FROM THE FIRST LINE TO THE BYLINE: MALAYSIAN JOURNALISTS'

LEARNING IN PRACTICE UNDER THE POWER OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP

by

KIT YOONG NG

(Under the Direction of Ronald M. Cervero)

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand how Malaysian journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities. A qualitative study design using the critical incident method and a semi-structured interview guide were used to interview 15 Malaysian journalists from the mainstream print media. The constant comparative method was used to analyze the verbatim-transcribed interview for emerging themes.

This study found that Malaysian journalists learned two major skills – substantive journalism and negotiating. There are three sub-categories under substantive journalism skills – basic journalism skills, communication skills, and skill at managing content and publication space. For negotiating skills, journalists learned three important elements, namely gaining trust, maintaining relationships, and strategic withdrawal and intervention.

This study also found that there are three ways how journalists learned to carry out their professional responsibilities: 1) guidance from the community of practice; 2) informal learning; and, 3) formal learning. Guidance from the community of practice includes guidance from their senior co-workers and counterparts, one-to-one coaching

from superior, and mentoring relationships. Informal learning uses observational learning, incidental learning, and trial-and-error learning methods. There are two ways that journalists learned through formal learning – in-house training and learning from textbooks.

Lastly, three categories of contextual factors were found to be affecting journalists' learning and practice. They were structural power relationships, editor's political survival, and topic of writing. Three sub-categories of structural power relationships were discovered: 1) legal control; 2) political interference and control; and, 3) ethnicity and language of writing.

As a conclusion, although Malaysian journalists are free to negotiate their learning and are able to learn the skills needed to carry out their professional responsibilities, their learning process is essentially being choreographed. It is being choreographed in such a way that what have been learned could only be applied to practice if they are within the boundary(ies) sanctioned by the media organization they work with. The media organizations, in turn, are controlled by the government through ownership and laws governing the media industry. Like the journalism practice in Malaysia that is shaped by the legal constraints and political interference, Malaysian journalists' learning path is similarly negotiated while being navigated by the power of press ownership.

INDEX WORDS: Journalists' learning on the job, Continuing journalism education, Workplace learning, Community of practice, Reflective practice, Learning and power, Political-economy of learning, Situated Learning, Mass media in Malaysia, Media ownership.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory to my father

Ng Eng Kong

(1928-1993)

for his gentle spirit, patience and belief in education

and to my mother

Leong Lan Keow

for her unfailing support and belief in education

and finally, in exaltation and exultation to my very best friend, God and personal Savior,

Jesus Christ.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I was trying to make sure that I do not leave out any individual's name on this acknowledgment page, I remembered an incident occurred in Japan when I was studying there years ago. A Japanese senior was trying to hurry us to attend our departmental weekly seminar so that we would be there before our Japanese professor arrived – as the custom is. I said, "Why worry? The seminar can't possibly be started and conducted without we students being there!" The senior was somewhat amused but was perhaps more shocked because no Japanese would dare to make such a joke, particularly about any Japanese much-feared and revered professors who are regarded almost as "gods" too. Looking back now, I do not think my joke was rude in any way because I found it to be very true in my own research now. My research could not have possibly be carried out without my respondents! For that, to all my respondents (you know who you are) my BIG TERIMA KASIH (thank you in Malay language). No words could possibly express my appreciation to your willingness to participate in my research and to enrich the fields of journalism and adult education studies in Malaysia.

The first person on my official list of acknowledgement is my mother, Leong Lan Keow. Thank you for your moral support and your belief that education is not for sons only and that education is for women of all ages too!

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Finally, but not the least, I want to acknowledge and proclaim God's faithfulness in seeing me through. Jesus Christ, my personal Savior, has been my pillar of strength and wisdom throughout this enduring process of research. You have shown me the meaning of humbleness and knowledge-seeking as Your word says in Ecclesiastes 1: 18 – "For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief." I have learned that the obtaining of a Ph.D. degree is the beginning of a long journey in seeking Your wisdom and knowledge in humbleness.

<div align="right">
Kit Yoong Ng
March 22, 2004
Athens, Georgia
</div>

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PROLOGUE

Malaysia is a country with a population of 23.27 million living on a land area of 329,723 square kilometer (*Press Statement: Population distribution and basic demographic characteristics report population and housing census 2000*). It is equivalent to 127,317.19 square miles, or slightly larger than the New Mexico state in the United States. It is divided into East Malaysia and Peninsular Malaysia. There are two states in East Malaysia which form part of the Borneo island. The peninsular Malaysia is generally better developed, particularly the west coast where Kuala Lumpur, its capital, is located. Kuala Lumpur literally means mud delta.

It is a multi-racial country with Malays/Indigenous making up 65.1% of the total population, followed by Chinese (26.0%) and Indian (7.7%) besides many other minorities such as Kadazan, Iban, Bidayuh and so forth who reside mainly in the two states in East Malaysia. All the main religions of the world are being practiced in Malaysia. The main religion of the country is Islam (60.4% of the population), Buddhism (19.2%), Hinduism (6.3%), Christianity (9.1%), and Confucianism/Daoism (2.6%). The national language of Malaysia is the Malaysian language, known as *Bahasa Malaysia* or *Bahasa Melayu*. A former colony of the British, English is the second language. As a multi-ethnic and multi-religion country, several other languages are spoken such as Mandarin, Chinese dialects (for example Cantonese, Fujien and Hakka); Tamil, and some other Indian dialects. Each of the ethnic groups practices its own culture and still speaks its own language.Malaysia was colonized by the British from 1874 until it gained its independence in 1957, except for a period of about three and a half years when it was occupied by the Japanese during World War II. The British welcomed the Indians and Chinese immigrants

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to meet the demand for labor supply, particularly during the early 1900s. This caused waves of migration that subsequently gave rise to the emergence of different ethnic groups, cultures and traditions, as can be seen in Malaysia today. The country also experienced rapid economic development during the early 1900s in different sectors especially in rubber plantations and tin mines. The immigrants were brought in to specialize in certain economic sectors. The Chinese were involved mainly in tin-mining and trading; the so-called less skilled and poorer immigrants from Southern India and Ceylon were recruited to work in plantations, especially the thriving rubber estates, and in the construction of roads and railways. The Malays were essentially living in the rural areas and involved in agriculture. With the different ethnic groups divided into specific occupations, a society was created that was recognizable through the types of occupations, which in turn determined the level of economics for each of the ethnic groups. For example, the Chinese who were involved in trading were of the wealthier class of society compared to the Indians and the Malays. Thus, there remained a social stratification in Malaya, the old name of Malaysia until 1963, when Singapore joined in to become part of the country. Due to political difference, Singapore separated from Malaysia and became an independent country two years later. Indeed, there were uneven developments during the colonial and post-colonial Malaya and the formation of social class and accumulation of capital in Malaysia were the results of ongoing contentions among classes (Jomo, 1986).

In terms of politics, the colonial-British government was aligned to the Malays through the rulers known as *Sultans*. There were nine Sultans who ruled the nine states respectively although there were a total of 13 states. The number of Sultans remains unchanged to this day. Each of the Sultans takes turn to be elected as the King of the country, known as *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong* (Supreme Ruler). It is a unique system whereby the appointment is on a five-year

rotational system. The relationship between the Colonial British and the Sultans provided the foundation for the emergence of political power among the Malays, while the mass migration provided economic stratification with the power of economics mainly within the hands of the Chinese. This legacy is carried on until the present day, whereby each ethnic group forms its own political party which in turn forms the ruling coalition government, known as the National Front (*Barisan Nasional*).

