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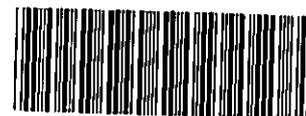
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Towards a theory of journalism as practice

Rhonda Breit

Abstract

The State of the news media survey 2004 has found that journalists in the United States believe "business pressures are making the news they produce thinner and shallower" (Kovach, Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2004, p. 1). In fact, Kovach et al (2004, p. 2) state that an increasing number of journalists identify economics as their greatest concern, with 66 per cent of national journalists and 57 per cent of local journalists surveyed believing "increased bottom-line pressure is seriously hurting the quality of news coverage". This paper seeks to provide a theoretical framework which explains this dilemma. The theory articulated challenges views of journalism that conflate journalism with business and media corporations. Drawing on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1985, 1994), this paper postulates a theory of journalism that distinguishes between the practice of journalism, the practices of business and advertising and the institution of the media corporation, in an attempt to explain why managers and journalists have different views on journalistic quality. The paper concludes that the future of journalism depends on a return to its core values or internal goods.

Introduction

Journalists in the United States fear the quality of their work is being undermined by the economic imperatives of the corporatised media (Kovach et al, 2004, p. 1). The 2004 *State of the news media* survey, conducted by the Pew Research Centre in collaboration with the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Committee of Concerned Journalists, found 66 per cent of national journalists surveyed believed bottom-line pressures were "seriously" hurting the quality of news production. Fifty-seven per cent of their local counterparts shared this view (Pew Research Centre et al, 2004, p. 1). The study also found a disparity between journalists' pessimistic views of the detrimental effects of bottom-line pressures and the views of executives. Some 57 per cent of national news organisation executives felt increased business pressures were "mostly

just changing the way news organisations do things”, rather than undermining the quality of journalism (Kovach et al, 2004, p. 1). This raises a key distinction between the views of journalists and those of managers in relation to the quality of journalism, which this paper attempts to explain theoretically.

The argument developed in this paper borrows heavily from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, in particular his book *After virtue* (1985), in which he attempts to explain an individual's relationship with society by reference to moral tradition emerging from social practices. MacIntyre distinguishes between two types of goods: those internal to social practices and the external goods of institutions, which support practices. In the case of journalism, this paper contends that media corporations are institutions that host a set of competing and complementary practices which are integrated through the practice of business. By using MacIntyre's practice-institution schema, this paper offers a theoretical explanation of the tension between economic imperatives and journalistic quality, which accounts for the different views expressed by US journalists and executives canvassed by the 2004 *State of the news media* survey. It is hopeful this approach may be used to expand our conceptualisation of the relationship between journalism, business and media corporations, thereby offering a foundation for the collection of richer data on the state of journalism in the 21st century.

In order to offer a theory of journalism as practice, this paper first outlines MacIntyre's practice-institution schema. It then applies this schema to journalism and media corporations, concluding that MacIntyre's view of social practices explains what journalism is, how it is done and what it should be. Given the complexity of the argument for journalism as practice, this paper focuses on a theoretical analysis, not a practical interpretation of the survey data.

Practice: A definition

The term practice has been used frequently to describe journalism. It is a generic term that applies to the work of many. However, MacIntyre (1985, p. 187; 1994) attributes a specific meaning to practice, which he defines as a:

[C]oherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 187)

Practices are “communities” developed within the wider social environ-

ment where common goods are identified in order to achieve excellence. Liedtka (1998, p. 4; Arjoon, 2000, p. 4) distils four central characteristics from MacIntyre's definition of practice. These are:

- ♦ A co-operative human activity (background account of the practice);
- ♦ Intrinsic goods, or outcomes, related to the performance of the activity, that go beyond profit;
- ♦ Participants must strive towards excellence, both in product and performance;
- ♦ A sense of ongoing transformation of the goals (Liedtke, 1998, p. 4; Arjoon, 2000, p. 4).

These criteria indicate that a social practice is more than a set of technical skills directed towards the unified purpose of producing a commodity (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 193). There must be "a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it" (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 191). This relationship requires a commitment to common goods that are definitive of excellence within that practice, but they also help to identify the overall social aims of a practice. "Excellence" is achieved by exercising virtues of character and intellect. Virtues are the "goods by reference to which ... we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kind of purpose and standards which inform practices" (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 193). Virtues are developed within practices in three stages of logical development (MacIntyre, 1985, pp. 186, 187). The first stage is the background account of the practice – the co-operative human activity. To be a social practice, these cooperative activities must involve participants (individual journalists) striving for excellence defined by a set of common goods that are interpreted in the light of a transforming tradition of that practice. In the journalistic context, this means individual journalists reinterpret and modify their co-operative activities in the light of their own experience, which MacIntyre describes as the narrative order of a single life. In turn, the co-operative activities and internal goods are interpreted in the light of a moral tradition of that practice (MacIntyre, 1985, pp. 186, 187).

