

The Contingencies of Creative Work in Television

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Abstract: This paper analyses research evidence about the creative environments in the UK television production sector. The industry is reviewed across a number of dimensions: the evolving sentiments and structures of collective creativity; the perception of the actual and the ideal creative environment for television production; the growing levels of uncertainty associated with freelance work; and the key qualities which underlie creative work.

A central argument of the paper is that there is a critical link in the television production process between contingent conditions which will, because of the project nature of programme production and the limited timescales, almost always be marked by levels of uncertainty and relative disorder, and this will have a direct impact on the creative outputs. In this situation, fundamental to optimum creative environments in production companies are the connections between individual talent, collective creativity and innovation. The research suggests that the contemporary organisational set up and the reordering of the work regime in television production has developed with insufficient attention to this dynamic and the spaces within which it occurs with uncertain consequences.

Keywords: Television production, talent, work, organisation, creative environment.

1. BACKGROUND

Television is an industry that is sustained by creative work. The regard with which British television has been held for many years is explicable in part by the structures within which it has operated and the high levels of investment in original programming alongside the creativity of those who have worked in it. The conditions of creativity in television have been much discussed but almost always with little in-depth evidence to support the arguments.

This debate dates back to the 1970s in the UK television industry. Within the BBC there was a range of views. A dominant view, articulated by Stephen Hearst, then Chief Policy Adviser, was that an organisation of the size of the BBC with a 'critical mass' was needed to achieve some of the most important programmes produced by that institution such as *Civilisation*, and indeed that only organisations of the scale of operations in NHK, BBC and ARD could achieve such critical quality. This view echoed Thomas Schatz' analysis of why the American studios had such success in making Hollywood the global capital of film production (Schatz, 1988).

Until overturned during the Birt regime in the 1990s, the BBC operated through a central control of programme resource allocation (see Anderson 1990, Birt 2002). The Kensington House experiment of the late 1970s in the BBC (Paterson, 1993) informed subsequent developments: the documentary department at the BBC developed a different model of programme production based on a small cohesive creative group. This influenced the template for the creation of an independent production sector with the establishment of Channel 4 in the early 1980s (Bonner and Aston, 2002).

The issue of working environments in the creative industries more broadly has been explored in relation to particular talent groups. Faulkner (1983) focused on music and how the individual creativity linked to music composition is situated in relation to the collective creativity of film production in the USA; Blair *et al.* (2001) and Gornostova and Pratt (2006) have reviewed the film production sector in Britain; Neff (2005) has begun to explore content production in new media. In television in the UK, Tunstall (1992) reviewed the work of producers across different genre.

The growing body of research into the creative industries (Caves 2000, Bilton 2006, Davis and Scase 2000, Hesmondhalgh 2005, Work Foundation 2007) has concentrated on the management of creativity at a macro-level, rather than investigating the optimum organisational conditions of creativity, that is the contingencies of an individual's working environment and its impact on their ability to be creative. Furthermore, minimal empirical evidence gathered from creative workers has been evinced in most studies, with a high dependence on interviews with policy analysts and executives. This study provides both a body of statistically significant evidence and rich qualitative data which for the first time enables a clearer perspective on the ramifications of different organisational forms in the television production sector. The continuing relevance of the research data from which this essay has been developed to the contemporary television production sector has been confirmed by the annual Skillset industry census. For example, wide publicity was attracted by the 2009 census results showing the difficulties women have in returning to work after maternity leave with little change over the decade since the Industry Tracking Study first highlighted this situation in 1998 (BFI 1999, Willis and Dex, 2003, Skillset 2009).

By the late-1990s, when the data used in this essay was gathered, the relative settlement of the years of duopoly in

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British television in terms of work practices had begun to be profoundly altered by the impact of independent production quotas and the continued growth of the independent sector. These companies had developed alongside the fast growing satellite and cable sectors which operated outside the older regulatory framework, and television creative work was also beginning to be radically affected by technological advance in the production sector. This process of change has been embedded in recent years and although the sector is still prone to the uncertainties associated with freelance work (cf. Dex *et al.*, 2000) these have been altered to some extent by subsequent developments in the broader organisational ecology and further technological innovation. Changes in the regulatory environment, in particular measures which followed the 2003 Communications Act, provided a new relationship between broadcasters and independent suppliers, and in particular a different rights regime for independent productions. A consequence of these changes was the strengthening of the independent production sector's commercial value and a series of mergers and acquisitions in the sector, leading to the growth of a number of large independent suppliers able to attract significant capital investment and having greater stability than existed in the late 1990s.