This feature can be seen in the mass media too, where the major ethnic groups publish newspapers in their own language. Therefore, the newspapers mainly serve the ethnic groups that speak and write in the languages of publication. For example, the newspapers in Malay language (or *Jawi,* the old written language for Malay language) are serving the Malay readers, the newspapers in Mandarin language serve the Chinese community and so forth. However, the English newspapers are read by the "upper class" of all ethnic groups, those who were mainly educated in English during the colonial times. Or, they are the younger generation who are more fluent in English. There were essentially four types of school using different languages as the medium of instruction until the formation of the Language Act in 1967.

The history of state control on the media in Malaysia can be traced to the British colonial period. In an historical analysis of the media in Malaysia, it is found that control on the media by the state started in a rather unregulated way initially by the first English language daily published on 1st of 1806 in Penang island (Mustafa, 2003a). He pointed out that the daily, *Government Gazette,* known later as the *Prince of Wales Island Gazette* (PWIG), was issued a license although no law stipulated such requirement then. Mustafa noted that the owner of PWIG, A.B. Bone, an entrepreneur from Madras, India, even requested that each issue of the PWIG be censored by the government.

One hundred and sixty-seven years later, journalism education started in the very island where PWIG was born. The first batch of formally trained journalists was produced in 1973 by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) (Lent, 1973). According to Lent, who was also instrumental in developing the program at the university, the only means for media education in Malaysia prior to the establishment of the program in USM was through practical experience. This was done by attending short-term courses offered by the South East Asia Press Centre in Kuala Lumpur, and by undergoing training schemes abroad. A proliferation of journalism or communications courses began soon after the first intake of students in 1971 by USM. The oldest university in the country, Universiti Malaya, started a post-graduate media research degree in May 1972, Mara Institute of Technology (ITM) inaugurated a school of mass communication in July 1972, and the National Broadcasting Training Centre offered a short-term course on broadcasting in December 1971 (Lent, 1973). Ramanathan and Frith (1986) observed that most of the journalism programs were based on a mixture of the English and American journalism education systems, except for the program in ITM, which is modeled more toward the American system.

In a simple case study conducted by Lent (1973) on the B.A. with Honors Degree in USM, it was found that while there were various difficulties faced in establishing the program. The greatest difficulty was the stringent control of mass media by the government in Malaysia. He points out that the Sedition Act (1948) and Printing Presses Act (1948) were the main legal constraints that hampered the work of journalists and the mass media. His prediction that the legal constraints would not be reduced has proven to be true as they are still in place 30 years later. Recent analysis on the Malaysian media found that not only the Acts were retained, a new law was enacted to cover new inventions or mediums of communications such as laser disc, video tapes and video compact discs (Zaharom, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). Indeed, the

control on mass media by the Malaysian government will not see any loosening of grip on the horizon. It is against this background and scenario that this research is based on – what is the effect of such control on the learning of journalists in Malaysia? In particular, what is the effect of such legal control and concentrated press ownership on the learning of journalists who still undergo on-the-job learning despite having have gone through formal journalism training in college?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The media in many Asian countries are generally government-controlled (Atkins, 2002;

Scheller, 1983), especially since the 1980s. The media in Malaysia are not spared such

government control and are indeed owned and controlled by the government through proxies of

individuals and conglomerates closely aligned to the dominant political parties that form the

ruling government (Cheong, 1993; Zaharom, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). The

ownership of media by a few individuals or conglomerates is a manifestation of the global trend

of concentrated media ownership which has become a main concern in the media studies. Two

perspectives, the political economy and media economics, have been commonly used in the

discourse of media ownership. The political economy perspective, adopted mainly by media

researchers in Britain, examines the implications of power interplays between media ownership,

economy and politics in society (Golding & Murdock, 2000). Media economics is a term coined

and has been used widely, particularly, in the U.S. since the late 1970s in the study of

communication with media ownership as one of its main foci.

Media economics is about the economic aspect of media production, the allocation of

resources, and how media operators meet the economic demands of society, and how these

economic activities influence the production of media goods and services (Albarran, 2002;

Alexander, Owers, & Carveth, 1998; Compaine, 1979b; Picard, 1989). However, one of the main

concerns of media economics is the concentration of media ownership, and its implications on

the four distinct groups the media serve as identified by Picard (1989). The four stakeholders in

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the study of media economics as named by Picard are: 1) Media owners (individuals or stockholders who own media outlets); 2) Audiences; 3) Advertisers; and, 4) Media employees.

The emergence of concentrated media ownership is due to massive business reorganizations, regulations, technology, financial changes, takeover, breakups, mergers and acquisitions of media by conglomerates (Alexander et al., 1998). This trend of ownership of media organizations is not only about an oligopoly of media ownership in the hands of a few individuals or by a few conglomerates; of more concern is the ownership of diverse business entities including non-media organizations and non-performing (non-profit making) media organizations. Media researchers have criticized this trend of ownership because it is seen as a tool that conglomerates use to cement their power, and control the flow and dissemination of information. This trend of media ownership and its subsequent business activities affect media ownership globally albeit in somewhat different manners in different parts of the world. Journalists in the United States of America still enjoy a relatively greater degree of press freedom compared to their counterparts in many Asian countries which are under draconian government control. This is largely due to the guarantee of freedom of speech under the First Amendments, a right that many other countries are still deprived of.

This new trend of media ownership has raised some critical questions about the media industry. In a classic work on the power of mass media, it is noted that mass media has traditionally been under more scrutiny due to its nature as a cultural industry (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1977). Adorno and Horkheimer pointed out that as a cultural industry, mass media has the power to influence society while being influenced by society at the same time. Examples of questions raised about the media industry include how media are being operated under concentrated media ownership and, how media audiences are affected by media ownership.

However, the field of media economics has essentially focused on the question of media performance. There is an absence of discourse on the relationship between the structure and conduct among the four stakeholders in the study of media economics. In other words, discourses about media ownership have not dwelled on the question of power perspectives, nor power relations among the four stakeholders in the studies of media economics. Media employees, the fourth group in the study of media economics, particularly the journalists who affect the agenda setting process, seem to be the poor cousins in the study of media economics. How journalists are affected by the concentration of media ownership, particularly press ownership that hinges on the economic and political aspects of ownership, remains on a mute mode in the studies of media economics. Media ownership refers to the ownership of any type of media in general, while press ownership refers specifically to ownership of media organizations that produce news and information, which is also the focus of my research. Further, from the perspective of adult education, there is no discourse made on how the economic and political aspects of press ownership affect learning among journalists on the job.

