for their

stories where appropriate in accordance with the social media policy of the company. So they must be able to use social media for sharing news, and for finding content and contacts. Also important is the ability to work in a broadcast environment – with video, for instance – whether they work with a video journalist who records on location. They need the ability to think visually. Also useful will be the ability to record with video if they happen to be the only journalist on location or, take still images with their smart phones and send it back to the office. Also important is being aware of media law across the platforms, there are some traps for digital platform use for media law.

Must-have knowledge: must-know things, such as history, politics, current affairs: Arts and politics, history are useful. They give an understanding of society. Scientific background can be useful in the newsroom, especially in dealing with issues like climate change. Quest for knowledge counts. If you have studied something, it shows an interest and then you can build on that.

How can a young journo become more skilled?: A journalism degree or a degree of some sort is a good start. I know many believe a non-journalism degree is good, I can see the reason behind that. It creates a broader knowledge base in the newsroom and more specialty areas in the newsroom. The idea behind this is also that journalism skills can be shaped in the newsroom or in a final year at the university.

Skills learning in newsroom versus at university: One of the things that people in newsrooms often say is quite different from an academic environment to a news environment would be ethics and that whole sphere. There is a great deal of emphasis in the academic environment on ethics. But there isn't enough time in the cut and thrust of day-to-day work in journalism to over-analyse things. They need to be taken into account, it needs to be inherent that one acts with ethical values but it's important to get the applications right.

It's a combination (of values through education and newsroom training) that works. The practicality of it applies. It's a strong foundation of ethical values that is applied appropriately in the workplace.

There are other skills. The news collection and writing skills and so on. It is appropriate to have a foundation of these skills in a university or similar learning environment and further shape these skills in a newsroom.

Reflecting on practice: I suspect you only get deeper reflection when you take someone out of the newsroom either for training or for a session where you reflect

upon things deliberately. Otherwise, the day moves on and the following day there may be another story and the cycle starts again, and the reflective moment passes. Everyone to some degree reflects on the day they have had and what they have done, whether subconsciously or not. I think it is a matter of taking people away from their work environment for some time. It will be good if journalists reflect upon what they do.

Multimedia skills: spread of skills versus specialisation: In a way they are still specialised skills but there is more of them. That's the difficulty in a modern newsroom is that in many different environments, not just this company but in others as well, people who were doing one task before are required to multi-task. Each of those new tasks has its own degree of specialty or specialisation. Often there is not sufficient recognition of that within the companies (news organisations) overall. We think that because someone is a good print journalist they can then become a good person to pop up on TV and talk about their stories or do the same on video, not only to talk, but to write their own script and voice it. Each of those individual subsets of skills is a different skill. In terms of appearing in front of a camera, writing a script is a different skill to writing a story for print. Voicing is again another skill. Supervising any edit process is yet another skill on top of that. So, it's greater generalisation but with new specialisations.

Leadership: As journalists progress to become section editors and then on to become editors, it's not just journalism skills that come into play. It's also people skills and management skills. Being on top of a whole range of issues that are important to managing people and tasks.

Mid-career training: How can we find the time and is there a one-size fits all solution? How can training areas be identified? It's a case by case basis. It depends on what the training need is and whether it can be taught in a range of formats. Some things may be taught online, some may taught face-to-face, and some things differently. It depends on the type of training needed and the people you are dealing with, the part of the company they are with, and the culture of the part of the company. A range of factors exist.

Technology challenge: There are ways around technology. Let's face it, if one can't use a computer, they are not working here any more. So, we can all use computers. From there, if they need to learn about social media and they need to be able to use a camera, they can be taught. Or there is something else they can do where

they don't need to do that. So I think technological skills challenge can be overcome through training. It might be some of the other skills that can be challenging. Things like how does a previously print-based company equip its staff to do a whole range of new things. They are editorial type skills but they also involve a person becoming more personally involved by getting in front of a camera or giving a voice-over. And then new editorial skills such as writing a script – they are challenges that many companies are grappling with.

Learning by trial and error in the newsroom isn't ideal. When they learn new skills such as video or using a camera in a training environment, there is more learning. It gives them more understanding. There is reflection built into it.

**Excerpts from interview with Michael Gawenda, research fellow at the Centre for Advanced Journalism at Melbourne University and former editor-in-chief of The Age newspaper, Melbourne. The interview was conducted on 9 May 2012.**

*Where is the industry going? Do you see a future for newspapers?*

I do see a future for newspapers. The first thing is how long is that future and the second thing is what sort of news will have a future. The newspapers that we are producing now – I don't think they have a future. They will have to be producing different newspapers. The era of mass newspapers – in an Australian context at least, of newspapers producing hundreds of thousands of copies – is probably coming to an end.

But niche newspapers – newspapers that target specialist markets, by that I don't mean economic or business newspapers, but newspapers that say, these are the areas that we cover and this the market we are aiming at, these are the things we don't do. If you want those things - entertainment – go to the website because it is better done on the website. This is what we do – our call is news, business, sports and some commentary and that's all we do. And we don't cover everything.

That's the newspaper of the future for me. How many newspapers might we sell? We might sell half as many as we do now. You might have to have a higher cover price. And you would really have to test whether you are producing a newspaper of quality – whatever that means – that would justify a cover price that is four times or three times the price we have now.

And you are not going to get the advertising that you are getting now – those kinds of ads which are about reaching a big audience. You are going to get display advertising, I believe. You are going to get advertising targeting that market. I think you can deliver valuable markets. You also have to show through cover price that you are delivering that market and not giving the paper away. And to do that, you will have to charge a cover price that says we are producing a newspaper of such quality that people are going to want to read it.

It's got to be a scaled-down operation, but it can be a profitable business. But it won't make the kind of profits that Fairfax made when they had the rivers of gold (the classifieds). They are gone. It can be a profitable business. And it can have a future into the next two or three decades, I believe.

We are only at the beginning of the digital revolution. We don't know what that is going to produce in terms of a business model that works. But in the meantime, I don't think we should give up on newspapers. But we do need to make big decisions about what sort of newspapers we are producing.

*Do you see newsroom with its hierarchy of journalists existing? Will there be newsrooms where large numbers of journalists will congregate and produce news?*

That is going to change as well. It is going to change basically because the business model of print won't sustain the sort of sizes of newsrooms that we now have. That is the first thing. The second thing is that more and more journalism will be produced by people who aren't members of staff.

But they are not multifunctional journalists. Increasingly the beat journalists and the general reporters are going to be under pressure. Because they are the numbers that are first going to be cut. And that includes outsourcing subediting. And most of the work done on sections that go online don't need staff journalists. They can be done on contract, overseen by editors that are keen on a certain look, and a certain quality. But (these journalists) don't need to be on the staff. That might lead to a situation where we might have half to one-third of the staff we have now.

*Bloggers say they are journalists. Do you think so?*

No I don't think bloggers are journalists. Even if journalism isn't a profession, it is at least a trade. If you look at say plumbers, for instance, there are lots of people who do plumbing, but they are not all plumbers. There are certain skills you need to have if you are going to call yourself a journalist. I believe there is a certain ethics you have work to if you want to consider yourself a journalist.



*What are the values of journalism?*

That we have a commitment to accuracy and fairness, that we aren't driven by hidden agendas that go to business interests or other interests we might have. That we are open to being scrutinised in terms of the work that we do. That we have a conversation with our audiences that allows them to answer us back. That we have the skills and the ability to produce journalism that is of a quality that meets the needs of our audiences. All those things need to be proclaimed and worked on. In many ways that is more urgent now than ever. Objectivity is a fraught word. I am more concerned with fairness than objectivity.