It is the contention of this essay that collective creativity leading to innovation, whether of a limited or radical nature is a product of trust, certainty and culture operating in an organic organisational form appropriate to the tasks required of a project. As many studies have demonstrated, the best ideas in any workplace arise out of casual contacts among different groups within the same company. The nature of the group, its longevity, diversity and cohesiveness, resource availability, alongside factors including leadership, group size and social information exchange have been identified as crucial aspects in creative performance (see Boisot 1998, Uzzi 1997).

Furthermore, the relationship between the wider context of an industry – the fitness landscape of firms (cf. McElvey 1999, Thompson 2003) – and the everyday working lives of creative workers is an important consideration in analysing television production. Although this is often below the surface in the everyday concerns of creative workers, in this research (BFI 1999) it was expected to have a direct relevance to the issue of how important, or not, the size of a firm is in producing high quality programmes.

The central hypothesis explored here is that 'contingent factors affect the creative environment in television production and that the extent of talent and skills available, and an organisation's size - its 'critical mass' – influence its performance'.

2. METHOD

The BFI Television Industry Tracking Study, of which the author was a principal investigator, issued questionnaires every six months between 1994 and 1998 to 450 creative workers in the UK television industry. The respondents were recruited from a range of sources and were matched in proportion to the Skillset census of workers. The panel suffered quite a high attrition rate amongst the youngest age group and this group was refreshed in 1996.

The questionnaires included both quantitative and qualitative material and were addressed to issues relating to working lives in television (see Paterson 2001, Dex *et al.* 2000, Willis and Dex 2003) and to critical factors in the creative environment of work. In addition, as analysis of the research evidence proceeded and theoretical concepts were deployed to interpret the empirical material, additional research on the intensity of the networks of relationships between workers in firms was undertaken.

Throughout the study 'creativity' was one of the values polled periodically. There was a consistently high rating for this (undefined) attribute of work in television. At the same time 'uncertainty' was consistently rated negatively. In May 1998, further data was collected to enable exploration of the social dimensions of creativity. In asking respondents about creative environments, questions were posed in the context of an 'ideal' situation, and then about the experience of these factors in their recent employment. No attempt was made to identify characteristics of the creative individual; rather the focus was on the conditions which individuals with creative jobs believed beneficial to high quality work. In so doing, the research tapped into the professional ideology of the different communities of practice, and salient factors in the organisational cultures of firms.

The quantitative data collected was analysed using a range of techniques: the non-parametric Kruskal Wallis Analysis of Variance Test as well as Mann Whitney U Tests. These results were then interpreted in conjunction with the qualitative information using a number of theoretical frameworks drawn from organisational and economic sociology. All data and quotes in this essay are drawn from this BFI study. The designation of the workers is anonymised where they are quoted: a worker designated Male 30-17, is the 17th male worker in the 31-40 age cohort. The independent production companies were identified by a number (e.g Indie 7).

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. Collective Creativity

In the 1990s there were significant changes in the modes of solidarity available to those working in television. The gradual demise of the sentiments and structures of collective creativity in television, with the advent of a predominantly freelance labour market, was a significant change for organisations and communities of practice (see e.g Ursell 1998).

This can be encapsulated in two quotes:

Male 50-16, a Film Editor, "I miss the melting pot of ideas with producers, directors and editors...all sitting over coffee in the BBC canteen chewing the fat. I still feel we offer creativity but only if time allows, when budgets are tight the easy route seems enough" (May 98).

Male 50-9 'For a period in the 70s and early 80s Thames TV was a creatively stimulating place to work at. Responsive management, coupled with good dedicated and talented people working in harmony, were the main factors. Staff were happy and felt secure! Recently I've changed my opinion about freelance/casual/very short contract work. Curiously I see little evidence that insecurity stimulates creativity!' (May 97).

The changes in attitude and structure were confirmed by a senior ITV executive, Male 40-27, 'The fragmentation of the industry has undoubtedly reduced creativity' (March 94), while Male 30-2, a producer, noted that, "the increase in independent production and the casualisation in broadcaster/producer companies has undermined the stable, communal (or collegiate) atmosphere that is most conducive to good programme making. Increasing commercial pressure on managers makes them less tolerant of and less likely to employ 'unconventional' producers; and makes them exert greater expectations of immediate ratings success on producers" (March 94).