As mentioned earlier, the situation of media ownership in many Asian countries are far from autonomous, including that in Malaysia (Atkins, 2002; Scheller, 1983). Tracing the root of media ownership in Malaysia would reveal that the media are owned and controlled by the government through the ruling political parties' business investment arms (Cheong, 1993; Zaharom, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). This form of ownership is not only a form of concentrated press ownership, but the mainstream press organizations are acting as the mouthpieces of the government, especially public broadcast organizations (Curran & Park, 2000; Zaharom, 2002). Further, there are various laws enacted by the Parliament that directly control the function of the media. Zaharom (2002) noted that there are three laws that directly govern the

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media in Malaysia. The Printing Presses and Publications Act introduced in 1984 governs the press in Malaysia by providing powers to the Home Minister to grant or withdraw a printing license or publishing permit. This is the most powerful law among the three, not that the others are less controlling, but because it gives ultimate power to the government to grant entrée for any organization into the industry, and power to censor or ban offending publications. The Broadcasting Act 1988 determines the type of television programs that are allowed to be broadcast. Finally, The Finas Act 1981, amended in 1984, controls mainly the filming industry by widening the definition of film to include video tapes, video discs, laser discs, and video compact discs. The controlling part of the Act is exercised when anyone who possesses three or more copies of the same film in any of the mentioned forms is deemed to be involved in film distribution, and hence, is required to apply for a distribution permit.

The past decade seems to suggest that the government is more liberal toward the control of media when media organizations proliferate, especially the broadcasting industry. However, Zaharom and Mustafa (1998) pointed out that this is a false liberation because there is no loosening of government control over the media. Instead, it is a result of the Malaysian privatization policy which in turn has caused greater commercialization of the media and hence resulting in more being offered. They called this trend of liberalization as the "regulated deregulation" (p. 15) of the Malaysian media where a seemingly deregulated industry is actually being regulated by the government through the various laws enacted to control the operation of media organizations.

Embroiled in all these issues of concentrated media ownership and control are the journalists. Journalists are one of the main groups in the operation of the media organizations who have influence over the agenda of the media. Although they may not have a final decision-

making power over what gets or does not get published, their choice over what to write and how to write is an important factor in the agenda setting process. Indeed, journalists learn their profession by carrying out their work. A census on the enrollment for journalism education in the U.S. shows that more than 95 percent of journalism and broadcasting programs includes internships in their curricula (Beker, 1990). Although no similar empirical study or statistics could be found on the Malaysian mass communication education, most colleges require their students to undergo an internship. This trend for the inclusion of internship as an integral component of mass communication training speaks about the importance of learning on the job, and the need for an accumulation of experience by acclimatizing students to the profession's environment. This process of learning through internship does not stop at the point of actual entry into the profession when they are employed by the media organizations after graduation. They continue to learn while carrying out their professional responsibilities, and learn the tricks of the trade while in the environment of concentrated media ownership.

From the perspective of a reflective practitioner, professionals learn and reflect a great deal while carrying out their professional responsibilities in the swampy areas of practice (Schon, 1983, 1987, 1995). Schon (1983) espoused that reflective practitioners rely heavily on repertoires of knowledge developed through experience. This includes the use of reflection-in-action (reflecting while performing professional task), reflection-on-action (reflecting on a professional task that has been performed), and knowing-in-action (the instantaneous knowledge that one uses in solving problem when faced with one without any prior planning). The practice of journalism is one that is carried out in a practice that is full of uncertainties and, requires journalists to constantly conduct the various forms of reflection as mentioned by Schon (1983). Journalists confront various subjects or areas of expertise, from the issue of a clogged drain to high-profile

politics when going for assignments such as press conference, interviewing people on the street or collecting data for write-up. On the other hand, journalists are also working in a context of practice and media organizations that may require more than just an individualistic form of reflection as espoused by Schon (1983). Their learning seems to reflect the way learning takes place in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). They learn by being part of the communities they interact with, whether they are journalists or non-journalists.

Schon's (1983) reflective practitioner has been criticized for failing to take into account the power relations that are in existence in the context of professional practice (Cervero, 2001). Cervero argued that the reflective practitioner has neglected the socio-political theory of events and the "asymmetrical social and political contexts in which learning takes place and to know whose interests reflective practice is serving" (p. 216). Other works by Wilson (1993) and Hansman and Wilson (2002) have also shown the importance of taking into consideration the contexts of learning. Therefore, it seems imperative that journalists learn to strike an equilibrium of being reflective practitioners and learning under the power of concentrated press ownership. However, despite the presence of a draconian government control on Malaysian media, particularly the print and broadcast media, nothing is known about the effects of such concentrated press ownership on the learning experience that Malaysian journalists go through. Most research has focused on the effects of concentrated press ownership on press freedom, political democracy and business (Gomez, 1990, 1994; Zaharom, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998).

<div align="center">Problem and Purpose of the Study</div>

Journalists learn most of the politics and tricks of the trade on the job. They learn both by going to assignments and by writing news, feature articles or commentary pieces. It is through

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going to assignments that journalists build up their repertoire of experience and learn to become reflective practitioners, an essential component of the profession. However, at the same time, journalists work in press organizations that are often under concentrated press ownership, where ownership is in the hands of a few conglomerates. This trend of ownership is a prevalent global feature of press ownership. However, in Malaysia, the press organizations are not only owned by a few conglomerates, but the conglomerates are virtually controlled by the government. The Malaysian government uses this form of ownership as an instrument to reinforce and to cement its political power.

Press ownership is of great concern because media organizations in general have enormous power of shaping culture in societies. The product of the press is information, which is essentially generated by journalists who also serve as the primary solicitor of facts and are one of the most important agents in agenda setting. Journalists in Malaysia, whether with or without prior journalism training, essentially are required to go through some form of semi-structured training program during the initial entry period into the profession.

Although research has examined press ownership and its effect on media audience and culture, attention has not been paid to how press ownership affects learning among journalists. Their learning process or experience is of concern because press organizations under concentrated press ownership tend to carry out their hidden curriculum. The learning process that journalists go through may be framed by the owner's agenda, especially for those who have had no prior training in journalism. This raises the question of how objective on-the-job training is for journalists in the profession. How do the journalists learn on the job under the strong influence of concentrated press ownership? Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand

how journalists in Malaysia learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1) What do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities?

2) How do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities?

3) What contextual factors affect journalists' learning on the job?

Significance of the Study

Compared to many other areas of continuing professional education, continuing journalism education (CJE) is relatively a field that is not well researched. An overview on a journal that publishes journalism education, *Journalism Educator*, shows that it essentially focuses on the teaching of journalism in journalism school, or as known in its abbreviated form, J-school. The other area that seems to be of concern is the increase or decrease of students in J-school. Another focus is directed to some of the effective ways of teaching journalism. Although very few have touched on critical thinking in the practice of journalism, journalism education has not reached the ripened stage of critical discourses whereby the discourses of more meta-level of the practice of journalism are made. Further, as pointed out by Grow (1991), journalism and mass communication education have not entered discussions of professional education although it has discussed two "higher-order skills," such as problem-solving and critical thinking. Therefore, this study would contribute toward a more critical discourse of professional journalism education, especially with regard to the impact of press ownership on CJE in press organizations.

A theoretical contribution of this study is to address the practice gap of journalism and reflective practitioner. Schon (1983) has espoused that it is important for professionals to be reflective practitioners. However, he has essentially focused on the individualistic form of reflection and does not address much the context of learning, particularly the implication of ownership of an organization on learning. Therefore, this study hopes to further address the theory of reflective practice by widening its scope from an individualistic reflective practice to a contextual reflective practice that takes into account the ownership of the organization where learning and practice take place.