MacIntyre's notion of practice stems from his view of the modern individual as a moral person who is (at least partially) socially constituted through the narrative order of a single life (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 187; Horton & Mendus, 1994a, pp. 8, 9). This process is a tradition derived from a set of agreements (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 292). While recognising that individuals ultimately choose their future, MacIntyre believes an individual's choice is limited by the social context in which he or she is making these choices. Thus, the theory of practice acknowledges that individuals have a degree of individual autonomy within practices but that some choices will be prescribed by the social context in which they find themselves. If, however, the co-operative human activity is systematically performed in a way that does not reflect its internal goods –

thereby going against its overall social aims – the internal goods of the practice are corrupted. Here, MacIntyre links morality to context, in that morality (which MacIntyre sees as the exercise of virtues) is internal to social practices. While virtues are the means by which excellence is achieved in practice, they also are partially definitive of the practice: they are an end in themselves but also a means to an end – excellence¹. MacIntyre states:

A virtue is an acquired human quality, the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods. (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 191)

Practice is the first stage of the development of common goods because an individual's choices and actions are partially constituted by the practices within which they operate. Tensions will emerge within practices and, to resolve these tensions, individuals must exercise the virtues in light of tradition.

Leeper and Leeper explain (2001, p. 2): "The tradition of virtues established by the practice sustains the practice itself. These practices must harmonize with one another to form a community. This requires the idea of an ultimate good." While the use of the term practice to describe the components of the whole is confusing, Leeper and Leeper (2001) view common goods within practice as dynamic concepts because each practice harmonises with other practices and the institutions that support them (these distinctions are explained in more detail later). The common goods of a practice are identified or agreed upon through a process of resolving conflict arising out of the social context in which they are being performed. In the journalistic context, this involves a process of harmonisation of conflicts arising at individual, professional, corporate and community levels. The harmonisation of these conflicts reveals the internal goods of journalism. According to MacIntyre (1985, p. 187), the resolution of this conflict involves the exercise of virtues of intellect and character in the light of tradition, which can be simply described as the acquired habits of reflective practice (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 187). This means an individual must know what he or she is doing and why he or she is doing it. Mulhall and Swift (in Horton & Mendus, 1994a, p. 11) explain tradition in this way:

A tradition is constituted by a set of practices and is a mode of understanding their importance and worth; it is the medium by which such practices are shaped and transmitted across generations. Traditions may be primarily religious or moral ... economic (for example, a particular craft or profession, trade union or manufacturer), aesthetic (for example, modes of literature or painting) or geographical (for example, crystallizing around the history and culture of a particular house, village or region).

Journalistic traditions reflect the agreements (to agree and disagree) reached by journalists about how they should carry out their co-operative activity. These agreements are reached through a process of conflict and unity which arises as journalists co-operate with each other professionally. These are known as economic traditions and take account of the influence of routines on journalism. Journalistic traditions have a moral dimension, because quality journalism reflects key values such as honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others. These values could be seen as being common to all social practices. Taylor (1994, pp. 16-43) argues that such goods transcend all practices. However, MacIntyre (1994, 2000, pp. 268-290) rejects this concept, arguing that all internal goods are dynamic as their core value is challenged from the interaction with competing and complementary practices. The dynamic nature of core moral values can be seen in the debate around concepts of objectivity, fairness and balance, which have been the subject of extensive debate in terms of their relevance to journalism. Because of this process of integrating goods, practices such as journalism evolve over time. (However, it is important to note here that the process of integrating internal and external goods is a social practice in its own right. This point will be discussed later in this paper.) Journalistic tradition also embraces an aesthetic dimension in terms of its various stylistic approaches.

Therefore, the internal goods emerging from the social practice of journalism come about as practitioners resolve tensions between a range of activities internal and external to the practice. Internal conflicts emerge between the individual narrative and the professional, moral and aesthetic dimensions of journalism. External tensions emerge as journalism is institutionalised within media corporations and co-exists with other competing and complementary social practices. Traditions develop as the practice participants develop a systematic response to resolving these conflicts by exercising virtues, which can be simply described as reflective habits (MacIntyre, 1985; Horton & Mendus, 1994a, p. 12). Therefore, MacIntyre's conception of tradition can be described as a process of reflective habit (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 123; Sanders, 2003, p. 36), which means challenging accepted views where appropriate and having the appropriate feeling and attitude when acting (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 125; Sanders, 2003, p. 36).

The dynamic nature of tradition means that a practice includes a sense of "ongoing extension and transformation of the goals of practice" (Liedtke, 1998, p. 4). Internal conflicts arising between the aesthetic, moral and professional traditions of journalism and an individual's single life narrative must be resolved in the light of the ultimate aims of the social practice. When journalists face conflicts between personal values and those of their practice, to ensure journalistic excellence they should resolve this conflict in favour of the overall aims of journalism. If they do not, it will not have any obvious immediate effect. But if the overall aims of the practice are systematically overlooked for

personal aims, ultimately the internal goods of journalism-will be weakened. An example of this is the Jayson Blair controversy. In this case, Blair's personal fame and position became more important than journalism to both himself and his workplace.

The transforming tradition of practice helps identify the internal goods of that practice as they are tested in everyday activities. These internal goods are vulnerable to external goods. As journalism interacts with other social practices, its tradition can be subsumed by external goods when conflicts between internal and external goods are resolved in terms of the ultimate aims of other social practices (such as business or advertising) or the ultimate aims of the institutions that support those practices (power, fame and profit). The current trends identified by US journalists, where the quality of their work is vulnerable to bottom-line pressures, suggest the social aims of the practice of journalism are being overlooked for the institutional objectives of profit and power.