*With multimedia journalism there is a dilution (of values)? Maybe audiences are feeling that what they are getting is not the real deal?*

People never thought that they were getting the real deal. When you consider the rankings of jobs that people think of highly, we (journalists) have always been near the bottom of the ranking. This was before the digital revolution. This was because often our job is to make people uncomfortable. Often our job is to outrage people. Often our job is to reveal things that people don't want revealed. Which is not to say there isn't an element of our doing badly in that ranking.

I don't believe there is as much checking going on with online news on mainstream news websites. Many journalists working online now believe things (the ways in which you work) are different: you put things up and then if you get it wrong, you can update it with a correction. I think that is fraught and dangerous. I wouldn't support that. The more mistakes you make online, the more you don't vigorously check, the more there are questions about your accuracy, the more you are in the same position as the thousands of bloggers blogging nonsense, (churning out) rumours and conspiracy theories. It is even more important (now) that we be accurate. We can't allow fierce competition to lower the bar on accuracy.

I fear that we are not finding the balance (between speed and accuracy). Editors have to argue that yes, we want to be first, but more than anything we want to be accurate. Being first and inaccurate is not a good thing. It doesn't do you any good. You get a reputation for being inaccurate. You get a reputation for not being believable.

*There wasn't this kind of need to be speedy in the past...*

In my memory, when I was a young journalist, if you were working for an afternoon newspaper and there weren't laptops and there weren't mobile phones, you

had to be really quick. You had to be on the phone and be dictating copy. So you did have to be fast but you also had to be accurate.

I think the same pressure (as now) existed before but we didn't have the 24/7 news cycle. So the pressure is constant in a way that wasn't constant before. But I think we have to make some decisions as a profession and as news organisations. We have to say that fast is not the only overwhelming value that we have, that if you are fast and inaccurate, that is not acceptable.

*What are the must-have skills for a news journalist in a convergent newsroom?*

You have to have some of the basics that you always have to have. You must have good research skills. You must have good interviewing skills. You must know your area that you are covering. You must have good contacts. Over and above that, you must be able to write well and clearly. Those skills are just as pertinent to online media and multimedia as they are to print journalism.

I think those are not technical skills in my view. Those are the fundamental talent that you have to have that can be fostered and developed in order to do your job properly. The other thing I would say, I would urge journalists nowadays to have good specialised knowledge in the areas that they cover. Because you are increasingly confronted with new research, new information, new debates. I don't see, for instance, how you can be a good reporter of climate change if you are not across the basic science, and the basic scientific arguments and understand them. Now that is true across a range of areas. (Hence) I would urge young journalists to develop knowledge. And that's where universities can come in. They can help provide that specialised knowledge.

But I think the core competencies of journalism don't change. There are technical things now that you may not have needed to know in the past: what is the difference between online journalism and print journalism; we used to know something about how people read print – how do they use a website; how do they read the news; how do they read longer pieces; are there limits to what you can write. So you need to know those things (now).

The second thing you need to know is how does multimedia work? How do I use a video camera? Have I got the skills to be able to ask questions that are going to be broadcast live? If you are a good interviewer, it doesn't take much to learn to interview for video.

It does take some skill to learn to do voice broadcast. In my experience, most journalists who are good journalists can do that and can develop those skills. They don't have to do a degree to develop those skills.

So there are basic technical skills that I didn't have to have when I was training to be a journalist. They need to understand how social media work. And what are the challenges and benefits of social media.

So I do think that there are new competencies that you need to have.

But the basic skills you need – and the basic knowledge you need to be a good journalist – I don't think that has basically changed.

*Would you recruit those with journalism degree or just anyone and think you can train them?*

When I was in a position to recruit (as an editor at The Age newspaper), I recruited across the board. So journalism graduates – undergraduates – didn't have an advantage. That's my view. They had no advantage over young people who were other sorts of graduates. I was in favour of recruiting some people from school even though the organisation – Fairfax – was not in favour of that. But I was looking for certain things – qualities.

*What qualities?*

Curiosity. Evidence of a commitment to being a journalist.

The work done – things that you had done to show me that you are serious about being a journalist says that you are a media consumer. So you have got role models, people that you want to follow across the media.

I often discounted people who said to me, I only read The Australian or The Age, I never read The Herald Sun. And I think you are not the sort of person that I want. And then there are people about whom I think, you haven't done much journalism, but you have got the specialised skills that I think we could use. You are keen to get involved. In your work you have shown some evidence that you have got some core competencies, you are curious, you know something about the media and you are prepared to take on a salary cut of up to 50 per cent. You could have been a corporate lawyer or you have finished your medical degree and done your internship but you are prepared to come and do this, well, you are the person that I would be interested in.

*How can journalists be made to reflect on their profession? Very few have time. Is it best to take them outside the newsroom or can reflection be incorporated into the newsroom?*

It's not going to be incorporated into the newsroom. Newsrooms are increasingly under pressure. They are not going to set aside time to reflect on what they do. That's not one of their priorities.

The masters programs at universities, if they are good, offer journalists the ability to reflect on what they are doing and how they might go forward and how they might be better at what they do.

*In the heydays of journalism, in the 1970s and 1980s, when journalists had a monopoly over their audience, do you think they were accountable?*

No, they didn't feel like they needed to be accountable. They had a captive audience. The world has changed.

*So how will accountability come about now?*

They are held accountable by the fact that people have lots of other places to go to (for reading news). Second thing is, audiences are increasingly saying I want a say in what you are doing, I want to respond, I want you to explain things. And increasingly journalists have to respond to that. And some are responding. Thirdly, universities have a role in giving journalists platforms where they can reflect.

*What must-have qualities or skills should a newspaper editor – newsroom leader – have?*

Obviously they have to have a commitment to journalism. Over and above that, they need to have a vision about what their newspaper or website is about. And a roadmap on how they are going to get there. One that they can convey constantly to their staff. And they need to adjust that (vision) according to how their audiences respond to what they are doing. Always with the foundational values that I said they should inculcate in their staff and they have to follow themselves. They have to have energy, and the ability to be up all the time even if they feel down and be able to inspire people, those who work with them and for them.

I don't know what good people skills are – but you have to be honest with people, be honest with the people you work for and with.

You have to have an idea what you are doing and why. You need to be able to look beyond tomorrow's paper, to where are we heading with those issues that we consider to be particularly important.

*Do journalists need to be generalists or specialists?*

They need to know a little about everything and a lot about something, because in my view that is the future. Specialisation doesn't disappear. Specialisation is important. One of the things you can bring to your media organisation is outstanding special skills and knowledge.

**Excerpts from interview with John Henningham, foundation professor of journalism, University of Queensland, and director of JSchool, Brisbane. The interview was conducted on 26 May 2012.**

*Do you see a future for print media – newspapers printed on paper?*

In the short term, there is a continuation. But in the long term, I don't think so. If we are thinking text – words – there is a future. In about 20 years, it will all be on screens (digitally delivered), except perhaps in the developing world where there is a lack of access to the technology. As long as the text survives, that is the main thing.

*What about newsrooms? Where journalists congregate and produce something like a newspaper? (Will they survive?)*

I think that will continue. There is a need for that, the team producing newspapers of some sort, however they are delivered. Rather than a set of freelancers operating independently. I think that collective wisdom, collective production (effort) continues to be important.

*Do you see some core values underpinning the practice of journalism? Or do you see those values changing over time?*

I think the basic values are the same – getting the news, getting it out there, finding out what's happening and telling the general public what's happening. That's the basis to it. That will continue. That is eternal.

*What are the must-have skills or competencies for a practising journalist?*

They must be able to get the news and then write about it. They are quite different skills, they are not related. To be able to get the information, to do the research, to do the investigation – and then to be able to distil from that the essence, (getting) what is most important, what is of interest to the readers and of most use to the readers, and thereby summarise, distil the essence of it as a story. They are different sorts of skills, with no real overlap. We are looking for people who can do

those two different things – researchers or getters of information and then writers of information.