Lastly, within the practice of journalism in Malaysia, this study would contribute to the relatively scarce research on communications, particularly from the perspective of adult education. Communications research on press ownership in Malaysia has focused mainly on the political economy implications of concentrated ownership. Or, they have criticized the practice of journalism without conducting an in-depth analysis of the learning and practice of journalists under the restrictive and challenging condition imposed by Malaysian laws, and the constraint of concentrated press ownership. This study would show the importance of recognizing the implication of press ownership on journalists' learning on the job. It would benefit the practice of journalism in Malaysia by providing a further understanding of the practice that is restricted not only due to the economical power of concentrated press ownership, but a tight surveillance by the government as well. This is done by illuminating on-the-job learning barriers of journalists under such powers. This study also suggested some of the ways journalists face or overcome the learning barriers. Therefore, this study would also inform the planning and designing for journalism education in general by taking into consideration the factor of press ownership in the on-the-job training program and professional journalism training school.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an old Chinese Malaysian adage that says: When you draw a picture of a human, you do not have to illustrate the intestines. Adhering to the advice of the elderly, I shall use the following online newspaper article published in Malaysia to illustrate the media in Malaysia ("Editorial policies prerogative of publishers, says NST chief," 2003, March 25). The article quoted Abdullah, the former chief of New Straits Times Press (NSTP), the biggest media conglomerate in terms of size in Malaysia:

Editorial policies prerogative of publishers, says NST chief

Kuala Lumpur: It is the prerogative of the owner or publisher to decide on the principles a news media adopts and it is up to the editor and his staff to devote their journalism to those principles, Group Editor-in-Chief of New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad said.

"The individual journalist exercises his independent conscience in deciding why and for whom he works, not how," he said at the UN Development Programme's National Conference on 'The Future of the Media in a Knowledge Society: Rights, Responsibilities and Risks,' during a panel discussion on the impact of media values and ownership on access to information.

While implementing editorial policies, he said, the bedrock values of journalism - such as clarity, fairness, honesty and integrity would still apply.

"These virtues must be in the product, but they cannot be if they are not among the producers," he added.

Abdullah said it was a myth that media ownership compromises journalistic integrity.

"The media business is a business. If a free press means a press without ownership, then there never has been such a thing, nor could there ever be," he said.

He added that a newspaper reflected its editor and every editor would then choose his publisher, or vice versa.

"Every publisher is or should be a businessman and every businessman should want to make a profit," he said, adding that because circulation was the only way for newspapers to make a profit, it became the only measure of their quality.

"The daily newspaper remains the least expensive media product, but it is not practically free like the broadcast media and the Internet. This makes buying a newspaper more of a willful decision on the part of the news consumer," he said.

The thesis of the news article above is stronger than any proposition or theory related to media ownership, the practice of journalism and learning process that journalists might possibly go through. The prerogative of the publisher or owner of the newspaper company mentioned in the article speaks louder than any theory that espouses media ownership. Abdullah's statement that the media is a business entity is a *confession from the horse's mouth* of the fact that the commercial market forces navigate the operation of the media industry. Further, being a business entity, it warrants for a discussion of organization. His advice to journalists that they could only

choose who to work for and not how they could work has implications on journalists' learning in practice and in organization. It also warrants a further discourse of the theories of adult learning.

The news article and brief discussion above strongly suggest that media ownership is a vast subject that ranges from studies on mass communication to economics and politics. This is particularly true for press ownership in Malaysia due to two main reasons. The first reason is Malaysian press organizations are inextricably linked to the government through partisan political involvement in the ruling government (Cheong, 1993; Mustafa, 2003a; Wang, 1998; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). The second reason is they are controlled by the government through legislation such as mandatory license for operation and several other laws that restrict publication.

Therefore, in order to conduct a research on how Malaysian journalists learn under the power of press ownership, four bodies of literature need to be examined. The first is an examination of the mass media. I would examine the power of the media, the phenomenon of media ownership and the connections between economics and politics, and media ownership. The attention of the discourse would be made on the global phenomenon of concentrated media ownership, particularly that in Malaysia. The second is the analysis of the underpinning political and economic nature of the media industry and its operation. The focus of discourse on the operation of the media would be analyzed from the perspective of the critical political economy (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Goldsmiths Media Group, 2000; Murdock, 1982). I would also discuss the operation of the media industry from the theory of media economics (Albarran, 2002; Albarran & Chan-Olmsted, 1998; Albarran & Dimmick, 1996; Alexander et al., 1998; Compaine, 1982). The third body of literature that I would examine is the discourse about the conception of ownership and power in relation to organization. I would analyze the different

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discourses of power in relation to organization, particularly organization's structure and organizational ownership. The last body of literature that I would examine is the theories of adult learning. This will include exploring the theory of reflective practice (Schon, 1983, 1987, 1995), situated learning (Hansman & Wilson, 2002; Lave, 1988, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wilson, 1993), and learning within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). I have related these theories to journalists' learning in and through practice.

I have used both the terms media ownership and press ownership interchangeably. Although there is hairline difference between the two terms, they essentially mean the same thing with press as a subset of media. Media ownership refers to ownership of all the different forms of mass communication and products in the cultural industries, such as radio, television, newspapers, music, film, and theatre. It also includes the ownership of the entertainment industry in areas such as computer games, Disney Land and Universal Studio Theme Park. Press ownership refers to the ownership of news and information industries of broadcasting and print media. The broadcasting industry includes news or information transmitted through television, radio, and the Internet. The print media includes newspaper and magazines. Therefore, at times, the term *press ownership* used would refer specifically to the news and information industry.

<center>The Mass Media – An Examination</center>

Before launching into a discussion of the other three bodies of literature, it is useful to provide some background of the mass media. I would examine three sub-sections of the mass media - the power of the mass media, the phenomenon of concentrated media ownership, and the connection between ownership, economics, and politics.

<center>18</center>

The Power of the Mass Media

The media industry has always been an industry that comes under more scrutiny and public surveillance globally compared to many other industries. In order to trace the reasons for this concern, I have attempted to list the power of media, what it is believed to be capable of doing and has done. Hokheimer and Adorno (1972), in one of their most influential works within the field of cultural studies, opined that the media, especially films, radio and magazines, are operating as a culture industry. Further, this culture industry is seen as leading to cultural chaos when the "movies and radio no longer pretend to be art" because of the standardization of production (p. 121). This view is shared by many of the Marxist political economy theorists who see the mass media as a prominent player in the cultural industries (Curran, 1977, 2000b; Golding & Murdock, 2000; Hall, 1977). They saw the potential of the mass media being used for enculturation process on the society to conform to a certain form of desired behavior by the domineering party. The mass media is further used as a tool of commodification of cultural life (Golding & Murdock, 2000).

From the perspective of cultural studies, the mass media is essentially a tool of meaning construction (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1977; Murdock, 1989). Murdock (1989) argued that the mass media "is centrally concerned with the construction of meaning – how it is produced in and through particular expressive forms and how it is continually negotiated and deconstructed through the practice of everyday life" (p. 436). The construction of meaning was most visible in the early studies of mass communication. Traditionally, the mass media was used during the World War I and II for propaganda purposes, especially through the use of radio and newspaper. It is also popularly known to be used as a tool to influence voting behavior. Related to the idea of the use of mass media for meaning construction is the idea that the media is "a powerful

symbolic force" due to its "narrative power of news texts" (Switzer, McNamara, & Ryan, 1999, p. 29). Therefore, the mass media has the traditional power of using its texts as tools to hegemonize people, and to cause audiences to construct meaning and deconstruct meaning to suit the agenda of those in power.