These changed structures and sentiments were equally felt in the emergent independent production sector. Male 50-17, Managing Director at a small independent, found "turnover is a nuisance; it reduces the collective creativity of the company. But we do what we can to hold staff." (March 94). Male 50-6 commented on feeling a new isolation "Less work has meant less scope to be creative. Not working for a company full time this year means that the shaping of ideas and the day-by-day learning of creativity from others that I got from working at Thames and [Indie 9] has shrivelled" (November 96).

Collective activity depends on continuities of practice. An ITV executive, Male 40-26, identified a key problem: "...when working with freelance contract staff there is no continuity and no real loyalty from them to company aims. Often aims of company different from freelance staff." (March 94). A slightly different effect was identified by Male 30-6, a freelance producer: "I tend to work with a small group of companies and programme makers because good programmes come from mutual trust and understanding within a team. The main disadvantage of working in this way in the independent sector is that you can become cut off from other things going on in the broadcasters or other independent companies" (March 94).

In stark contrast, Male 50-1 commented (May 98) "...the places that were least creative were those in large institutions with a rigid and unhearing management. I left those as fast as possible. But then I was lucky to be able to do so." This was an evolving sector in which the lived reality was difficult for some but rewarding for others, and in which the long-term effects of change were contested. They confirm the importance of social capital (Burt 1997) and the relevance of embeddedness (Uzzi 1997) but importantly signal the complexities of negotiating collective creative work in times of change, and differences of view about the relative strengths of different company types for achieving optimal creativity.

3.2. Perceptions of the Creative Environment

The creative environment in all its complexity – the spaces and conditions of the production of knowledge assets (Boisot 1998) – plays an important part in enabling or undermining the success of firms, and the quality of work which workers can deliver. Analysis of the views held about the ideal creative environment by the panel – in effect the ideal type characteristics of the communities of practice which workers inhabit – set alongside the data about the actual experience of the contemporary work environment provide a context for understanding how the discourse of

creativity was inhabited in the organizations, cultures and working lives of individual workers in television.

Eighteen factors were identified as possible critical factors in a creative working environment. Respondents' views about their importance were sought using a ranking from one (not at all important) to five (most important). Six factors were ranked as the most influential by the respondents, each rated at 4 or 5 by more than 80 per cent of the panel, and with a broad consensus across all roles and age cohorts. They were 'working with talented individuals' (mean=4.48), 'trust between colleagues' (mean=4.44), 'working as a team' (mean=4.34), 'effective leadership' (mean=4.26), 'exchange of ideas' (mean=4.23) and 'responsiveness to ideas' (mean=4.20).

3.2.1. Creativity and Uncertainty

Data on key aspects of the creative environment were mapped against the uncertainty groupings. This analysis was carried out using the non-parametric Kruskal Wallis Analysis of Variance Test. It was found that those who registered uncertainty as a positive value rated adaptability to change ($\chi^2=10.42$, $p<.05$) and flexible working conditions ($\chi^2=7.63$, $p<.05$) more important to the creative environment than those who offered a negative evaluation of uncertainty. This group also rated sufficient time ($\chi^2=22.72$, $p<.001$) more important to the creative environment than those offering a negative evaluation of uncertainty.

Each of these three factors implies working at what might be described as the 'edge of chaos' in the creative environment, which has been suggested, is a factor affecting creativity (cf. the work of Kauffman 1993 and its subsequent influence in the social sciences). Adaptability to change and flexible working conditions are in some sense synonymous and their existence in a company might be linked to a degree of uncertainty in working life. These results suggest a better fit between individuals who are comfortable with change and two important factors in the new types of creative environments, which had emerged with the changing patterns of work and organisation in the television production sector. These individuals took a different approach to the creative work environment – welcoming a degree of instability – while also wanting sufficient time to achieve the desired results (Dex *et al.*, 2000).

Those who registered a negative response to creativity in their current jobs rated high energy, leadership, staff stability, exchange of ideas, diversity of expertise experienced, responsiveness to ideas, and flexible working conditions, as more important to the creative environment than other groupings. These results suggest that the views of these individuals were focused by their negative experience in their current employment, and that these were the areas they found most lacking there.

Significant difference was also found between those who had a neutral evaluation of creativity in their current job who rated working with talented individuals as less important than those who liked or disliked creativity. Working with talented individuals was identified as very important by a large majority of respondent but this result suggests that neutrality towards creativity might be associated with work on programmes which lack challenge or innovation, so that

the presence or absence of talented colleagues was less relevant.