The tensions between journalism and public relations or communication management are examples of the vulnerability of journalism to competing social practices. Much has been written about the tensions between these two practices because of the inherent differences in their social goals. MacIntyre's notion of practice explains these tensions in terms of the different traditions and internal goods emerging as conflicts within those practices are resolved in light of their overall social aim. When journalistic traditions are abandoned for PR traditions, the practice of journalism is being evaluated from goods that are external to it. MacIntyre warns this could lead to the ultimate destruction of a social practice. This point will be discussed again later in relation to the practices of journalism and business and media corporations.

Virtues and practice

It has already been stated in some detail that the exercise of virtue is crucial to identifying the internal goods within social practices. MacIntyre (1985, p. 191) sees virtue as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods". It is a mean between opposite habits of excess and deficit, but it is not principle driven:

In this middle ground, thinking does come into play, but it is not correct to say that virtue takes its stand in principle; Aristotle makes it clear that vice is a principled choice that following some extreme path toward or away from pleasure is right. Principles are wonderful things, but there are too many of them and exclusive adherence to any one of them is always a vice ... The origin of virtuous action is neither intellect nor appetite,

but is variously described as intellect through-and-through infused with appetite or appetite infused with thinking or appetite and reason joined for the sake of something ... [O]ur thinking must contribute to right reason and our appetites must contribute to right desire if the action is to have moral stature. (Sachs, 2000, p. 7).

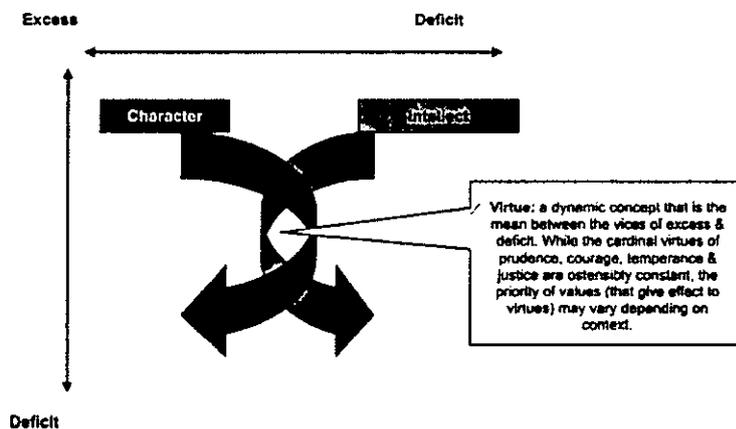
Virtues are sustained through traditions which provide the “resources with which the individual may pursue his or her quest for the good” (Sachs, 2000, p. 7). Goods internal to practice are achieved through the pursuit of excellence, by exercising “virtues” of both character and intellect. Virtues of character are derived through regular practice, and intellectual virtues are derived through learning. Thus a state of lifelong learning is integral to excellence in practice. Both types of virtue are needed to achieve excellence, but the virtues of character take priority.

The virtues of character and intellect derive from what Aristotle describes as the cardinal virtues: prudence or practical wisdom; courage or fortitude; self-mastery or temperance; and justice or fairness (Arjoon, 2000, p. 5). Arjoon (2000, p. 5) explains the cardinal virtues in more detail:

Courage is the ability to face and to overcome difficult situations. It is the power to act even when we are afraid. Temperance or self-mastery is the ability to have control over our tendencies to laziness, complacency and reluctance to fulfill our responsibility. ... Justice describes a situation where one constantly gives others what they are due so that they can fulfill their duties and exercise their rights, and at the same time, one also tries to see that others do likewise. Prudence can be equated to good judgment and right reasoning about people.

Prudence or practical wisdom is seen as the most important virtue, because it is needed in order to practice the other virtues (MacIntyre, 1985; Arjoon, 2000, p. 5). While character is seen as the most important aspect of virtue, the cardinal role of practical wisdom embeds intellectual virtues into good character. The moral virtues develop as a result of reflective habit – being of good character and exercising practical wisdom. The virtues of character cannot develop in isolation: they must be developed in conjunction with the intellectual virtues. The relationship can be depicted in this way:

Figure 1: The dynamic nature of virtues



By exercising the virtues of character and intellect, individuals within practices can identify the common goods of a practice. The goods internal to practice are understood only when considered in the light of the moral tradition of the practice, the social context in which the practice is exercised and the social context of the individual self – their narrative (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 286). While acknowledging the cardinal virtues, MacIntyre (1994, pp. 181-203, 284) also accepts that the goods emerging within a practice are dynamic, influenced by individual, collective and community interaction. He concludes:

No quality is to be accounted a virtue except in respect of its being such as to enable the achievement of three kinds of goods: those internal to practices, those which are the goods of an individual life and those which are the goods of the community. (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 284)