Two theories, State Apparatus (SA) and Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), by Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1971) respectively describe how the mass media can be used as a tool to hegemonize the society. They both analyzed the function of the media as a system of power. Gramsci's (1971) famous and most espoused theory of cultural hegemony and State Apparatus describes the power the state has on media. Gramsci, in expounding Marx's theory of power of the state, asserts that Marx's ideas of power of the state as merely of a repressive kind and the state's function of producing capitalist reproduction are too simplistic. Instead, he believes it is the power that certain number of institutions in a civilized society has that is of concern to the state, and how the state in turn tries to have power over them. He names these institutions, such as the church, the schools, the trade unions and also the press, as perpetuating cultural hegemony; where the state influences and controls the minds of the people by exerting power over those institutions to further cement its power. He also refers to these tools as state apparatuses, the tools that state uses in strengthening and cementing power. This is done by creating common sense and consensus on issues of concern to the public and thus, silencing dissenting voices. Such use of the State Apparatuses in the form of legislation to silence dissenting voices is common in many countries such as Singapore (Hachten & Hachten, 1993), the Philippines (Lent, 1971), Pakistan and India (Scheller, 1983), and Malaysia (Zaharom, 2002). Indeed, press ownership in Southeast Asian countries is about politics and is very much controlled by government who uses it in the name of national development (Atkins, 2002).

The second theory of ISA explains the power of the press in relation to the state. Althusser (1971) drew his work from Marxist's theory of the state and advances a step further the road taken by Gramsci earlier by making a clear distinction between the use of SA and ISA. SA is primarily repressive and violent in nature while ideology is its secondary function. On the other hand, ISA is primarily ideological and functions through ideology, and its secondary function is repressive. The other difference between SA and ISA is the ownership pattern – SA is essentially owned by the public domain while ISA is owned by private domain. This power of ISA as espoused by Althusser (1971) explains the power of press in capitalist societies. The press are usually privately owned and yet posses the ideological power that can be used to influence audience. In most cases, they are used as a tool to hegemonize the people or the subject. Althusser (1971) explained further that:

> … the Ideological State Apparatuses are multiple, distinct, 'relatively autonomous' and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express, in forms which may be limited or extreme, the effects of the clashes between the capitalist class struggle and the proletarian class struggle, as well as their subordinate forms. (p. 149)

The difference between the ISA and the SA is that the SA is essentially grounded more in a Marxist Socialist ideology. This is rather apparent because it was a theory first espoused by Gramsci (1971), who was a Marxist socialist, and in an era when the Marxist ideology reigned. The ISA, on the other hand, is a theory that explains the phenomena and implications of the capitalist era, the ownership of organizations by individuals. Althusser's (1971) explanation of the ISA is a theory that seeks to explain the power of capitalist ownership in terms of clashes between the capitalist power and proletarian struggle.

Althusser's (1971) exposition on ISA explains the power of press ownership, which has been of an oligopoly ownership trend in recent decades where only a handful of firms dominate the media industry and the media industry is a big business (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Gomery, 1998). Such an oligopoly trend projects an autonomous power in capitalist society because there is relatively no direct control. However, the control is more of a false autonomous power because media ownership is somewhat governed by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) since 1978 and Federal Communication Commission (FCC) in the United States (Compaine, 1979a; Exoo, 1987; Sterling, 1979a, 1979b). It creates capitalist class struggle when the few owners are competing with each other in gaining more audiences; and it creates proletarian class struggle when the effort in cementing hegemony by those in power resulted in the emergence of different groups of dissenters in the capitalist class.

Another explanation of the media power is that the media is seen as a guardian of freedom of speech. A senior official of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), deputy director of the Bureau of Competition, Alan K. Palmer, admitted this power of guardianship when he was quoted as saying that:

> We're somewhat more concerned about concentration in the media [than other industries] because they are not just economic concerns but First Amendment concerns as well. ("FTC to take on media concentration," 1978, quoted in Compaine, 1979a)

Therefore, how the media industry functions is of great concern because of its power, and the public's expectation for media to play their role as the guardian of freedom of speech. Media researchers are also concerned about freedom of speech in terms of the need for the media to act as a public sphere, an idea that is popularized by Habermas (1989). Habermas' tenet of argument

lies in the importance of a democratic public sphere where democratic exchange of information prevails for a more informed decision making in the society. In the case of the United States, despite the power of what the media can do, it is of utmost importance to uphold the First Amendment as the guarantor of freedom of speech. This is a right that the Malaysian media and many other less developed countries do not have.

The role of the press as the guardian of freedom of speech, particularly in reporting the truth, rendered the press the name "Fourth Estate." It is called the Fourth Estates after the gallery where reporters sat in the early days of the British Parliament (Hulteng & Nelson, 1982). The other three estates are Man, Lords Spiritual, and Lords Temporal and Commons. The press was accorded the watchdog role by being given the seat of honor in the parliamentary system to carry out its responsibility of reporting the truth, to act as a check on the state by monitoring the full range of state activity, and to fearlessly expose abuses of public authority. However, this role is the media's practice of the past and the media are now acting more like the mouthpieces of the state (Curran, 2000b; Curran & Park, 2000).

Concentrated Media Ownership

Media ownership has become more concentrated especially in the last three decades, resulting in fewer people owning more and diverse organizations. To give some statistics of ownership to show the *severity* of the trend, the number of corporations controlling most of the US daily newspapers, magazines, radio, television, books and movies has taken a sharp plunge from 50 to merely six since 1983 (Bagdikian, 2000). In Malaysia, there were 39 dailies in 1993 but they are owned by mainly two giant media conglomerates aligned to the government (Zaharom, 2002). In Britain the world's media were taken over by major industrial and commercial entities such as General Electric, Westinghouse, Toshiba, Fiat, Bouyges and Santo

Domingo groups, that stretched across political boundaries (Curran & Park, 2000). Indeed, media ownership is about making profit and power. A leading newspaper broker was said to have told potential corporate purchasers that they ought to buy daily papers for two reasons – profit and influence (Bagdikian, 2000).

The trend of media ownership has reached, what I call, the third wave of ownership. Doyle (2002) referred to such trend of ownership as "diagonal cross-media ownership" and "vertical cross-media ownership" (p. 68) while Albarran and Dimmick (1996) described it as "economies of multiformity" (p. 41). A diagonal cross-media ownership is a pattern of ownership where media corporations diversify into new business areas. For example, a newspaper publisher buys over a television broadcasting company or telecommunication company. Vertical cross-media ownership involves media corporations expanding into either succeeding stages or preceding stages in the supply chain. Media ownership with an economies of multiformity is a scenario where different types of non-media corporations are bought over to create multiple forms of ownership across the industries.