3.3. Working Relationships

A consensus about the importance of three interlinked factors in working relationships in television production work emerged (see Table 1 below). This consensus emphasised that the contingent connections across the talent-creativity-innovation nexus are critically configured around working relationships.

3.3.1. Working with Talented Individuals

The importance of individual ‘talent’ to any successful creative collective endeavour was understood by most workers in tv. The influence of individual contributions to the creative process was rated highly, and “working with talented individuals” was seen as of most importance with 91.6 per cent considering this factor as very important or important. *Talent is, in effect, a synonym for unique skill, accomplishment and knowledge in a particular field.* It cannot be contained by conventional authority mechanisms inside organisations and its economic value can provide the incentive for an individual to move outside an organisation in an attempt to capture more of the rent deriving from his or her contribution. There were numerous examples where ‘talent’ was seen as a critical factor in a company’s success.

For example, Male 40-28, an independent producer, reported (November 94) that ‘hanging on to talented staff is the most difficult thing for an independent producer’. Another independent producer, Male 50-2 witnessed many staff as ‘passing trade’, which highlighted for him the problem of hanging on to talent (May 94).

Talent was a term also used synonymously with ‘creative ability’. Its discursive use confirmed the perceived importance of work relationships to working life and the centrality of individuals in the collective process of television production. In the talent-creativity nexus, it is arguable that there has been a growing influence of the occupational and economic individualism associated with the discourse on ‘talent’, however defined. For example, the attached talented individual(s) was often critical to commissioning decisions, confirming the existence of core and peripheral groups in the workforce (cf. Faulkner 1983).

Female 50-7 suggested that the uncertain climate for submitting ideas, and particularly not knowing what was wanted, had a negative effect on creativity in the freelance world. The downside of the emergent occupational individualism in a project-based world was the absence of the conditions best suited to creative work and the lack of creative hatcheries in nurturing environments (cf. Mulgan and Albury, 2003).

Table 1. Perception of Importance of Factors in a Creative Environment (Source: BFI)

Work Environment	“Not at all Important”		“Most Important”			Total N
	1	2	3	4	5	
Working as a team	0.7	3.1	12.2	29.9	54.2	288
Energy	1.8	10.5	24.9	37.9	24.9	285
Backup	1.1	7.7	21.1	37.2	33.0	285
Leadership	1.8	3.9	9.3	37.0	48.0	281
Competitiveness	25.2	26.2	27.7	13.5	7.4	282
Stability	3.2	15.8	29.5	34.0	17.5	285
Exchange of ideas	0.7	3.2	13.0	38.6	44.6	285
Adaptability to change	1.8	4.9	26.8	39.4	27.1	284
Diversity of expertise	0.7	8.1	24.6	43.3	23.2	284
Responsiveness to ideas	0.7	2.5	13.8	42.4	40.6	283
Talented individuals	0.3	2.1	5.9	32.5	59.1	286
Trust	0.3	1.4	8.7	33.1	56.4	287
Effective management	2.5	6.3	18.0	29.6	43.7	284
Good pay	1.8	8.4	32.3	35.4	22.1	285
Flexible working conditions	2.4	8.0	30.8	33.9	24.8	286
Sufficient time	2.1	3.9	17.9	34.7	41.4	285
Large company/dept	45.1	30.0	18.7	4.0	2.2	273
Small company/dept	28.6	19.2	29.7	14.7	7.9	266

Perception of importance of factors in a creative environment (Source: BFI).

3.3.2. Trust

“Trust” was considered very important with 89.5 per cent seeing it as a crucial element of a creative environment, again confirming the importance of relationships between workers, but also between workers and employers. *‘Trust’ is a quality where an individual can be relied on to act predictably and in the best interests of all involved in the collective endeavour of programme production offering support and acting in a collegiate manner.* Trust augments understanding between work colleagues in situations marked by temporary order against the incipient chaos, which results from the project nature of most programme making (cf. Williamson 1996, Khodyakov 2007). The influence of organisational cultures in providing the psychological space for these positive effects from a climate of trust in a creative environment can be subtended from these results. Individuals contribute more effectively when they trust and respect their co-workers.