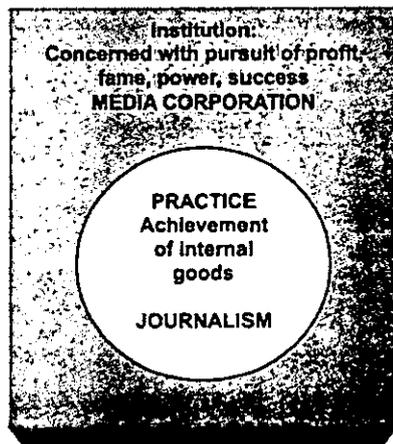
This means internal goods within practices cannot be prescribed *ad infinitum*, but they lead to an understanding between community members of the core values and issues facing that practice. In a journalistic context, a set of core moral values has been identified by professional codes of ethics and codes of practice. These include honesty, striving for accuracy, fairness, independence and respecting the rights of others. The “tradition” of journalism involves many more core values deriving from the economic, moral, aesthetic and geographic dimensions of journalism. And depending on the social context, these traditions may vary according to the institution that hosts it. (This point will be discussed in more detail in the next section.) Journalists are often seen as failing to live up to the core values set out in their codes of ethics. This paper contends that this reflects the vulnerability of journalism when its quality is determined by goods external to it – whether personal, institutional or those of a

competing and complementary practice. But what are the institutions that host journalism?

The practice-institution distinction

This notion of a dynamic tradition also takes account of the fact that practices cannot exist by themselves. This gives rise to an important distinction which helps to explain the increasing problem facing journalists: the distinction between practices and institutions. Macintyre (1985, p. 194) explains that institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods, they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Moore (2002, p. 21) depicts the practice/institution distinction diagrammatically:

Figure 2: Practice-institution schema



MacIntyre (1985, p. 194) acknowledges that practices cannot survive without institutional support, but stresses that questions of excellence in practice must be determined from the perspective of internal goods. He notes:

The ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution.

This aspect of his theory has been criticised in business circles, with several critics dismissing his theory as purely idealistic (Dobson, 1997; Brewer, 1997). But in response to his critics, MacIntyre (1994, p. 284) explains the distinction in terms of a productive craft of fishing:

The aim internal to such productive crafts ... is never only to catch fish or milk cows or to build houses. It is to do so in a manner consonant with the excellence of the craft, so that not only is there a good product, but the craftsman is perfected through and in her or his activity. This is what apprentices in a craft have to learn. It is from this that the virtues receive their initial, if partial definition.

The aim of journalism is not just the disseminating of information. Professional codes of ethics and codes of practice indicate that excellence in journalism requires more than just the processing of information. There are core values that determine the quality of journalism: its internal goods. MacIntyre argues that where a practice is evaluated from institutional values such as profit and fame, the internal goods of that craft are weakened. In a journalistic context, this means the practice of journalism will be weakened if its quality is determined by the extent to which it produces audiences or attracts advertising. He claims procedural reinforcement of external virtues to define excellence can ultimately lead to the destruction of that practice. In the journalistic context, if bottom-line pressures continue to erode the quality of journalism, the practice of journalism could be destroyed. This is not to say the external goods of institutions (in the journalistic context, media corporations) and the wider society are not influential in identifying a practice's internal goods. They are factors that are taken into account in reflective practice and the formation of a moral tradition within a practice. The institutional goods are influential in shaping internal goods, but MacIntyre argues that the agreements reached by individuals should always be made in the light of the overall social aims of the practice. This enters a highly debated area of journalism studies – the social aim of journalism. This paper does not attempt to proffer a preferred view of these aims. Suffice to say, the practice-institution schema accommodates the fact that there could be various social aims of journalism depending on the context in which the practice is operating and the tradition that has emerged through the process of harmonisation of internal and external goods. Thus the theory of journalism as practice can be applied to various media models and goes some way to being a universal theory of journalism without articulating a grand theory where all forms of journalism are lumped together.

The findings of the *State of the news media* survey 2004 suggest that the corporatised media evaluate journalistic quality from an economic perspective, whereas journalists are fearful of these effects on their practice (Kovach et al, 2004). Applying the practice-institution schema to these findings, there is a need for caution because it could be the early warning sign of the practice of journalism being undermined by external goods. This point needs further explanation.

Journalism as a practice

MacIntyre uses a complex set of criteria to define and explain practice. In the light of these criteria, he claims bricklaying is not a practice, but architecture is (1985, p. 187). This paper argues that news gathering, reporting and editing stories are not practices; but journalism is. By applying the four characteristics identified by Liedtka (1998, p. 4; Arjoon, 2000, p. 4) as characterising practice, this paper illustrates why journalism is a practice. There is little doubt that journalism is a co-operative human activity, in terms of how it is done, the effects it has on society and its fundamental purposes. Various technical skills must be combined to produce journalism. These technical skills are frequently performed by different individuals. The product produced has been variously described, including news, information and stories. These products should reflect the aesthetic goods of the practice, which means they need to be entertaining. But this does not mean a product of journalism is entertainment. This paper contends that entertainment is a product of the practice of business, the aim of which is to build audiences. Some believe the product of journalism involves an even greater level of human co-operation, as journalism plays an integral role in creating communities. These aspects of journalism are all explained by MacIntyre's conception of a social practice.