The first wave of ownership is what Compaine (1979a) called "one-newspaper communities" where concentration of ownership is within the industry segment and at local level; and the second wave is conglomeration ownership. The third wave of ownership portrays a stronger and consolidated power through cross ownership, creating a media industry that is owned by a very few conglomerates who own a few diverse media productions. The conglomeration of news media mostly took place during the last three decades especially in the 1980s and 1990s (Curran, 2000b, p. 123). This includes those non-performing or not-profit-making media organizations because conglomerates keep and use them as a means of control over the flow and dissemination of information. Example of cross ownership is Disney that not

only owns set of theme parks, but also the ABC television network, sports cable-TV networks (ESPN and ESPN2), and a string of newspapers and magazines, and a movie studio (Gomery, 1998). This trend of cross ownership is seeing the penetration of media organizations into huge leisure conglomerates that are among the largest in the world; so much so, that the issue of ownership is "no longer simply that the media are compromised by their links to big business: the media *are* big business" (Curran, 2000b, p. 123). Famous names of media magnates especially since the 1980s such as Rupert Murdoch, Ted Turner, Silvio Berlusconi are the owners of this third wave of ownership who have enormous power to determine the type of information the whole global community gets. Alternative information is almost crushed. Such an ownership trend is not healthy because, as explained earlier, mass media is a powerful ISA and, as any theory of economics states, control of ownership means control of power. Compaine (1979b) listed two implications of press ownership, the first is, "bigness is bad" because economists generally believe that organizations, after reaching a certain size of optimal efficiencies or production, will not provide any economic growth benefits to the society. The second implication is that it suppresses pluralism in terms of diverse voices and culture within the media (Doyle, 2002; Hendriks, 1995). Curran (2000b) noted that a more serious implication is the market can absolutely silence any media watchdog, the proud role that the media played before the early eighteenth century and before the present trend of ownership emerged. Gomery (1998) opined that the implication of such concentrated ownership will "offer a high barrier to entry" because many of these media owners keep their non-performing subsidiaries. They survive as they are dependent on their other profitable and non-media business arms; and thus "potential rivals lack this conglomerate protection" (Gomery, 1998, p. 48).

The "Trinity" of Mass Media - Media Ownership, Economics and Politics

The link between media ownership, economy and politics is inevitable, apparent and strong. The three are like the *trinity* in the studies of mass media. This link is seen as a dangerous liaison compared to other entities in many other industries due to the nature of the media organization being part of the cultural industries as discussed earlier. Famous Media historian, Curran (2000b), pointed out that the power of economic has taken over the ownership of media corporations. In his earlier work (Curran, 1977) where he did a comprehensive analysis on the development of the press in the Britain over a period of 175 years from 1800, he posited that capitalism has brought about control of the press. Contrary to what some believe, he asserted that the shift of ownership and control from the government to the private corporations through commercial market forces should not be equated with a liberation of control. Instead, he observed that:

> The period around the middle of the nineteenth century, it will be argued, did not
> inaugurate a new era of press freedom and liberty: it introduced a new system of
> press censorship more effective than anything that had gone before. Market forces
> succeeded where legal repression had failed in establishing the press as an
> instrument of social control, with lasting consequences for the development of
> modern British society. (Curran, 1977, p. 198)

Curran's analysis showed that a shift of control over the press has occurred from the state legal repression to the commercial market forces, which was brought about through capitalism. The market forces now establish the press as a tool of social control – a role undertaken by the state earlier, prior to the *liberation*. This false liberation is, perhaps, similar to one being released from a lion's den only to be put into a tiger's den. Curran's analysis of capitalism and press

control is based on the proposition that the state lacks the apparatus and resources to regulate

production of the press, hence the takeover by private business entities. He also refers to this

takeover as the "breakdown of the control system" of the British Press (Curran, 1977, p. 198).

His analysis of this breakdown is further crystallized some two decades later by Golding and

Murdock (2000) when they pointed out that the takeover by the private business entities is a

manifestation of a push for privatization by the state. They asserted that this has caused the

media to be increasingly commandeered by corporate interests. They argued that:

> Media production, in turn, has been increasingly commandeered by large
>
> corporations and moulded to their interests and strategies. This has long been the
>
> case, but the reach of corporate rationales has been considerably extended in
>
> recent years by the push towards 'privatization' and the declining vitality of
>
> publicly funded cultural institutions. (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 74)

However, this commandeering attitude of the corporations over the press is a dialectical

relationship between the corporations, as the private profit-oriented media enterprises, and the

government. Curran (2000b) noted that the two are interchangeably relying on each other for

profit:

> Media organizations are also in general more profit-oriented, have extensive
>
> economic interests and have more to gain from business-friendly government. In
>
> turn, governments are now more in need of government-friendly media because
>
> they have to woo and retain mass electoral support. (p. 123)

Such interdependent relationship between the media organizations and the government is

very apparent in the context of the Malaysian media where the relationship between the two is a

cordially and business-friendly one. The government depends and uses the media to garner

electoral support. The media organizations, on the other hand, ensure that they do not put a toe

beyond the permissible boundary by publishing news that might *threaten national security* lest

they lose their operating licenses issued by the government (Zaharom, 1998). Indeed, as a

Malaysian media history researcher (Safar, 1996) has pointed out, there are two forms of control

over the Malaysian mainstream newspapers – by "the government through the existing

legislations and politics, through the leaders of the political parties" (p. 6). Safar has conducted a

comprehensive 200-year historical study tracing the development of the print media in Malaysia

since 1806. The first newspaper in the country, *The Prince of Wales Island Gazette,* was believed

to be published in 1806.

Therefore, big conglomerates have taken over control of the press from the government.

They also have diverse interests in different businesses and the question of using the media to

fulfill their interests and strategies is ever mounting. More analysis is warranted than ever before

on the media industry, particularly on the concentrated media ownership issues. I have identified

two major lenses of analysis being carried out on concentrated media ownership. The first is

through the perspective of political economy in the field of mass communication study,

particularly the critical political economy perspective. Most studies done through this perspective

are from the British tradition (Curran, 2000b, 2000c; Golding & Murdock, 2000; Murdock,

1982). This tradition is essentially concerned with not only on how the trend of concentrated

media ownership, particularly the press, affects the presentation of media content but the power

interplay between ownership, economics of press ownership, and politics in society. Another

equally important issue of concern is the control of the press, which is feared to affect freedom of

speech and the governing of political democracy. In other words, this tradition is concerned with

the reign of capitalism that is seen to have a great potential of controlling and commandeering the press.

The Political Economy Theory of Media Ownership

The political economy theorists of the media see the power of the mass media from different angles. They believe that the media is capable of producing material and cultural inequalities (Golding & Murdock, 2000). This is a shift from the cultural studies perspective that is more concerned with focusing on the construction and consumption of media meanings. According to Golding and Murdock (2000), the power of the media is more than about its implication on the construction of meaning; it is about the interplay between the symbolic and the economic aspects of public communications tools. It creates inequality when access to the media is limited by several factors. For example, the concentration of media ownership creates the economic power of producing a wider range of products across the political and market boundaries. This creates an infinite need for machineries to access the products, such as a dish for satellite reception, a computer and so forth. On the other hand, consumers will have a finite capacity to have access to such machineries when it has created a cultural consumption that "required consumers to purchase the appropriate machine (or hardware) as a condition of access" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 75). This causes a further division of wealth among the already unequal distribution and possession of wealth by the populace. Therefore, Golding and Murdock (2000) saw the growth of media as a potential for the extension of corporation needs. The media is now owned by the private companies who continue to create needs beyond the affordability of more of the populace.

Several communication theorists in Britain have debated the political economy theory of media ownership. Golding and Murdock (2000) argued for the importance of analyzing media

ownership from the perspective of a critical political economy perspective. This lens is more

concerned about the:

> Interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public
>
> communications. It sets out to show how different ways of financing and
>
> organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of
>
> discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to
>
> them. (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 70).