*What are the basic skills that every journalist must have irrespective of the platform?*

They need to be able to recognise news. What makes an event newsworthy and the ability to extract it themselves, if they are observing a demonstration on the streets to see if that has any news value and to be able to get to the essence of what is going on. And to be able to extract from that the relevant key information about what is happening. And then to be able to write about it.

Often in courses the writing is put first, which gives the wrong signal. That's the problem with high school and careers advice. They focus too much on writing – that any student with writing ability is seen as someone who could be a journalist. There are lots of people with writing ability who are hopeless as journalists.

*Why is that?*

A general writing skill – creative writing and the like – does not a journalist make. At the same time, there are people who are not all that good at writing and are not brilliant writers but are very good reporters. They are very good at getting information, very good at relating to people, good at sensing what is new and unusual and what would be of interest to the community generally. It is a problem if you focus too much on the writing.

Many a good reporter – their words are saved and their reputation is made by good subbing. So that happens. So (good reporting) it is that ability to suss out information, have the contacts, talk to people.

*If I were to ask whether journalists need to be street smart or knowledgeable, which of these two would you do choose? When you are gathering news, would street smartness be sufficient?*

It is not sufficient, but it is very important. Some subeditor are particularly keen to get through those people often fall through the cracks those who are street smart and who just have that nose for news from operating across a wide section of society. Those who study academically and get good results and so on are good at scholarly work but don't have that street-smartness. So, often it is inversely correlated with education.

*How can newcomers acquire journalism skills in the newsroom?*

I think experience really is a magnificent teacher. It's not the only teacher but it is a great teacher. You learn things by doing, by writing stories. That's why at J-

School we stress writing stories, doing lots of them, which is not the normal university experience.

But you do pick up a lot. Every knock back you get in an interview, every new lead that you get or every idea – it's a brick wall but you can develop into something else. Every good interview, and every less successful interview, you learn from that. You learn all the time.

And then bringing this information together and writing it as a story and finding that the subs have torn it to shreds and have totally rewritten it, and then comparing your raw story with what actually appears in the paper, you learn a great deal from that about the process, writing style, emphasis and news value. Just the experience of being out there and doing it is very important. Keeping an eye on what is happening, reading widely, reading your own paper widely and other media – the internet gives you such an opportunity to be across so many different media now it is incredible. Being voracious in your thirst for news, yourself being totally up to date, and thinking of ideas, how you can develop what has happened, build on what has already been reported – it's all very important.

*I know you have a practice-based approach to teaching journalism. Do you think there are some skills that are best learnt in a newsroom? And vice versa – are some skills only learnt outside a newsroom?*

The pressure, the reality of deadlines. The relentless deadline and being able to write to deadline. The fact that when you are writing for a publication with a mass audience, things (performance) just have to be at a high level. The high expectation of your ability to perform. And that pressure is enormously instructive.

The internship experience is invaluable for students and they learn a lot from it. I know that university students learn even more because they have done very little in terms of practice. (Practice) is a real eye-opener. They suddenly write more stories than they have written in a year. That is not the case with my students. They are writing stories everyday. It is that urgency, that acts as a great motivator. They learn from that.

*What kind of characteristics do you try to develop in your students?*

Not giving up. That persistence. That curiosity. And many of these things are innate. But you can foster them, and encourage people not to be discouraged. You can be discouraged when you are a student and when you are a young journalist. People won't answer your calls or they won't comment meaningfully.

So just encouraging people to having a go or think of another way, another angle or think of another source they could contact.

They are the things that we can do that will be useful. Helping them to work hard really, to do the research, to make the calls, (to help them persist with calls and help them overcome the big wall of media officers and those who act as a barrier and make it difficult to get to the source). All those frustrations, it is really a matter of encouraging them to keep at it. (telling them) if you are bruised and bloodied, get back up and continue the game.

*What are the things you emphasise as an educator in your course? What are the takeaways over a period of time for students?*

Specific skills like subbing, photography, internet use, HTML, web design to a limited degree, multimedia skills like video and audio skills. The basis (of the course) is still the idea of the story, getting the story. It takes a while for some of them to ignite. When it does, and it is reinforced from doing it, you get the pleasure of seeing your work, your byline, sometimes your picture below a headline, wow, what great motivator that is.

Once they have got that, and love getting stories, that is the key thing that we like them to have.

And that persistence. And that applies to seeking jobs as well, to applying for positions. They are hard to get. Those that persist don't get put off by one, or 10, or 20 or 50 rejections. They will get there in the end.

*Do you teach shorthand?*

Yes, we teach shorthand. It is a good basic skill. No one has ever complained about being able to do shorthand. It is a useful skill, a good practical skill. Universities don't see that it quite belongs to them because it is not academic enough because it doesn't require a lot of academic analysis. But it is a useful skill. So we have that.

*What is your view about specialization v broad base of several multimedia skills?*

Good to start off as a jack of all trades. But then a degree of specialization is important. But it was always thus in terms of being a reporter and moving into a round, where you built up contacts and really knew all there was to know about that round and wrote about it with great authority. And you see cases of people who are in charge of rounds becoming experts of such a high level that they are witnesses in commissions of inquiry and so on. They are advising governments because they often



know the rounds better than any newly appointed minister, for example, and they know it from a range of perspectives. They have written about it and they have learnt it on the job, mainly by talking to people involved in that industry, whether it is aviation or defence or IT or whatever it is. So having a good solid immersion in a round is very important. It is on top of having been a generalist, being able to cover anything that is happening. Having areas that you do know a lot about it very important.

With convergence of technology, to have a good ability with audio or video – that can be useful. With research, some are more able to do use social media than others.

*How would you advocate the choice of a journalism graduate from among three graduates of different disciplines to a newsroom editor? How would you convince the editor that a journalism graduate is a better proposition than the others?*

I am not even sure that I necessarily would. Because there are some situations where students have spent far too much of their tertiary education thinking about and doing journalism at the expense of building up a good knowledge base in some specialized area be it government, or history or economics. I think it is good to have a good understanding of an academic field with journalism grafted on to that. That is why I find that the one year course, which some find is inadequate, is perfectly good for a start. It is good to get started.

A great deal of journalism canon is taught in the newsroom. That is why industry has taken on training itself. It is a little bit of a putdown in a way to universities. If universities were really doing their job well, then Fairfax and News (Corp) wouldn't have to develop their own training except as something like icing on the cake, to refine the basic training and education. The fact that they find it deficient is a problem in what they have been taught at universities.

*So where do you think universities are getting it wrong with journalism education?*

Well, there may be too much agonizing over journalism and critiquing it. There is a lot that needs criticism, but if a degree course is no more than a three-year extension of Media Watch, then that can be quite negative in terms of students themselves coming out of courses with a poor view of journalism rather than a positive affirming view.

I would like to see the good things of journalism achieved, being stressed, the royal commissions and the jailing of crook politicians and organised crime and so on – the achievements that journalism has achieved through its reporting.

*The two universes of education and practice remain separate. Do you think it has affected the practice of journalism?*

To a large extent, the industry simply ignores what happens in universities. It doesn't take much notice of them. Changes that have happened in the industry have been independent of anything that has been said in the academy. Which is a pity. I think a good partnership (between the two) would be helpful. I think in the States (US), it is a better partnership, there is greater respect for what happens at the leading journalism universities, there is more of an exchange between senior editors and leading academics. Not so much in Australia or Britain.

*What is your conception of an ideal journalist? What are the basic characteristics? What is the profile of an ideal journalist?*

Someone who really is serious about their work and dedicated in getting information, and working hard at getting it, talking to people, having a range of contacts, researching a topic very thoroughly, being concerned with getting it right, and not being misled by sources who are not giving it to them straight.