Co-operation exists between journalists – individually and collectively as a profession – and the community in which they operate. As already mentioned, there is a set of values – relating to both outcome and performance – seen as defining journalism and defining excellence in journalism. These values go beyond profit and the institutional interests of corporations and shareholders. Journalism is defined by some as a commitment to these values, which are seen as the hallmarks of journalistic excellence in terms of product and performance. The fact that some of these values are prescribed in codes does not detract from the argument that journalism is a practice rather than part of a corporate institution. This reflects what MacIntyre (1994, p. 286) sees as a feature of the culture of modernity, where practices are “marginalised” and their significance obscured and distorted through the dominance of external goods. The conception of journalism as a product or commodity blurs the distinction between the media corporations that support the practice of journalism, and the practice of journalism, thus legitimising the use of external goods to evaluate journalistic excellence. This view of journalism also blurs journalism with two other practices hosted by media corporations. They are the practices of media business and advertising, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Several journalism theorists (Christians, 1990; Meadows, 2001; Carey, 1997; Zelizer, 1992) see the notion of excellence in journalism as an ongoing transformation of the goals of practice. This is stated in terms of the relationship with the community and the conception of journalism as an interactive or mediated community. The process of journalism and the process of achieving

excellence in journalism derive from a state of reflection-as journalists reconcile tensions between individual, professional and community goods to identify a common good that relates to the individual journalist, the profession of journalism and the community it serves. This involves a process of reflective decision-making in the light of the economic, moral, aesthetic and geographic dimensions of journalistic traditions.

Some journalism theorists and self-regulatory codes see common values and ways of doing journalism as definitive of it (MEAA, 1999; APC, 2001; Tapsall & Varley, 2001). But unless those theorists distinguish between the internal goods of journalism and the external goods of the institution, journalistic values are vulnerable. Some journalism academics (Sheridan Burns, 2001; Oakham, 2001; Hirst, 2001; King, 1999) conflate the two, accepting the economic paradigm in which journalism is produced and rendering journalism a commodity or product. However, MacIntyre cautions (1985, p. 195):

The ability of a practice to retain its integrity will depend on the way in which virtues can be and are exercised in sustaining the institutional forms which are the social bearers of the practice. The integrity of a practice causally requires the exercise of the virtue by at least some of the individuals who embody it in their activities (at least some of the media corporations); and conversely the corruption of institutions is always in part at least an effect of the vices.

It has already been stated that acquired reflective habits are essential to identifying internal goods, but the possession of these reflective habits may undermine the ability of media corporations to achieve the external goods of profits. The pursuit of quality journalism may detract from an organisation's profitability. This has been seen frequently in the history of journalism, where journalists pursue their work in noble defiance of the commercial realities facing their owners. Newspapers and news programs die because the harmonisation of the internal goods of journalism and the external goods of media corporations has failed to integrate them effectively. This paper argues that this is the role of business, a point that will be discussed in more detail later.

If, on the other hand, the pursuit of external goods becomes dominant, "the concept of virtues may suffer first attrition and then perhaps something near complete effacement, although simulacra might abound" (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 196). Here MacIntyre is identifying the constant conflict which emerges in journalism: the tension between corporate and journalistic values. While the internal conflict between journalists, their profession and the community in which they operate is part of the process of identifying the internal goods, the conflict between journalists and the institutions that support them gives rise to a potentially destructive conflict, which has been identified by US journalists (Kovach et al, 2004). Journalism has attempted to preserve the values seen as

the hallmarks of excellence through a complex process of self-regulation. MacIntyre (1994, p. 288) sees the integration of internal and external goods into individual and communal lives as a practice in its own right. (This paper argues that this is the role of business.)

Herein lies a problem for journalism. Journalism is just one of the practices hosted by media corporations (or media institutions). Commercial media organisations host at least three practices: journalism, business and advertising. But even government-sponsored media institutions must have funding to support journalism; thus they face the same internal conflicts between the competing practices of journalism, business and advertising or sponsorship. The difference lies in the type of institution that hosts them. In the case of Australia's government-sponsored media, the Special Broadcasting Service and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the major institutional stakeholders are the state and the public, whereas with commercial organisations the major stakeholders are shareholders. Before moving on to discuss the tension between internal and external goods, this paper discusses advertising and business as practices².

Advertising as practice

Advertising is a paid form of professional communication where the person buying the advertisement has control over content. Advertising generates income directly for media organisations, whereas journalism does not. Income from journalism is derived because the audience it produces provides a "market" which media organisations can sell to advertisers. The dependent relationship between advertising and journalism appears to challenge the argument that journalism is a practice in its own right. However, when applying MacIntyre's schema, journalism, advertising and media business are identifiable as separate practices because they are not fully understandable if described solely in terms of the technical and economic means to an end.