A number of comments confirmed the important role played by trust in television production: Male 40-3 “I work with a combination of familiar faces and new faces. I think that this is a good mix, offering both relationships based on trust and mutual confidence and also allowing new relationships to contribute flexibility and stimulation to all concerned”(March 94). Female 30-15, a freelance director, stated that the “major drawback (of working with different groups) is there is understandably less trust of you than there would be if someone had worked with you through various different projects – so if you want to do something slightly at odds with your colleagues’ experience or imagination they stamp on it. They can’t afford to take risks.” (March 94). Male 30-16, a freelance writer-director, observed “This is a cliquey, nervous business. On the whole people only work with people they already know/trust. So you tend to work within a small circle of people, which gradually, but only gradually, widens through recommendations to strangers. When it works well, it works well: you all get to know each other’s styles and ways of working and so blend well as a team. But being reliant on such a small number of people can have severe drawbacks if anything goes wrong” (March 94).

The prevalence and impact of uncertainty has an effect on creativity and on work seeking activities: the propensity or avoidance of risk taking, the acceptance or not of work in a preferred workplace or genre, the refusal or not of a particular job option, the protection rather than sharing of ideas. Together these negative or positive effects, variably combined, have an impact on the level of trust achievable in the constantly changing teams in tv production and consequently on their creative potential.

The connecting thread between the trusted qualities of the individual in the project and his or her relation to teams is their reputation (see for example Burt 1992, Zafirau 2008). Trust and talent are both associated with a person’s reputation, which affects how they are evaluated in the networks of the various television communities (hirers, fellow workers, practice communities etc).

3.3.3. Team Working

The collective organisation necessary for television production requires a high level of team working once a programme has been commissioned. Team working,

interpreted as good working relationships, was identified by 84.1 per cent of respondents as a critical factor in securing the optimum conditions and realising the most ‘creative’ outputs. The team working environment and the ease of working together have been seen by some analysts (Faulkner and Anderson 1987, Boisot 1998, Jones 1996) as the elements most at risk in an industry as its labour market practices transform. Production work on programmes is team driven but the new and different organisational types and cultures had created a degree of instability and uncertainty in this area. Work was increasingly carried out with a wider set of risk factors. With ever more broken strings in the networks of effective working relationships (Burt 1992, Paterson, 2001), with individuals on short-term contracts and living with uncertainty, some form of compensatory framework was necessary. The team environment created for each programme production – however temporary – offered some element of certainty.

At a qualitative level, the questions about working in teams and the other relationship-focused factors, which affect creativity and quality, elicited a range of responses. Different inflections of, and influences on, the discourse on creativity emerged. Many identified team working as critical in providing a group world view: producer, Male 50-1 “the advantages are connected with shared experience, understanding, communication, a shared aesthetic and goals, also mutual confidence” (March 94). The loss of a culture of sharing was highlighted by some who had left a large organisation to become freelancers: Female 50-7 ‘Since becoming freelance I have worked much more on my own and lacked the stimulation and creative ‘bubble’ of colleagues’ (March 94).

In any company of any size the teams of staff engaged to work on programme production required a stable core at the centre. A Chief Executive of an independent production company, Male 40-29, noted the productivity/creativity potential of ‘being able to assemble a team of +/- 20 people with input of 200 freelancers at different times’ leading to a steady stream of good adventurous work. He added ‘several key staff at (Indie 7) provided a strong sense of continuity’ (May 98). Male 40-23 noted that ‘We keep a ‘stable’ of people cycling round and that has the great advantage of familiarity. Good people aren’t easy to find. But also new blood, new ideas are essential’. Female 40-11, managing director at an independent, assayed (March 94) “We have a core of ‘tried and trusted’ colleagues who work with us intermittently depending on their availability/our needs. The benefits are great when ‘a team’ is already familiar with each other’s foibles.....I generally have at least 1 or 2 – or more – new people on each project alongside the ‘old circle’.

Equally there was a good dose of anxiety or insecurity - brought on by the nature of the independent sector. Female 20-15, producer, in March 94 identified the importance of “reliable support from hard working team – dislike rapid change, believe in continuity – strongly resist employing overt careerists whose selfish ambition overrides care and the responsibility of making a programme”.

The data from the time series provided some contrast and differentiation as well as confirmation that these views were shared widely. Clustering three factors formed an aggregate for ‘team work’: ‘relationships with peers’, ‘responsibility’

and 'achievement'. There was a significant difference by age in attitude to 'team work' both at the initial census point in March 1994 and at the last questionnaire in May 1998, with the 31-40 age cohort valuing team work the least and those over 40 valuing it the most. The lack of a consistent response across the time periods is difficult to explain but the lesser valuation by the 31-40 cohort may be explained by the critical career point that these people occupied with those surviving in the industry now taking increasingly powerful positions and enhancing the individualism in their response. The uncertainty levels for this age group confirm their different approaches to working life (see below for other age cohorts) (cf. Paterson 2001).