Being comfortable in using records and databases and being across that whole information gathering process, then being able to distil that and write it as a story. Yes, there are journalists operating in that level, and it is something to aspire to.

*What are the characteristics of an editor?*

You have to make an impact, to have a newspaper that is talked about in the community, that is making a difference, that is one of the major institutions in the community, and a source of good journalism by exposing corruption and incompetence, or suggesting new directions that could be taken within a city or a country, to challenge what is going on, to be a kind of an opposition, an opposition not just to the government but an opposition to the parliamentary opposition, to show their weaknesses as well. There is not as much of that as there should be at the moment.

So by producing something that is read, talked about, that is important that people would miss if it wasn't there – their life is incomplete without this brilliant newspaper that this editor is producing. To be able to do that by having journalists

who are committed, hard working, well-trained, have good morale and can also compete, who love the scoops, and doing the best they can for you as the editor.

**Excerpts from interview with Helen Trinca, managing editor of The Australian newspaper in Sydney. The interview was conducted on 8 May 2012.**

*Do you see a future for print?*

I see a future for print. I don't see a large future for the print newsroom. Print and other platforms will have to converge. It is happening already.

Print will have to compete for the same readers as other platforms. It will be a complementary competition, not a direct competition. All platforms will have to attract the same readers.

There is a real place for print media, in the sense of longer articles. Some people will always want to read in print. The real shift in my generation has been how readers have embraced the digital reading. It's not reading on the computer as such or the laptop, but the huge breakthrough has been with the iPad, tablets and other devices. People are now prepared to read long stories on the tablet. It is an interesting area for print to compete with. The kind of material that has traditionally been in print is now available in iPads and tablets and different platforms.

*So the newsroom is not under threat?*

I think we will need a newsroom. The danger is that we could lose the essence of how a paper is created. A paper is created through a hierarchy of effort. It is an amazing phenomenon when you think about it. A massive amount of interaction takes place and decisions are made (to make the newspaper happen). Conversations take place and decisions at various levels are made about the relative importance of news and people are despatched to do various things. I do not believe this product that emerges from the newsroom is possible to be created by someone sitting at home.

*When you think about who is a journalist, you think about values. Are journalism's values changing?*

Put it this way, I don't think they should change. Change is not new. It has not come about through digital media. The major changes in journalism in the past 20 years have come about through much wider social changes and pressures.

Digital media have pushed the boundaries of what a journalist thought was something they should report on. Some of it is great.

In the 1970s, journalism was male-dominated. I always believed in those days that I was writing for a male reader. I never thought I was writing for a woman. It has changed a lot now. A lot of change has been brought about by social change, not just by digital media.

*What are the must-have personal qualities of journalists?*

The first thing I would look for would be curiosity. Unless you are really excited, intrigued and interested in either people or ideas. Not everyone is interested in both. You have to be interested in one of those pretty strongly to get you through. It's not a curiosity that is negative or is constantly agonised about the bad elements of these people. It is not a traditional concept that the investigative journalist has to sniff corruption and dirt. Being sceptical is important – and an incredible curiosity to know. This is about people.

We are the filters, we are the conduits. Unless you are interested in what makes people tick, a long-term career (in journalism) is unsustainable.

It's not about the reporting of material that comes out to you anymore. It might be in some stages of the career but really you have got to put it together in a much broader framework. That is increasingly the case with an educated readership.

*Do you expect a journalist to be street smart or academically knowledgeable?*

Both or one of those at least, at any one time. I do think there are horses for courses. For a long time, in the 1940s, and 50s and 60s, the street smart journalism was what was required. You needed to be able to pop down to the cop shop, talk to the police, and know what was going on and get those sorts of contacts. Increasingly journalism has changed quite dramatically, in papers like The Australian in particular. And being street smart is still very important. But being – academic is perhaps the wrong word but being – conceptual is very important. I think there are two sorts of people – there are people who get concepts and those who don't, there are those who are street smart and those who aren't. And sometimes you are lucky to get both – that's a gift. Somehow, in a newsroom you need a mixture of those people and a respect on both sides for the other.

*Would you expect a journalist coming into the profession to show some knowledge of journalism or do you think it can be acquired?*

I think it can be acquired. But I think you need people who actually want to be journalists.

People who have been lawyers or accountants sometimes want to be journalists – and I am not against career change.

But journalism is not about writing but it is about explaining, it is about being able to understand material and to put it into a form that is interesting, and to be curious about the world and to be driven by that everyday, whether it is a curiosity about a new house being built somewhere or about what the prime minister didn't tell us about an event. I think it's important that people who come into journalism read and follow the news.

*What is the best way for a newcomer to learn about journalism? How can a young journalist be taught to become more skilled? Say, someone who is a clean slate, but is smart and knowledgeable.*

Years ago, we learned at the feet of our elders. Sitting in a newsroom, you overhear (and see) what they are doing. You go out on jobs with them. And you go out on jobs with photographers who often knew more than you did about how to get and you learnt by osmosis. I think a certain degree of that still happens. I think there is a bit more room for formal training on the job.

It is expensive and I don't know that it is going to happen.

*There is no time in journalism to reflect. How can journalists be made to reflect a little? Can it happen in the newsroom or do you think they have to be taken out of the newsroom?*

I am thinking about our own kind of paper, which is a particular kind of paper. I think it is possible to reflect a little bit more. Again it comes down to issues like productivity (and lack of time). Perhaps they can have brown paper bag lunches for meeting where you get in somebody from outside who is an expert in a field like international relations or financial markets and you actually have a conversation, so that people can sit around and have a conversation. Now that is about material (meaning knowledge), not about the practice of journalism as such. Those things are good because they will force journalists to go beyond the obvious. I remember telling a young journalist that they should start reading again.

You go into journalism and stop reading anything beyond newspapers and it is the most narrowing thing. And efforts to keep our journalists up to date with books – books on biography, national affairs, politics – would be a very very useful thing.

Ultimately it is a personal decision. A lot of my colleagues have never let go of their reading.

*Do you think shorthand is essential?*

Yes, I think it is.

*How many journalists know shorthand?*

I would say about 20 per cent. It is coming back in fashion.

This question of (finding the time for) reflection, I think all professions have problems with it. The medical profession has it, we have it, academics, teachers, but I think we do need to reflect on it (practice) a little more.

When we reflect on it, it can be slightly reactive and defensive. We react and defend our central values.

*What are those values?*

That we publish and perish. That we sit beyond, above society and observe it, report upon it, that we are to that extent objective. That we report the facts (and run our own agendas).

Where we haven't gone is the subtle analysis of what goes on in the academy, about cultural and social bias, and the concept called news, how it has developed, and what we mean. When I said earlier about hierarchy of news, it is an inevitable and important part of creating news. That hierarchy of news is often unspecified and unrevealed in some senses and taken for granted.

How do you reflect in a reasonable and mature way? Some people in the academy have said that it (news and its creation) is all negative. I don't think it is useful (this kind of negativity about news) to any side.

Trying to get people within the profession to talk about news is complex. It ought to be done in the language of journalism, not in the language of the academy. People (in the newsroom) reject the kind of conceptualisation that is done in the academy. It is difficult to access that language. It is language that doesn't have any connection with the people who are doing the job. Therefore then it is easy to be dismissed.

Reflection on your profession can be done in the newsroom.

The bigger influence on journalists will be the people in the newsroom who have the capacity and the intelligence and the interest to be thinking about what they are doing in journalism.

It's not just about being street-smart and getting a story at all costs and knowing what a story is about (and how it hasn't changed for about 30 or 40 years). We do have people in the newsroom, at leadership levels, who do have a subtle understanding of what journalism is.