Looking at advertising first, it is a co-operative human activity in that the technical skills required in advertising are performed by a collective of people who have a common aim – producing a product that satisfies the brief provided by the client. It requires a relationship of trust and mutual dependence between the advertisers and the people producing advertising. Advertising (as a collective) has identified a set of intrinsic goods, or outcomes, related to the performance of the activity beyond profit and fame. While certainly it involves selling products and generating income, this is the role of the institution that supports advertising. The primary focus of people involved in advertising is "getting their client's message across" by employing a range of skills within a particular ethical framework. This involves reference to a specialist body of knowledge regarding how messages are received by audiences, how clients can get their message across most effectively and the most appropriate medium by

which to communicate this message. The profession of advertising recognises a set of values which underpin excellence and prescribes a way of doing advertising both in terms of production and outcome. One problem with this argument is that those ethical values have been shaped by a prescriptive framework supported by a variety of laws. However, moves towards self-regulation within the Australian advertising industry suggest advertisers are now bound by a common view on what is excellence in advertising. These values describe a notion of social responsibility specifically requiring advertising agents and professionals to be legal, honest and truthful; respecting clients, competitors and the rights of others in terms of privacy, age and human safety; and not discriminating or inciting fear. Advertising should not exploit the reputations of others and should comply with legal requirements in terms of labelling and guarantees.

The ways of doing (professional habits) within advertising are constantly being refined in the light of professional excellence (in terms of production and outcome). Ethical values (albeit those prescribed in codes) are being re-evaluated in the light of the profession's relationship with clients and audiences. Therefore, the common goals of the profession are being extended and transformed.

Based on this analysis, advertising is a practice independent of the media institutions that support it. The points raised about the practices within modernity in relation to journalism are also applicable to advertising. In the journalistic context, journalism and advertising are two practices hosted within media corporations. Each of these practices has its own traditions which, at times, will be in conflict with the other.

Business as practice

There is a third practice within journalistic institutions that has its own set of internal goods. That is the practice of business. MacIntyre's schema has constantly been rejected by business theorists because of his claim that management is not a practice. To analyse this point, it is important to articulate what business is. Business is commonly described as "one's occupation, profession or trade; the purchase and sale of goods in an attempt to make profit; a person, partnership or enterprise engaged in this concern" (Delbridge, 1985, p. 267). This paper takes a different view of media business. It sees the aim of media business as developing audiences and integrating the internal goods of media practices with the external goods of the media corporation. Journalism and advertising as practices help build audiences, but the media business expands on the effects of these two practices by utilising a body of knowledge that involves strategic planning, promotion and programming (in broadcast media) to develop audiences. Other functions of media businesses include financial control, marketing, provision and maintenance of computer systems and soft-

ware and accounting. The key role of business is to integrate these skills into "a holistic activity" (Moore, 2002, p. 24), which includes reconciling conflicts between internal goods of media practices and the external goods of the media corporation.

The distinction drawn is a difficult one. MacIntyre has stated that "employment can only be a feature of institutions since institutions determine and enforce the division of labour and employment policies" (Moore, 2002, p. 24). Moore (2002, p. 24) sees employment and management as features of certain types of institutions or organisations. In the media context, management and employment are features of the media corporations. Moore rejects Brewer's argument (1997) that management is a practice in its own right, arguing she has inadvertently contradicted her own argument by viewing business as the socially co-operative activity that falls within MacIntyre's definition of practice. According to Moore's distinction, excellence in management is measured by external goods such as profit and power, whereas excellence in business takes account of other factors. At this point, it is important to distinguish between real managers and business managers. Managers who are concerned with profitability and future development of the corporation form part of the institution (the media corporation). Undoubtedly, Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch are managers in this sense. However, editors, whose primary task is integrating the products of media practices such as advertising and journalism, are part of the practice of business.

This paper argues that the business of media organisations can be viewed as a practice hosted by the corporate structure because business has common goals: production of audiences and the integration of internal and external goods into individual and communal lives. The manner in which audiences are created or developed involves a co-operative human activity encompassing a range of technical skills. There are intrinsic goods that go beyond profit and fame, in that business must accord with best practice (despite effect on profit). The notion of business best practice requires pursuit of a set of internal procedures that ensure excellence in production and pursuit of excellence in terms of product (efficient and transparent business). Best practice ensures procedures are reviewed and revised according to changing relationships between clients, governments and the organisation, suggesting there is a sense of ongoing transformation of the goals of practice. The increasing trends towards infotainment, celebrity journalism and sensational reporting are examples of where the internal goods of media business are dominating the internal goods of journalistic practice.

Moore claims (2002, p. 22) that "MacIntyre's schema can be applied directly to business as a practice and to corporations as institutions". He justifies this position by reference to MacIntyre's clarification of the notion of practice in productive practices (Moore, 2002, p. 23). He sees business as a productive craft because it should aim to carry out its activities in a way that promotes

excellence: the focus should be on the internal goods (virtues) of business rather than the external goods, such as profits. Moore claims (2002, p. 25) that MacIntyre's schema helps to explain a number of ethical problems facing businesses which are supported by corporations. It explains the "ethical schizophrenia" which results in tensions between personal values and professional values and the external values of corporations, such as profits. But it also helps to explain the tensions described by US journalists, where business interests are affecting the quality of journalism. He argues that the second consequence of the practice-institution distinction "is that it helps to explain the claims that are made in respect of the market as a source of virtues" because "business, as with any practice, rewards those who possess and exercise the virtue" (Moore, 2002, p. 25). He claims the craftsperson "is perfected through and in her or his activity" (Moore, 2002, pp. 25, 26; MacIntyre, 1994, p. 285). Therefore, the tensions between good business and good journalism mean journalistic values are always vulnerable. But good business should acknowledge the need to balance competing goods. Therefore, ethical reform of journalism requires a holistic approach that targets individual journalists, business, other media practices and corporations.