The bifurcated nature of the industry in the 1990s needs to be emphasised again. Organisational cultures in large, staff-dominated organisations – the BBC and ITV companies – continued at this time to be focused on the staff workforce. This was borne out in the responses recorded. Team working, high energy, effective leadership, exchange of ideas, adaptability to change, responsiveness to ideas and diversity of experience available were all experienced more by staff. The exceptions where the advantage perceived by staff was small were in working with talented individuals and the level of trust between colleagues. The low level of trust between colleagues is counter-intuitive but is probably explained by the flux inside these companies at that time with competition for continued staff status. The relationship of these factors to the functioning of an environment of distributed knowledge in production needs to be better understood as it seems to confirm a view of a positive contribution from familiarity (the team ethic). The regulated changes in the production sector by Government were, in that respect, counter-intuitive and relied heavily on an ideology which suggested the benefits of small and medium enterprise cultures.

Two other value clusters were investigated: 'relations with management' and 'conditions of work' but no significant differences were found.

3.4. Process and Structures

Workers learn to inhabit and use the structures and cultures of organisations but they also influence and change them over time. Sociological theories have problematised individual agency within social structure (Law and Hassard 2004, Callon 2004) while anthropological analysis has suggested that institutions both think and are thought (Douglas 1987). The emphasis of respondents to the importance of relationships in teams was sometimes reinforced by their beliefs about some key structural elements of the organisational ecology of television.

3.4.1. Stability and Security

There was a mixed response from respondents about the importance of stability to creativity. There was a small majority that registered stability as important or most important in a creative environment with a sizable minority offering a neutral valuation. Female 40-2, a producer, remembered the most conducive creative environment she had experienced as her work at YTV (Yorkshire TV) between 1977 and 1982 where she started as a researcher. She found it "creative because of stability/security of

employment, an eclectic hiring policy on the part of the head of department, and good funding to give time to toss ideas around, find the best stories" (May 98).

However, creativity can be stifled and as noted above particular concern was expressed about too much instability and uncertainty. Female 40-10 (1947), a freelance director, noted "cutting of budgets and personnel have meant increased workload, cutting costs and doing the jobs that 5 years ago would have been done by a PA. Creativity becomes more difficult in these circumstances" (March 94). Female 40-2 "I do think the level of insecurity – not tied to ability or to anything tangible – is so high that sometimes creativity suffers" (May 98). Male 20-5, a Development Consultant at Indie 56, commented that "the enforced spread of freelancing has created an uncomfortably insecure environment and this undoubtedly distracts and smothers creativity and enthusiasm." (March 94). His entry continued that the consequences are difficult to sustain if 'budgets continue to get tighter with the crew bearing the brunt of cost savings. Six day working weeks, flat deals, with no overtime and longer working days'. Amidst incipient chaos there was felt to be a need to secure some element of solidarity and continuity. Shrinking production time and budgets were seen to have a major effect, Male 50-16: "I still feel we have creativity but only if time allows, when budgets are tight the easy route seems enough" (May 98).

One element of instability is stress. Statistical tests showed that the more individuals felt that stress was unhelpful in their creative work the more they disliked uncertainty – to some extent capturing attitudinal or personality characteristics of individual workers (cf. Dex and Smith, 2000).

3.4.2. Leadership and Management

Leadership provides order at the edge of the chaos which accompanies much creative endeavour. 85 per cent of the respondents identified the importance of leadership while one of the corollaries of this, effective management, was prioritised by 73.3 per cent. The need for leadership and effective management, although arguably always a major requirement in any industry or sector, was accentuated in television production following the changes in employment practices and the atomisation of the industry. That small start up companies should lack some management competences was not surprising, although some workers noted the centrality of a charismatic leader to successful but usually small start up independent companies. The situation at the broadcasting organisations was different: they were engulfed during the data collection period by the ongoing changes, which were seen to undermine the management's ability to lead.