*What do newsroom leaders need? What kind of qualities?*

Decisiveness. An editor has to make a lot of decisions everyday. Having to make those decisions while others stand by them is the biggest thing in the newsroom. It is a very hard thing to do. For some people, it is not their skill. They are still useful (those who don't make the decisions) in a newsroom.

The leaderships jobs are best done by people who can make decisions and stick by them. It is a factor of speed and the difficulties of meeting deadlines. The other thing a leader does need is subtlety.

*What do you mean by subtlety?*

The decision is very black and white.

By subtlety, I mean a breadth in their imagination so that they don't follow a template of the news. The notion that you can construct the front page or the first few pages of news with a formula (or a template) is not going to work. We have a very literate, sophisticated audience, even if they are not highly educated formally. What we are seeing are people who absolutely get what is going in the media – the notion of surprise, the notion of difference, imagination, subtlety – you have got to have all those things, as well as the ability to decide.

*Do you think journalism standards are declining?*

I don't at all (think standards are declining). I don't want to be defensive and knee-jerk about it. But I think the knowledge that people have to have, the speed at which people have to work, the capacity with which they have to explain things and actually say what is going on (what is expected of journalists at work now) is huge. In some areas of politics, we are seeing a deterioration in the quality of political debate. (37:16) In journalism, we have seen an increase in the demands on journalists to be able to write at an intelligent level. The standards of journalism in areas like finance has just extraordinarily improved. Nobody did it much years ago and it was not required.

Now economic knowledge of some sort – the basics – is required of all journalists really.

**Excerpts from interview with Jock Cheetham, training manager, Fairfax newspapers, Sydney. The interview was conducted on 6 June 2012.**

*Do you see a future for print media in Australia?*

Yes, I think so. There are community weekly papers and free papers. And then there are metro dailies. They are different beasts (from each other). Their economic future is different. I don't know how long it is going to be – 10 years, 20 years. There is no reason that all newspapers will become completely extinct. They will rationalise.

*How can print media compete with new media to retain its readers?*

I think that now you can make the distinction between print media and new media. You have media outlets that don't have print arms. They are younger companies. And you have media outlets that have print, online, multimedia tentacles. Print outlets have to compete by diversifying.

*How do you define a journalist?*

I think it's somebody who does it as a profession. It doesn't mean they have to be paid. Generally speaking, they would be paid. Both freelance writers and staff journalists work for a media outlet that has some level of accountability independent to them.

A decent journalist – as opposed to any journalist – will abide by certain standards, such as the MEAA code of ethics for example. Or the media outlet they work for subscribes to those.

That's a self-regulatory kind of thing. Any decent journalist subscribes to a higher code rather than saying whatever they want, in the context of getting it out there in the media.

I don't think journalists operate in a vacuum, whereas bloggers can. That's one of the distinctions. They are just people expressing opinions. Journalists are part of a profession or vocation or what. It's an entity that you join by volunteering.

*Is journalism a profession?*

If the criterion is that entry into the practice be regulated, as for accountants through CPA or for lawyers through the bar, then it's not.

*Do you think journalists are bound by a minimum qualification or a set of values?*

It's too difficult to say they are bound by a set of values because of diversity. So, no.



Minimum education, no. Because there are no standards that are absolute, like there are in law, accountancy and medicine. If you can spell, that helps. But even that isn't essential.

*Then how do they (their practices) cohere into journalism?*

It is very much in the eye of the beholder. First you have to call yourself a journalist. Then you have to act in a professional way – you have to sell your journalism. If you are not, then maybe you are an activist or you could be any number of other things. And then comes the choice about how you define a journalist. As, I join in this body of people in saying what journalism is.

*What kind of personal or professional qualities would you expect a journalist to have?*

Expect and want critical thinking. Curiosity. Engaging personality. Literacy and numeracy. General knowledge and awareness of the world. Story-telling ability. Writing ability.

*And what skills do you expect of them?*

Writing skills. Then technical skills, from computer literacy to all kinds of specific softwares. And other skills with equipment. Cinematography, for example, would be a technical skill.

Every journalist doesn't need to have every one of them. But they need to have some of them from the suite. Some are more essential than others. Interviewing skills and so on.

In order to make this more comprehensive, it would be better for me to send you a considered list. I can forget something and it may be most important thing.

People skills, interview skills.

Must have skills: You have to have grammar, spelling and writing ability. Basic level of being able to write accurately, concisely. That's what you work towards – from the entry level to the base level. People skills is about engaging people, to be able to get a certain amount of info out of them. That's fundamental. You have to have online research skills now. That's a minimum now. Online search and research are essential. Time management is increasingly important.

Attributes: curiosity, critical thinking, engaging personality and people skills (it's an attribute); general wide knowledge of what's happening in the world; curiosity to be in the world of facts and ideas.

*What's the best way for a newcomer to learn about journalism?*

One of the biggest things they have to learn is about news values and makes a story in that particular media outlet.

So they need to consume that media outlet hugely. And they need to engage with the people who create the content. And they need to do the work and reflect on the work they are doing as they start to do more and more of it.

Hopefully as a part of that process, they are getting feedback from the newsroom too.

(The feedback will) aid their reflection and learning.

*How are they (news values) learnt in the newsroom?*

Through implicit and explicit feedback. You come into the newsroom, you pitch a story and they say no. That's both implicit and explicit feedback. The implicit feedback is that that type of story isn't right; the explicit feedback is that that particular story isn't right. They go to conference and see what is knocked back. They pick up the paper and see what is on page one. They write an article and it gets to page nine and gets cut to 200 words. They file an article and they hear somebody whinging about it. It's not all feedback as in let's sit down and have a feedback session. Which is what I wished there was more of. But it is a range of feedbacks. They hear their colleagues saying what a brilliant story it was, or maybe they accidentally hear them saying what a crap story it was.

*So it takes a while for a journalist to go through a period of learning?*

It does. No doubt about it. It takes years.

*Are there skills that can only be developed in a newsroom?*

Potentially it can be taught better in a classroom. A course has the ability to be highly structured. Writing can be learned in a structured context.

Whereas in a newsroom, they don't help you much. Maybe what they help you get is so implicit that it takes you a long time to pick up on it. Maybe they tolerate mediocrity or low quality and you never pick it up.

About your question on what can be learnt only in a newsroom, they are very limited to things that are about that newsroom, about that particular media environment. The news values thing is a good example. A lot of core skills and values can and are picked up outside the newsroom. Potentially, writing can be taught better

outside the newsroom. Between a writing program at a news organisation and the university, there is no reason that the university one will be inferior.

*How do newsrooms contribute to a journalist's development?*

In lots of ways. They provide the resources and structures of things that people can learn. They provide the environment where the communication exists, so that the feedback and various other information about performance (can exist). They provide expectations. They provide places for people to practise.

Even though work isn't practice (for its own sake); work is the goal. You wrote a piece today. It's not practice; it's the real thing. However, it is practice, in the sense that you get better at it.

They provide an opportunity to do it, and then implicitly it is an opportunity to learn how to do it – to do it better.

One of my complaints about universities is they don't provide enough of those opportunities when they could.

*There is the thinking journalists need to be more street-smart than be knowledge-*

*based, that university degrees don't matter, what we need is a street-smart outlook.*

*What is your view when you have a choice between those two, assuming that people are either street smart or academically inclined?*

I know what you mean by academic modes of thinking, but I don't know what you mean by street smart.

I posit a third position, which is the way I perceive journalists think around here. If that is street smart, there are various issues with the way that universities operate and think that are incompatible with the newsroom – it is the speed of it. They are too slow, they have theoretical models that don't necessarily relate to the way the world relates. They have reasons for those, but that doesn't necessarily relate to the way the world operates. They are not audience focused or their audiences are so narrow – they are academic niches that it is not relevant to mainstream media. There is a real incompatibility between that way of operating and the way the newsroom operates.