The final argument to support the claim of business as a practice relies on MacIntyre's view that the work of "integrating" internal and external goods has the structure of practice (1994, p. 288). Media business performs this work in terms of integrating the internal goods of the practices of journalism and advertising (and other media practices) as well as the external goods of the corporation. It is important to point out at this point that journalism also relies on the practice of self-regulation to integrate internal and external goods. The institutions that host the practice of journalistic self-regulation are the bodies set up to oversee the codes. Each self-regulatory institution has a particular ideological focus. The media corporations reflect managerial and market-driven ideologies. Therefore, part of the practice of integrating internal and external goods is managing ideological and "cultural" conflict as well as the conflicts between internal and external goods. If the arguments that business is a practice in its own right are accepted, it becomes obvious that commercial media organisations host three-and-a-half practices; but there are intersections between the practices of business and self-regulation. Media business is concerned with conflicts emerging from competing practices hosted by the media corporation, whereas self-regulation is concerned with external conflicts emerging from the relationship between a particular practice – journalism, advertising or business – and the wider public. The relationship between these practices and the institution that supports them can be depicted in this way:

Figure 3: Public sphere, journalism & self-regulation

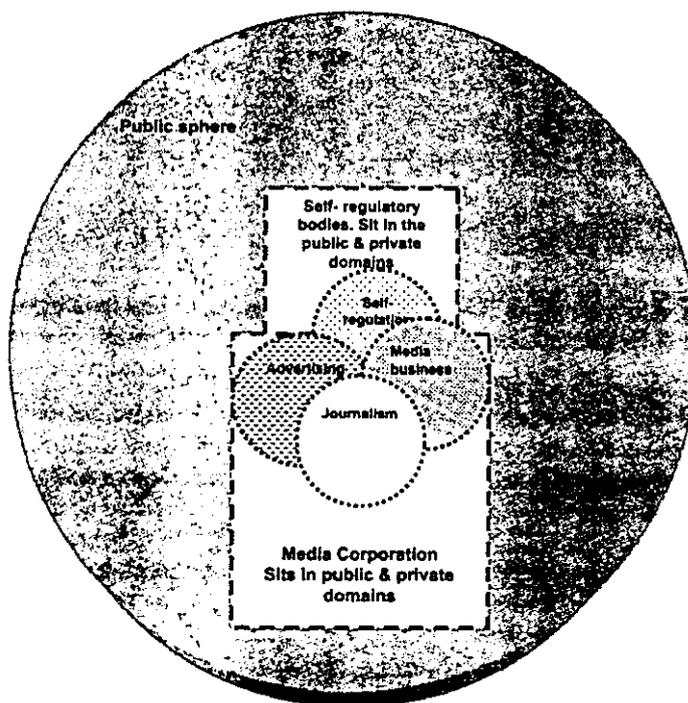
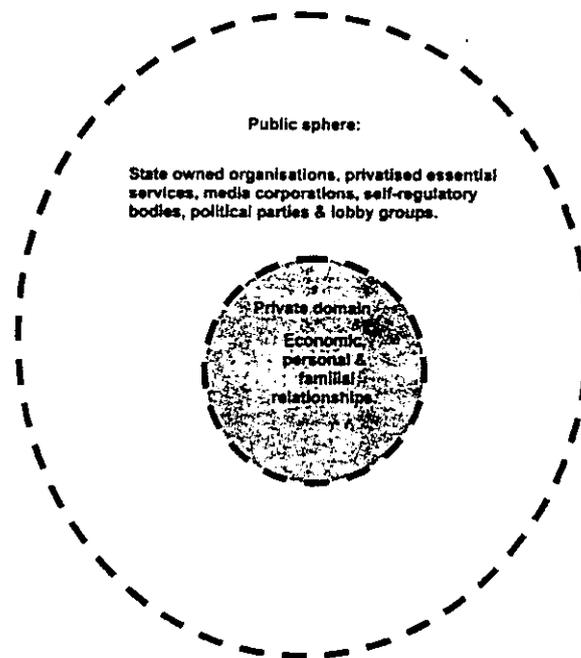


Figure 3 depicts the commercial media corporation. This diagram highlights the inter-relationship between the media practices of business, journalism, advertising and journalistic self-regulation. There are areas where all three internal practices intersect, but institutional self-regulation rarely embraces the complete range of internal conflict because it does not embrace the practice of advertising. Thus professional self-regulation usually can only embrace an ethical problem within media organisations from a partial perspective because it does not take account of all of the internal conflicts. However, the business of journalism can embrace internal ethical issues completely, as it intersects with all practices hosted by the institution. The eclipses are the areas of conflict (MacIntyre, 1985; Moore, 2002; Sayers, 1999) when describing the dynamic nature of traditions within practices. The conflicts that emerge – internally within practice and externally with other practices and institutional goods – are integral to the formation of common goods.