3.4.3. Other Factors – 'Noise in the System'

Several other major contingent factors relating directly to the effectiveness or otherwise of management were highlighted – "sufficient time" (75.8 per cent, but only experienced by 25.9 per cent); responsiveness to ideas (83 per cent, experienced by 51.7 per cent) and good back up (70.2 per cent, experienced by 37.6 per cent). Most respondents did not see "competitiveness" as a spur to creativity, with over half of the respondents scoring it as unimportant. This is slightly surprising until consideration is

given to one of the paradoxes of television production. While competing with other workers for particular jobs is increasingly normative in an industry beset by freelance working, as noted elsewhere, there is a need for networking and trust between workers in their working lives, which attenuates much of the competitiveness in the workplace (cf. Burt 1992). Furthermore, there was a significant gender division on this matter. Only 12 per cent of women compared to 28 per cent of men thought competitiveness an important attribute of a creative working environment. Indeed this was the only item where there were significant gender differences between the work environment variables

In summary, there was a division or contestation among the workforce in relation to their estimation of the importance of specific factors to the creative environment. This granularity suggested a changing set of attitudes to work in television and the emergence of new ways of relating to the creative dimensions of work.

3.4.4. Differences by Age

Each age cohort had a different view of the industry. As noted above, the quantitative data showed a distinctive position for the 31-40 age cohort towards the 'ideal' creative environment. Individual workers in this age cohort were assuming more authority but, during the period of study, faced considerable additional pressure because of rapid change. Arguably, their greater concern was with the brutal reality of survival in the labour market than the creative possibilities of television. For the survivors – the successful – they were at a dynamic and pivotal stage in their career, beginning to assume responsibility and power but with insufficient experience to value the contribution of trust to a creative environment. Indeed at that juncture, with increased competition for work, trust was not an easy value for members of this group to hold. The older cohorts both had greater experience and remained attached to the old style of broadcasting.

Indeed the data showed that career anchorage (Barley 1980) and reactions to the new 'disorder' in the industry were to some extent age related. In May 1998, a non-parametric ANOVA (Kruskal Wallis Test) was conducted on data collected for age band groupings and their ratings of the eighteen environment variables. Only two variables were found to differ significantly by age band, namely leadership ($\chi^2 = 9.16$, $p < 0.05$) and trust ($\chi^2 = 10.17$, $p < 0.05$). Further investigation using the Mann Whitney U Tests showed that 31-40 year olds thought leadership was significantly less important than 41-50 year olds ($Z = -2.50$, $p < 0.05$), or those who were 51 years and older ($Z = -2.81$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, 31-40 year olds also rated trust as less important to the creative environment than 41-50 year olds ($Z = -3.08$, $p < 0.01$) and those who were 51 years and older ($Z = -2.13$, $p < 0.05$).

The distinctive career point of the 31-40 cohort was confirmed by the step-change in the proportion who had co-workers reporting to them. Over 80 per cent of those aged 41-50 indicated having other people reporting to them compared with approximately 70 per cent of 31-40 year olds, 60 per cent of those 51 years and older and only 34 per cent of those aged 21-30 years. The position of those aged 51 years and over suggests that this age cohort was being "pushed out" by younger cohorts.

The 30s age cohort was also less convinced of the importance of team work than any other age group - 24 per cent suggesting a minor importance as opposed to 14 per cent of older workers – and attached less importance to "adaptability to change" for a creative working environment. Only 54 per cent believed this to be important compared with over 70 per cent for all the other age groups. This result can be attributed to a lack of experience. Team working was valued much more by younger workers than other age cohorts. Almost all (97 per cent) of the 21-30 year-olds gave working as a team a high score in stimulating creativity. Their dependence on other team members at an early stage of their careers, with the additional perceived need for on-the-job training, would account for much of this sentiment. There is decreasing reliance on the team for support after an individual worker becomes established and with experience assumes an increase in responsibility. Although creative production is reliant on teamwork, responsibility is individualised emphasising the need to recognise and value the complementary but different skills and talents of workers in television programme making.

3.4.5. Differences by Role

Some responses reflected the differentiated roles played by individual workers in the labour process. Hierarchy is related to an ordering in the employment space and the labour market through contractual relationships. Individual roles and position, which usually reflected the power relationships in television production, affected the responses. The differences between creative workers' aspirations were tempered by the realities of the roles held and their relationship to power. The politics of management is conventionally about maintaining control, securing order and keeping within budget in order to enhance profit (or shareholder or public value). But control and creativity can sit uneasily together – different agendas operate. Those in managerial or executive producer roles tended to adopt a 'managerial' perspective to creativity. So, for example, while 80 per cent of all other job groups thought "sufficient time" important to maximise creativity, only 54 per cent of Managers and Executive Producers concurred; 39 per cent of managerial posts thought "competitiveness" important compared with only 13 per cent of Producers and Directors; 43 per cent of managers considered "flexible working conditions" important compared with 63 per cent of Producers and Directors.