I would be much more interested in someone who was widely read than someone who was widely degreed.

*People in newsrooms boast that they can make a journalist out of someone who has the savvy to get things done – who is not schooled in anything but who is smart – much more easily than someone who has a degree in journalism. Do you agree?*

Absolutely. It has been done and it can be done. The evidence is that people come into the newsroom straight out of school at 17 and go on to become journalists. At times they wouldn't even have the equivalent of the HSC. And yet, they would pick up information about the world by being young journalists, by reading newspapers and books, and they would become educated journalists over time in a different way to someone who comes out of university.

They are just not mutually exclusive. Someone can come out of uni, with whatever degree – journalism or whatever degree – and still with that same street-smartness and ability to be moulded into a good journalist.

*What do you expect a beginner journalist to know? What kind of knowledge base do you expect from a beginner, say a cadet?*

In terms of journalism, to know the difference between news and just a topic. On some level, knowing what that difference is. They will develop that as they go on, that distinction, but they need that distinction already before they join the Sydney Morning Herald.

But that's the top of the tree. You can't say that everybody needs to know how journalism operates before they join the country newspaper. They will learn that when they get there.

*Given a choice, all other things being equal, between three candidates – one with an arts, another with a science and a third with a journalism degree – who would be your choice?*

It wouldn't be on the basis of their degrees. It would be on the basis of other characteristics.

*Nowadays there's a preference for journalists to be generalists rather than specialists. What's your view on that?*

In reporting, they have to start as generalists. They specialise over time. I am not aware of any change in demand. There was a small demand for science reporters 20 years ago, there is an equivalent demand now. It's difficult to predict. You still need those niches to be covered by people with specialist knowledge. The more skills, attributes and knowledge you can bring, the better. If you have got everything then great. If you don't then the company will have to invest in developing you towards that ideal.

*What kind of attributes do you expect of newsroom leaders?*

They have to know how to do things that they are asking their staff to do. So they need technical knowledge and skills. And they need to build on that with what are effectively management skills and leadership skills.

As well as being good journalists they also need to be good managers. They need to be more organised than the people they are managing. They need to have better people skills. They need to be harder working. They need to be more expert in their news sense. And so on.

*What makes the difference between a good editor and an excellent editor?*

Communication. Clear expectation setting. Performance management. Charisma, as an added bonus. Organisation skills.

*Journalists need to reflect but they don't find the time. How can they be made to reflect more? Is the newsroom the best context?*

They reflect more when they go away from the newsroom, with people from the newsroom. When they have coffee and so on. Walks, and beer and possibly training forums away from the newsroom. They are forums for discussion. All of the discussions outside of the newsroom – they probably get (a little more time) for reflection.

You might get (some time) in the newsroom. You probably get a little more time when you take one step outside it.

We have lunch sessions, where people talk. But they are more oriented towards junior staff rather than senior staff.

We should do a lot more of lunch-time talks and similar informal training sessions using resources that are readily available like journalists from the newsroom. Resources for training have not diminished but getting out of the newsroom has become harder and harder.

That is a resource issue but I don't think resources for training are hugely reduced. There is probably a few more limits on it. There is still a substantial budget and there has probably been a resurgence here. The budget has at least been maintained even though there have been financially bad years.

*What kind of areas do mid-career journalists need training in?*

Four years into the training role now, I would say they need training in everything. From the basics to investigative journalism and financial journalism. It varies from person to person. This is where your matrix idea fits in.

*How do you measure competency?*

Going back to what we were talking about before – accuracy, brevity, clarity, that takes you to basic competency. You can measure all those. You can measure accuracy, you can measure word economy. Similarly you can do that with clarity too.

*Do you think a listing of competencies is desirable to have?*

Yes I do. I have a draft competency framework that we use. We are working towards revising that to a 2012 version.

**Excerpts from interview with Graham Erbacher, managing editor, News Central, centralized editing unit for News Corp newspapers. The interview was conducted on 2 May 2012.**

*What is the future of print media?*

The important thing is that the mastheads, as we understand it, of media organisations survive. That is the core of journalism. Whether it is online, tablet format or as a newspaper is irrelevant. The important thing is that the news organisation survives, a news organisation that has the ability to employ a greater number of people who are trained as journalists.

*Do you see newsrooms surviving?*

They should, they must. The problem is that Advertising revenue is deserting newspapers and it is not necessarily going across to the online or tablet versions of what we call newspapers or mastheads. And that is a big worry.

*How can we define a journalist? Bloggers claim to be journalists. How can we narrow the definition of journalists and professionalise journalism?*

Without getting too medieval craft about it, I think journalism is a craft. I don't think because I have an opinion I am a journalist. Because I can blog I am a journalist. I am not. I can draw for you a pretty house. But that doesn't mean I am an architect. I can make a nice Lego model of a bridge but that doesn't mean I am an engineer. I can give advice to a friend who might need it, but that doesn't make me a social worker.

I firmly believe that there are some basic skills, knowledge, training which comes from on the job as well as what may have gone before in terms of skill, university, college whatever. There is a preparation beforehand, there is a period of working in the craft (so that you don't start practising from the first day of joining

without undergoing a period of cadetship or training or observation). It is a pity that formal structures of training have disappeared. In journalism you have got reporting, production – and they do require very specific skills that it's just not up to someone to say, hey I am a journalist, I am an architect. You are not.

*Would you say that a newsroom is the best place to train a journalist or would you prefer a journalist to have had university training?*

If I were to pick some of the conventional wisdoms floating around – they may be wrong – there is a feeling that formal education is failing journalism as a craft somewhat because, apart from anything else, it is not instilling them with a passion for the profession. It may be giving them a distorted idea of what journalism is all about. That is (it may be giving them the idea) that there is only one sort of journalism, that is crusading journalism. And it is probably not spending the sort of time that you would get from older times when university or diplomas of journalism offered by colleges or institutes of technology were more practically skills based. So I am all in favour of a liberal education, or paths of journalism courses that teach critical thinking that allow people to have analytical skills, to have knowledge of the history of journalism – where it has come from, where it is going to – all that sort of critical evaluation. At the same time, you have to have people who are passionate about what they are doing rather than cynical, or wanting to dispossess or disown the whole idea of being a working journalist.

That's where obviously in-house should give you the love of what you are doing. If you are a person with some of the basic skills – other than those academic – which would be a curiosity about the world, an ability to critically evaluate, think about things, think about what's before me...

Journalism is the craft of extracting the sorts of information. There is that process of selection, and it is important that people exercise a knowledge of for whom they are presenting, a basic fairness in selection and a maturity in judgment. There are a million facts out there and we don't need to know all. But it takes a very special person I think with very special training to understand what do we need to know, what is the need to know and then construct it in a lively and informative manner.

*What is the best way for a newcomer to learn about journalism? How can a young journalist become more skilled?*

Because of the pressures in the newsroom, we have failed the new reporters and we are failing, I think, in making sure that people understand that journalism is a

whole experience of gathering experience and then presenting it in a way that people want to read it.

I think we need to get back to some sort of mentoring system – pie in the sky. There needs to be more formal, in-house training on legal issues – defamation, contempt, copyright, all those things that people are engaging with, particularly online (where journalists may be using material from Google or other search engines and where copyright issues may arise). Also (needed is training about) ethical standards and ethical compliance. Those sorts of things we should be doing in-house. It calls for a more mature relationship between the academic world and the profession.

There is a bit of a them-and-us between some academics and journalists who like to think they can't be told anything in the world. You get a lot of resistance from journalists who are prepared to critically evaluate other people's work but then who go to ground if someone wants to turn the attention back on them. I have seen it so often.