Figure 3 positions media corporations within the public sphere. Traditionally, privately owned economic organisations operating in the market economy that are oriented towards profit have been seen as occupying the private domain (Habermas, 1989; Thompson, 1995). This paper contends, however, that the emergence of transnational media corporations has further altered the public

sphere, requiring us to reconceptualise it in terms of the space it occupies. The public's reliance on information and the effect of information on individual and social identities mean media corporations take a unique position in contemporary society. The profitability and social performance of transnational media companies should not be a private matter between the corporation and shareholders because of the power these corporations exert on the public's ability to participate in political and civil life. These corporations have been observed to be more powerful than some sovereign states (McChesney, 1998; Chadwick, 1996). Like individuals, corporations have both public and private aspects to their identity. Thus media corporations straddle public and private spheres. The relationship can be depicted in this way:

Figure 4: Public and private spheres



Instead of two separate systems that pursue different goals, the public sphere can be conceptualised as the "environment" that shapes private activities such as economic pursuits. Media organisations form part of the public sphere in that they provide information which shapes political attitudes. The private sphere sits within the public sphere and the "borders" are perforated, facilitating the expansion and reduction of both spheres as society transforms.

Conclusion

This paper contends that MacIntyre's view of practice explains why editorial managers and journalists in the US have different views on the effect of bottom-line pressures on the quality of journalism. This is occurring because of the different traditions of social practices. One reflects the internal goods of journalism; the other is concerned with the internal goods of the practice of business. Some journalists did not agree with their counterparts about the effect of bottom-line pressures. Further research is necessary to evaluate whether these groups of journalists have different conceptualisations of journalism's internal goods. This would help test whether journalistic traditions have become blurred with traditions of media business. This schema also helps to explain why Rupert Murdoch sees Fox Television as performing good journalism. The institutional measure of excellence is profit.

Given that this theory is grounded in social context which makes it applicable to various media models, this paper contends the practice-institution schema offers a "complete" theory of journalism in that it describes what journalism should be: a practice defined by internal goods which give rise to excellence in practice. It also describes what journalism is: a practice marginalised by the culture of modernity where external goods, of competing and complementary practices as well as the institutions that support it, corrupt excellence in that practice. Finally, it describes how journalism is done: by pursuing the internal goods identified through a process of reflective practice where decisions are made in the light of the overall social aim of the practice. Internal goods (core journalistic values) must take account of the social context of practice through this process of reflection, which involves acquiring habits of a good person through a process of continuous learning. This requires an understanding of traditions within the practice of journalism and competing practices as well as being mindful of the institutional aims of the media corporation that hosts the practice of journalism.

This discussion also highlights the dynamic nature of journalism, both internally and externally. It is an evolving practice because of the continual conflicts emerging from the social context in which it operates. But it also can have different social aims depending on this context. Thus it is dynamic both in ways of doing and in terms of its relationships with other practices and the media corporation. The evolving nature of journalism can be evidenced in work practices, the styles and approaches to journalism as well as the reappraisal of professional codes. This is to be expected as individuals involved in journalism adapt to different social contexts. The problem emerges when goods external to journalism (such as profit and power) become the determinants of excellence. Where profitability and the creation of audiences are used to evaluate journalism, the practice is being marginalised. MacIntyre cautions that if external goods are continuously used to determine the quality of journalism, the prac-

tice will no longer exist and people will no longer care. Some would argue this has already occurred.

The 2004 *State of the news media* survey heralds a warning. Further research is needed to see whether external goods, identified by managers, are dominating the process by which media businesses are integrating the institutional goods with the goods of the various practices. Thus, when evaluating the 2004 *State of the news media* findings, more data are needed to map the social aims and traditions of journalism in order to effectively monitor their vulnerability to external goods – goods of competing and complementary practices or the institution that hosts it. However, instead of mapping journalists across a range of media organisations, it may be helpful to focus on obtaining richer data from individual media organisations.

MacIntyre's practice-institution schema aids understanding of the role of journalism in society (in terms of what it is, what it should be and how it is done) and helps identify the key ethical and work-related issues facing journalism: the tension between corporate, business and journalistic values – professional, aesthetic and moral – and the systems put in place to deal with those tensions.

By offering a theory of journalism as practice and acknowledging the crucial role of journalistic values in distinguishing journalism from other forms of professional communication, this paper seeks to reinforce the importance of maintaining core journalistic values (internal goods). These values go beyond ethical concerns, as the traditions of journalism emerge from numerous avenues. Therefore, when researching the state of journalism, a more systematic approach is needed which acknowledges its dynamic nature and its dependence on complementary practices and the media corporation. Most importantly, however, the practice-institution schema can assist in the development of a more holistic approach to journalistic research.

Notes

1. Sanders (2003) sees virtue theory as being teleological because virtue is an end in itself. However, I argue that virtue theory is a category in its own right, displaying characteristics of both deontological and teleological theories, i.e. being and end in itself and a means to an end (excellence).
2. Given that the focus of this theory is on journalism as practice, the discussion about business and advertising as practice will be relatively brief. But it is

important to identify why advertising and business are practices in their own right.

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