Variables rated by the whole sample as less important for encouraging a creative environment and which showed significant differences across job positions were: 'flexible working conditions' (ranking 13), 'good rates of pay' (ranking 14), 'staff stability' (ranking 15), 'competitiveness' (ranking 16) and 'working for a large company/department' (ranking 18). As noted above, this level of disagreement suggests importantly conflicting agendas concerning the nature and direction of development of the industry at the time of data collection rather than attitudes to any specific creative factors.

3.4.6. Differences by Company or Sector

In the time series data on work values a number of differences emerged between individuals according to the company or sector in which they worked. These statistics

offer a mixed set of results, which have to be understood in the light of contingent events. In May 1998, those working in ITV companies rated team work ($Z = -2.23$, $p < .05$), energy ($Z = -2.56$, $p < .05$), backup ($Z = -2.05$, $p < .05$), leadership ($Z = -2.24$, $p < .05$) and competitiveness ($Z = -2.15$, $p < .05$) as more important for the creative environment than their BBC counterparts.

At the time the data was collected, between 1994 and 1998, there was no explicit 'creative' agenda in either the BBC or ITV as both were in the middle of ongoing restructuring. Historically, the workers in both sub-samples had been accustomed to work in teams – however temporary in relation to individual productions – inside an embracing and informing organisational culture. In March 1994, the only significant difference between those working for the BBC and those working for ITV was in the work value 'Recognition', which the BBC sub-sample reported liking more. This might be explained by the larger size of the BBC or the quest for recognition over reward associated with working in an organisation with a well understood set of public purposes. In both November 1994 and May 1998 those working for ITV rated disliking 'Uncertainty' significantly more than those at the BBC, which was surprising given the constant 'revolution' at the BBC at the time as then Director-General, John Birt, imposed Producer Choice at the BBC. In May 1996 and May 1998 those in the ITV sub-sample valued 'Independence' and 'Creativity' more than their BBC counterparts. Similarly, in May 1998, those in the ITV sub-sample valued 'Money' and 'Achievement' significantly more than their BBC counterparts confirming the differences in anchorage between the sectors.

They also rated working in a small department more significantly less important for the creative work environment than those working at the BBC, suggesting the existence of a view that the size of the BBC had negative consequences for 'creativity'. The 'ideal' is always coloured in some way by the work experiences of individuals in particular organisational situations. Performance and agency are crucial in organisations (Callon 2004) and how the institutional thinking affected an individual worker's perspectives was in some disarray at the time of the research because of the ongoing changes in the industry.

4. CONCLUSION

This study identified the contingent factors in a specific creative environment – television production. Earlier research on this subject lacked evidence from a large scale survey and had not considered the critical factors affecting individual work practices at the level of granularity possible from the BFI Television Industry Tracking Study. Other studies based on this data have cast new light on some of the consequences of organisational change on industry practices and have begun to offer fresh insights into critical organisational factors within creative companies: issues of size and its importance or not to performance; the relationship between the freelance sector and staff; age cohort and gender differences; the effects of technological and organisational change in the space of production.

As the analysis in this essay has shown, a critical factor in creative environments relates to how workers evaluate particular individual qualities of their co-workers in a

production team and that this is affected by the organisational framing of their work experience. The hypothesis of an advantage to large organisations because of their ability to deploy workers with skills within a broader creative environment was not proven and indeed was not seen by most workers as a significant factor. The degree of embeddedness achieved by workers (and firms) was in a period of flux when the research data was collected and this situation continues to evolve as the regulatory framework for the television industry is altered and the funding landscape responds to both the new political settlement and rapid developments in technology, with a cumulative affect on business planning. In this flux, creative work (and those who work in the creative industries), have to accommodate to a rapidly evolving array of uncertainties and contingent conditions.

Despite the importance of the creative industries sector in the pronouncements of Government and their perceived value to the economy, the lack of detailed evidence has impoverished the debate on how to create and sustain creative environments in general. This research, which brings both qualitative and quantitative data into the analytic space, offers an important corrective.

Television production remains a creative industrial activity where the interplay of individuals in teams is critical to successful projects. Beyond the rhetoric of the creative industries discourse, the contingent aspects of creativity outlined in this study will be reshaped to some extent as technologies and the commissioning environment change, but the findings in relation to creative working environments are unlikely to be radically altered while there remains a demand for high value audio-visual content to be consumed in the home or on the move on whatever platform.

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