*What are the must-have skills for print journalists in newsrooms today, with multimedia convergence occurring?*

Skills for journalists generally: You need a curiosity about the world, the ability to critically evaluate, a passion for truthfulness, common sense, and a dedication to accuracy and reliability. But working across platforms places greater demands on people. Once we used to have essentially one deadline – or a series of deadlines starting at 8pm and going to 1am or 2am. It was essentially based on the one set of events that you were updating or improving on as the night went on. In working across platforms, it is quite relentless. Talk about 24/7 newsrooms. There is a rolling process throughout the day. There is a constant readiness and speed. At the same time you have to achieve the same results. It's no good being the first online if you are not accurate. The same demands and pressures on people exist, but with shorter turnaround time.

*How can journalists be made to reflect? How can the process of maturation be made to happen?*

It comes with experience. Knowledge, wisdom and resourcefulness come with years of practice.

*What qualities must a newspaper editor show?*



Certainly an understanding of the publication and its readers' needs; an understanding of the staff and their skill levels and how they can be properly managed, and which can often require some tough decisions.

In a newsroom of the future, we have to face facts. There will probably be fewer people working, and therefore it's got to be better resource management than the past, both in reporting and production. (Production has taken cuts and has failed in the past 15 to 20 years as a career path in journalism. There was once a lot of demand for production roles in newspaper organisations. These days there are many who haven't had exposure to subediting, layout and those sorts of roles.) We actually have a skills deficit in that area (of production).

A good editor must have an effective reporting team (capable of working across platforms).

An editor must be courageous because they are going to come under enormous pressure always. There is going to be phone calls, emails, pressure applied particularly if you are on a crusading or investigative story.

You have to have the ability, strength, to back your own judgment, and after your assessment of what your staff have produced, back your staff. You are lost if you are not able to stand up to that pressure.

There needs to be in an editor a wider knowledge of the world and the place in which a newspaper finds itself. I don't think the newspapers are here to reshape the world. We are here to reflect the world. There has to be a dedication to truthfulness, objectivity – using a word that has gone out of fashion quite a lot – and fairness. That gets back to that skill to sort, select – there is so much information out there – in a way that has to be fairly, objectively presented.

*A journalist needs to be street-smart rather than academically bright. What is your view? What must a journalist know before becoming a practitioner?*

I don't think it is a question of either or. You do need to be street smart. Academically knowledgeable? Yes. What we are missing a lot is cultural knowledge. You need knowledge of history. Because of the complexity of stories, there has to be a numeracy skill, scientific analysis. A good academic knowledge is therefore important. You do need to be street-smart. You have to instantly assess what is good what is bad, what is in what is out, what is worth pursuing and how do I cover my bases. It requires a bit of savvy.

*Ideally, would an all-round knowledge be better than a deep specialised knowledge?*

I think it is. But then deep specialised knowledge usually indicates a state of mind, an ability to harness your mind into a particular area. You would think that the skills you develop to have a deep specialised knowledge, of Australian history or whatever subject, will be able to be transferred across the field.

You do need a pretty wide background these days. Specialists are probably disappearing more these days. A generalist is more the vogue.

*What personal characteristics must a journalist have?*

They must be curious about the world. (Curiosity can extend from trivia to the wider issues of how society is and should be working.) If you are not curious, you cannot be a journalist.

You have to have a passion for truthfulness, which sounds a bit naff I suppose. But if you are not a truthful person and who is dedicated to some idea of accuracy, and taking some pride in being accurate and truthful, (you might as well work not bother about journalism).

You need to be reliable and that reliability comes through both in your pursuit of knowledge and your selection of that knowledge, selection of the parcels of knowledge that you think are important for the presentation of a report.

You also need reliability in being able to meet deadlines. No good having the most perfectly formed story that is going to arrive after the paper's deadline.

You have to have common sense. A lot of people don't have common sense. Finally you have to marshal the facts and present them in a way that is going to excite the curiosity of others. If you are presenting the story in a way that people would not want to read, see or hear, then you are not doing it effectively.

**Excerpts from interview with Christopher Warren, federal secretary, Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance. The interview was conducted on 2 May 2012.**

*Do you see a future for print media?*

I think that print has a limited future. How limited that is, I don't know. Not because people don't want to read print, but because advertising is leaving print and advertising has sustained print. So I think print as we have historically understood it does have a limited future.

*What about the future of the newsroom – a place where journalists congregate and produce something? Do you see that surviving?*

Yes, I do. I think there will be two models for journalism, as there is now. I think there will be large newsrooms and there will be a lot of independent operators, some of them directly communicating with their readers, listeners or viewers and others working through media organisations of one sort or another.

I think that's because you get different things out of different groups.

You get a real synergy out of having people working together.

And secondly where you are dealing with people with limited experience, they need to be part of a collaborative experience. People learn through that collaborative experience in ways that they don't just learn by working on their own as individuals.

*Where do you see journalism going? Bloggers call themselves journalists. Do you think bloggers are journalists?*

Well, some are. Blogging is just a platform which can be used for anything. It can be used for personal diary, it can be used to practise journalism. One of the exciting ways in which journalism has adapted the blog format has been with live news blogging. It's a new way of telling a news story. Instead of writing news stories on a daily basis, summarizing the important events of the day, it is effectively a timeline that you develop. Live blogging is the way in which journalism has adapted the blog particularly to meet its needs.

*Is there a minimum qualification needed to be a journalist? Is it a profession?*

Yes, I think journalism is a profession. But it is a profession particularly because it is a craft. Yes anybody can write, but it doesn't necessarily follow that anyone can practise journalism. It's a bit self-referential. A journalist is someone who practices journalism whether they are practising journalism through a blog or in a traditional newspaper or TV or radio or any other format. It is a mistake to confuse the platform or the delivery vehicle with the skills of the craft.

There was a time when you could talk about the pressman as being synonymous with a journalist because all journalists worked on newspapers and work in the press, and most journalists were men. Now you can't really conflate the two. People know journalism when they see it. What defines is a certain degree of skill in communicating, and also a commitment to the ethical standards that underpin journalism – respect the truth, respect the public's right to know.

*Is there a set of values that define journalism?*

That's right. Both ethics and a set of values (that define journalism) are broad principles – in our case the journalist code of ethics that journalists administer through

their union. A set of principles – respect the truth, respect the public’s right to know, respect the rights of others, and then concrete guidelines on what that actually means in particular circumstances – don’t plagiarise, for example. Clear any conflict of interest (for example).

*When a person says I am a journalist, what are the qualities that you would expect that person to have?*

Different people answer that in different ways.

I would think a journalist is someone who can communicate. That doesn’t mean that they can just write or present, but that they would do it in a way that people would want to absorb or consume and does it in accordance with the code of ethics that underpin journalism – that is, respect for truth etc.

It’s a bit like a scratch and sniff test. You know a journalist when you see one or when someone holds themselves out to be a journalist. What behavior shows the commitment to journalism? It is not enough to know the truth or to respect the truth, there is an obligation to share that truth.

A journalist has to have that curiosity about the truth, and the skills to communicate the truth. And also a desire to communicate that truth and an almost a revulsion at the idea of communicating something that is not true or something knowingly untrue.

*What are the must-have skills for a journalist?*

The core skills are curiosity – that doesn’t just mean they are interested in things, it also means they are interested in taking the steps to find things out, make the phone call, interview the person, do all the things that journalists naturally do to gather information.

Secondly, communication – that is the ability to write or put words together in a way, sometimes it is not words, it can be a visual or a text-based medium, to put information together in a way that will be attractive for other people to read or to quickly or easily consume through whatever media they may wish to work with.

*What is the best way for a new journalist coming into the newsroom to learn about journalism?*

The best way is by doing.

The second way is only through rejection. It is through that process of being told that your work is not good enough. (through feedback.) Often quite brutal

feedback (like being told the work is not good enough). That is why congregations of journalists in a newsroom are critical to the development of journalists.

*Learning by doing involves learning from others, from your colleagues in the newsroom?*

Absolutely.

*Feedback from others in the newsroom is not explicit often...*

That's right. It's difficult when it is not explicit. You write a story and it's not run in the paper, for example. There could be a whole lot of reasons for that. It could just have been squeezed out, it might have been superseded by another story, it might not have been right for the news of the day, or you didn't write it very well, you didn't prepare it very well – but you don't know that unless you get that regular feedback.

When I first started in journalism, which was quite some time ago, you write a story even if it was only 3 or 4 paragraphs, for a few months I was continually phoned back, where is this, where is that. There is no doubt that that kind of rigorous training is invaluable in enabling you to write.

Journalism is not about writing, it is about writing in a way that is easily and quickly consumable by our readers or our listeners or our viewers. (It is also about) getting to the point very quickly.

*Between a science, an arts and a journalism graduate, who would you choose to be inducted into the newsroom?*

The experience of university graduates, it is only in the past 30 or 40 years that most journalists have been graduates. Up until 35 years ago, most people coming into journalism were not graduates at all. Even for a long time after that, quite a lot of senior journalists were dismissive of anyone with university training.

I remember one senior manager at News Ltd saying to me, we have employed a graduate once, he was no good at all, why would we employ graduates?

It is less important what people graduate from, than it is that they be graduates. Being a graduate gives you a whole lot of skills like analysis – a sense of analysis – and understanding of the world into the newsroom which you don't have coming directly out of school.

*Is it important for journalists to be graduates?*

I think it is. I am a bit of oddity in that in my cadetship – not as a graduate, but then I did a university degree (later) – I can see both sides. On balance, its shift to becoming a postgraduate occupation is a positive one for the industry.

The kind of degree that they do shapes the kind of journalists that they are.

I think if you are a journalism graduate you have certain skills. If you are an arts, science, law or medical graduate, you have different skills.

There is often a frustration that some journalists will express that people coming into the newsroom with journalism degrees are not ready to be a journalist. And I will say, that's right, they have been trained so they are now ready for you to train them to the next level. There is still a significant amount of training that needs to occur (in the newsroom).

*Does a journalism degree give the journalist an advantage?*

It does. It means that some of the things that are important in journalism – communication skills, understanding the practices of the craft – that they bring in, in a way that people with other degrees don't bring in... I think there has been a trend (towards doing journalism degrees prior to seeking entry into journalism, just as there has been trend for journalists to be graduates).

There is a whole lot of things you don't need to learn if you have been told them at the university.

But there are still many things that you do need to (learn) because no university can teach you the skills you need for the day-to-day generation of news stories, the craft skills that are tailored for that operation.

*Journalists in newsrooms often boast they can make journalists out of street-smart people. What is your view?*

It is a circular argument in some ways. Give me anyone who has aptitude for journalist and I will make them into a journalist. That is a statement of the bleeding obvious really. But the question is how good a journalist will you make them?

Journalism is something that operates on a range of levels. Layers of journalism are now greater than they ever were, because a lot of the information that we used to report, that we still report, either through the paper, the radio or television, is already accessible to people.

So in a sense journalism is the first draft of history. It is actually in some ways more important now than it was perhaps historically.

*Do you think there are some journalistic skills that can only be learnt in a news organisation as opposed to what universities and other explicit training courses do?*

There is no doubt a lot of socialization skills are taught in newsrooms. Newsrooms are by definition different to universities. There are some core craft skills that you only really internalize into your own practices when you actually have to do them everyday. At university, yes you do learn them and you do internalize some of them, but you only get that profound inculturation in the way writer everyday, in the way you communicate everyday when you are in a newsroom or when you are in the daily practice of journalism.

*Looking at it from the other side, are there some skills that can only be internalized outside of the newsroom?*

I don't think there is any doubt that newsrooms don't lend themselves to any reflection. They are very much about what is happening now, whether they are reporting for the next day's paper or that minute's news bulletin.

Whereas I think the benefits of university graduates bring and what external study brings generally is that challenge of reflection.

*Generally news journalists do not have the time to reflect. That is one of the excuses that they have...*

That is partly true. But it also partly not true. I think journalists do reflect in the sense that journalists are themselves the greatest consumers of journalism. They will be reading papers, they will be reading the magazines, they will be reading books, they will be monitoring the internet, they will be watching documentaries. Journalists are in a continual process of keeping themselves informed.

Journalists know a little about a lot and then a lot about whatever their area of expertise is.

So I think journalists do do that process of reflection, but it does often need to be a more detailed process of reflection.

We see a lot of journalists do that through long-form journalism. *Because of multimedia there is pressure to know a little about a lot of areas – be a jack of all trades. Do you think there is scope to specialize?*

There is scope to specialize and many journalists do specialize.

But one of the things that journalists bring to journalism is the sense of knowing a little about a lot. It is one of the things that journalists bring to covering issues.

Even if they are covering politics, they should have an understanding about what is happening in society at large. That's a pretty important part of journalism. Most journalists read a lot of newspapers wherever they are, even on a holiday. They develop a lot of knowledge about a lot of things, even if they never write about those things and often they never will.

That broader and admittedly shallow knowledge of the world informs the reporting of those things where they have a very deep understanding.

(It testifies to) the natural curiosity of journalists. Journalists are interested in almost anything.

*Are multimedia skills must-have skills now?*

There is no doubt that multimedia skills are critical for journalists. And it is hard for journalists. It is possible to build a career without being on Twitter or Facebook or engaging in social media in that way. But it is going to be increasingly hard.

Because one of the things that journalists need to do which is particularly hard is manage their own brand, manage their own career.

Traditionally when you are in a newsroom, your career or your brand is managed by the organisation where you work. They make the decisions. They have a say about what you would do and what you report on and where you would go.

Increasingly individual journalists need to make those decisions and manage that process. Journalists need to become an expert in what they do, not just through the reflective glory of their masthead but as individuals.

*What are the key qualities you would expect editors to have?*

I think editors are a bit like football coaches. They have two responsibilities in terms of their journalistic staff. The first is to get you to do today's story the way it needs to be done. Secondly they need to be thinking about where is this person going to be in five years' time?

On the subject of football coaches, you see coaches who are very good at day-to-day (things), managing the (daily) game, and you get coaches who are very good at managing the player's career for the long term. Same with editors. You will see editors who are very good at getting the best out of today and you can see editors who are very good at, I can see where this person is going to be in four or five years' time.



## APPENDIX D - INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

### Competencies for future newsrooms in Australia

Researcher: Padmanabhan Iyer (Padma Iyer)

I have been given information about “Competencies for future newsrooms in Australia: A mid-career learning strategy for journalists” and discussed the research project with Padma Iyer, who is conducting this research as part of a research degree supervised by Dr Eric Loo in the journalism faculty of Creative Arts Department at the University of Wollongong. I have been advised that, apart from the time taken to answer the questions, potential risks are minimal. I have had an opportunity to ask Padma Iyer any questions I may have about the research and my participation. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with my organisation or with the University of Wollongong. If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Padma Iyer on 02-42271472 or Dr Eric Loo on 02-42214487. If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is being conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 02-4221 4457. By signing below, I indicate my consent to my responses being used in a study for academic purposes.

(Please tick one of the following):

..... I choose to be identified with my responses.

..... I would like a pseudonym to be used with my responses.

I understand that the data collected from my participation may be published as research findings in a thesis and used in academic presentations.

Signed ..... Date ...../...../.....

Name (please print) .....