They were of the view that simply analyzing the effects of media ownership from a

cultural studies perspective, by looking at how the media text is being construed and its

implication is not sufficient. Instead, they argue that a larger picture of the complex political and

economical implications of press ownership should be drawn. This complexity, they believed,

needs a critical political economy lens to show "the interplay between the symbolic and

economic dimensions of public communications" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 70). Their

argument is a shift from the cultural discourse of communications studies that has traditionally

focused on the behaviorist effects of the mass media.

Golding and Murdock (2000) have outlined four ways how the critical political economy

is different from the mainstream economics and why it is important to analyze concentrated

media ownership from the lens of a critical political economy. First, they noted that the

difference lies in the holistic aspect of critical political economy. Mainstream economics sees the

economy purely as a separate and specialized domain. Critical political economy, on the other

hand:

> Is interested in the interplay between economic organization and political, social
>
> and cultural life. In the case of the cultural industries we are particularly

concerned to trace the impact of economic dynamics on the range and diversity of public cultural expression and its availability to different social groups. These concerns are not, of course, exclusive to critical commentators, they are equally central to political economists on the Right. The difference lies in the starting points of the analyses. (p. 73)

The mainstream economics "focus on exchange in the market as consumers choose between competing commodities on the basis of the utility and satisfaction they offer" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 73). They questioned the notion of this seemingly open market for the consumers by offering more choices based on Adam Smith's free competition theory. Instead, they believe in Marxist's theory of "shifting attention from the realm of exchange to the organization of property and production, both within the cultural industries and more generally" (p. 73). They asserted that critical political economy is more holistic in that it does not deny that cultural producers and consumers have the liberty of continually making choices, but that they do so within a wider structure. They pointed out further that the critical political economy perspective:

Starts with sets of social relations and the play of power. It is interested in seeing how the making and taking of meaning is shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations….What marks critical political economy is that it always goes beyond situated action to show how particular micro-contexts are shaped by general economic dynamics and the wider structures they sustain. It is especially interested in the ways that communicative activity is structured by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources. (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 73)

Critical political economy perspective is more concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprises and public intervention. Contrary to the fallacy that concentrated media ownership grants the media proprietors the power to always do whatever they wish, Golding and Murdock (2000) observed that this is not always true. This is because there are some contradictions in the system. They opined that the media owners, advertisers and the political personnel also "operate within structures that constrain as well as facilitate, imposing limits as well as offering opportunities" (p. 74). Elsewhere and earlier, Murdock (1982), has laid down the structural constraints in the media industry. He distinguished two ways that owners of the media could interfere. One is allocative control and the other is operational interference. Allocative control refers to decisions such as regarding the overall policy-formulations, editorial lines, allocating resources, and product investments. He posited that the operational control is of a higher level of intervention because it is about the effective use of allocated resources and how they could be used to pursue policy decisions that have already been dictated. He argued that in most cases, the managerial elites in the media have operational control. Thus, the elites are very much the operational executives of the media organizations who carry out mandates from the owners.

The second difference between critical political economy and mainstream economics is in terms of historical. The former is more concerned with analyzing the evolving history of the press including the growth of the media, the extension of corporate reach, commodification of media, and the changing role of state and government interference.

The third way critical political economy is different with respect to mainstream economics is its view on the appropriate scope of public intervention on the equality of the media's market systems. It does not believe in giving market forces an unlimited freedom of

operation. It believes that the deficiencies in the unequal market system can only be rectified by public intervention. However, it does not believe in any form of public intervention except for those that contribute to the creation of a "good society to the extension of citizenship rights" (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 76).

The fourth difference is similar to the notion of social justice in adult education. Critical political economy questions the basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good. Therefore, it believes in the creation of a media ownership structure that could ensure widest possible range of access to information, avenue for voicing dissenting feeling and debate for making better-informed choices.

The economics of media ownership is not seen in its traditional sense whereby the liberation of the market opens up opportunities for control. It is concerned with the interplay of power that causes all the inequalities in the system. This is an appealing aspect of the theory. However, it is also quite a utopian idea in that it agrees on a public intervention, but not the forms. Is there ever going to be a form of public intervention that is deemed less controlling when there is an omnipresence of power play? Nevertheless, political economy is a lens that questions a more deeply rooted super structure and its implication on media, media owners and society.

Media Economics, Media Ownership and Power

The other perspective that deliberates media ownership is the theory of media economics. It is a theory that is enjoying its vogue largely in North America since the early 1980s. The term media economics is widely known and used in the literature published in the United States. The only journal dedicated to the discourse of media economics to date began its publication in 1988. This theory looks at concentrated media ownership mainly from the perspective of economics

and, how the economics of concentrated media ownership affects the performance of the media. The political aspect of concentrated media ownership is less of a focus.

Needless to say, there is a huge connection between concentrated media ownership and the economy. Therefore, the emergence of the study of media economics is of no surprise. Most writers have defined media economics as essentially dealing with the economic aspect of media production, the allocation of resources, how media operators meet the economical demands of the society, and how these economic activities influence the production of media goods and services (Albarran, 2002; Alexander et al., 1998; Compaine, 1979b; Picard, 1989). The term media economics is more commonly used in North America although a survey of the literature on press ownership has also shown that it takes up the lens of liberal economics of the British press as described by Curran (2000b). Although it is a relatively new concept compared to the political economy perspective, discourses about media ownership actually begun as early as 1951 (Picard, 1989). Nevertheless, Picard's (1989) definition is worth mentioning as it is more comprehensive:

> Media economics is concerned with how media operators meet the informational and entertainment wants and needs of audiences, advertisers, and society with available resources. It deals with the factors influencing production of media goods and services and the allocation of those products for consumption. (p. 7)

Picard also stated that the "media serve the wants and needs of four distinct groups" (p. 9). They are: 1) media owners (individuals or stockholders who own media outlets); 2) audiences; 3) advertisers; and, 4) media employees. As there are four players in the study of media economics, the questions of demand and supply in the media industry, and the effect economics has on the production of media goods and services are of paramount concern and in

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need of more research to further develop the theory of media economics. Lacy and Niebauer's

(1995) content analysis on 48 articles on media economics from *The Journal of Media*

Economics and 28 articles from *Journalism Quarterly* published between 1988 and 1992

confirms this. They believed that it is imperative to integrate models and theories of media

content creation to move economics toward the center of studies of mass communication. They

also found that most of the articles analyzed use theory as a basis for empirical research and only

a few actually developed theory. They conclude that the theory of media economics needs to be

developed further.

The connection between economics and media ownership is not a new phenomenon.

Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) had this to say about the blatant power of media ownership from

the perspective of media economics:

> The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly: as its
>
> violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no
>
> longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an
>
> ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call
>
> themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt
>
> about the social utility of the finished products is removed. (p. 349)

The marriage between the theory of media economics and media ownership is a rather

natural union. An analysis of the history of media has shown that the control of the media,

especially news press, has shifted from the state to the forces of the economics as a result of

capitalism (Curran, 2000b). A critique on media economics can be found in Curran's reiteration

about the liberal watchdog argument that the release of press control by the state through the

liberation of economy has failed to take into account the economic power of stakeholders in the

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economy. He asserted that the control over the media is now increased to two – the state and the

private:

> The watchdog argument so appears time-worn in another way. Traditionally,
>
> liberal theory holds that government is the sole object of press vigilance 'seat' of
>
> power and main source of oppression. However, this traditional view takes no
>
> account of the exercise of economic authority by shareholders. A revised
>
> conception is needed in which the media are conceived as being a check on *both*
>
> public and private power. (p. 122)

Discourse on media ownership from the perspective of economic power of stakeholders

in the economy is one of the greatest concerns for the theory of media economic. A Media

economic theorist, Bagdikian (1992; 2000), has pointed out how merely looking at the quantity

of mass media in the market is a deficient view of the economic implications of concentration of

media ownership. Instead, he observed that media biases could surface out of such concentrated

form of ownership when, although corporations "claim to permit great freedom" for their editors

and producers, in fact, the media businesses "seldom refrain from using their power over public

information" (Bagdikian, 1992, p. xxxi).

Media Studies in Malaysia

While there is countless research on media and ownership in the Media studies, research

in Malaysia is generally still in its infancy stage. Its infancy stage is similar to the United States'

media research in the 1940s and 1950s which was more concerned with the effects of the media,

especially film and television, in a very narrow and, behaviorist sense, on the audience

(Zaharom, 2002). Media research is mainly a source of concern especially for the theorist of

media democracy, with a political economy flavor. For example, see the work of Zaharom

(2002; 2000), Zaharom and Mustafa (Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998), Wang (1998), and Loh and Mustafa (Loh & Mustafa, 1996) and Mohd. Safar (1996). This influence of political economy perspective is quite expected given the fact that except for Loh, who is a political scientist, most of them are media researchers trained under the British tradition especially in the 1980s. The following section provides an overview of the media practice in Malaysia, particularly the emergence of the government-controlled media ownership and its development to the present state.

Media Ownership in Malaysia

The media in Malaysia is inextricably linked to the government through partisan political involvement in parliamentary politics (Cheong, 1993; Gomez, 1990, 1994; Mustafa, 2003a; Wang, 1998; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). This form of linkage to the government mirrors that of the British press which has traditionally come under direct government control (Curran, 1977). This is not surprising considering the fact that Malaysia was colonized by the British for over a hundred years, ending in 1957. Further, some studies of the history of Malaysian media confirm this. The main literature that discussed the history of media ownership in Malaysia can be narrowed down to three authors. The first is that by Mustafa (2002; 2003a), the second is Mohd. Safar (1996), and the third is Loh (Loh & Mustafa, 1996).

The history of media ownership in Malaysia, particularly that of a state-controlled ownership, can be traced to the British colonial period (Mohd. Safar, 1996; Mustafa, 2002, 2003a). An historical analysis of the development of media in Malaysia revealed that control on the media by the state began in a rather unregulated way. It started with the first English language daily published on 1st of 1806 in Penang, an island city north of Malaysia (Mohd. Safar, 1996; Mustafa, 2003a). Mustafa pointed out that the daily, *Government Gazette,* known

later as the *Prince of Wales Island Gazette* (PWIG), was issued a license, although no law stipulated such a requirement then. Indeed, Mustafa observed that there was no existing law in the Straits Settlements governing the issuance of licenses for newspaper then. It was reported that the owner of PWIG, A. B. Bone, even requested that *each* issue of the PWIG be censored by the government prior to publication, a practice of the press during that period (Mohd. Safar, 1996).

Mustafa (2002; 2003a) concluded that the licensure and request for censorship by PWIG ushered an era of intimate relationship between the state and the press in Malaysia. A non-Malaysian media researcher who is familiar with issues of the press in the South East Asian country and who has spent time researching and teaching in Malaysia, Lent (1982), found that the early Malaysian newspapers were commonly subsidized. Indeed, this feature of subsidy is not new in the history of the press, especially in Britain. Curran (1977) revealed that the press in the early days were subsidized by the government in the form of receiving subsidies in exchange for printing government announcements. Although most media researchers see this as a form of control by the state, this should not to be taken as a surprise in the present day practice of newspapers that sells advertising space in exchange for revenue. The advertisers have taken over the government's role in giving subsidy in the form of advertising revenue to the news organizations.

The consolidation of control over the press was further amplified when more Chinese and Tamil newspapers flourished as a result of the migration of Chinese and Indians, who were brought in by the colonial government to work in the tin mining and rubber plantation sectors (Mustafa, 2003a). From Mustafa's account of the history of press control in Malaysia, four reasons are identified as the factors that caused the amplification of state control over the press.

The first is migration, which was mentioned earlier. The second is the political developments in China, where the anti-Manchu republican movement rose in the late 19th and early 20th century. Anti-Manchu and pro-Manchu Chinese newspapers emerged, leading to greater state awareness and control over the press. The third reason is the nationalist movement in Malaya that rose as a protest to the British proposal of the Malayan Union, a new form of federal government that granted automatic citizenship to all. The last reason is the emergence of the communist movement during post World War II, which the British colonial government saw as a threat to its hegemony. Under the Emergency Rule to suppress the insurgency of the Communist Party of Malaya, the British enacted strict laws as one of its counter-insurgency measures. The first Sedition Ordinance 1948 and the Printing Presses Ordinance 1948 were enacted, and the influence of these laws is seen today, albeit in slightly different names and nature.

The history of the government becoming a direct stakeholder in the press system in Malaysia occurred in the post-independence era from 1961. This happened when the Malaysian government took over an influential newspaper through a political party (Mustafa, 2003a). This was a critical period that impacted the present structure of media ownership in Malaysia today. The takeover involved a Malay newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*, which saw a struggle between its employees, on the one hand, and the ruling *United Malays National Organization* (UMNO) party, on the other, over the issue of press freedom. UMNO is the main ruling government of Malaysia since independence that governs the country under the banner of a coalition party, National Front or, *Barisan Nasional* (BN). The coalition consists of multi-ethnic based political parties. The takeover was further consolidated in 1972 through the takeover of New Straits Times Press (NSTP) by Pernas, a national oil company. This ownership exercise was completed in 1984 with the selling of Singapore-based Straits Times under the National Economic Plan that

some touted as a plan for the creation of rich Malay elites, thus widening the poverty and class gap among the Malays.

The former Prime Minister Mahathir's regime saw the peak of media control by the government (Loh & Mustafa, 1996). Mahathir, who stepped down on October 31, 2003 after being at the helm for over 22 years, has caused further erosion of press freedom (Mustafa, 2003a; Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 2002). This is an era that had seen the highest number of media licenses, both local and foreign, suspended. It also had seen an era of financial scandals and political clampdown, resulting in a massive operational shutdown and temporary suspension of printing licenses of three major local national dailies (Mustafa, 2003a).

All these ensuing crises created an acrimonious relationship between the Malaysian judiciary and the government, resulted in the sacking of a judge in the highest judiciary court. There was interference and no freedom of speech even in the judiciary system. The control of ownership is already compounded by the fact that no foreign ownership of Malaysian press has been allowed since 1972. The Executive also has a firmer grip over the judiciary (Mustafa, 2003a). Such control results in a Malaysian media that is offering "more of the same" (Mustafa, 2003a, p. 11). Although technological advancement and a seemingly liberation of laws regulating the media have resulted in more choices for media and products, it is seen as a "regulated deregulation" trend of liberalization of the Malaysian media (Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998, p. 15). Zaharom and Mustafa pointed out that:

> This supposed liberalisation has not really resulted in a loosening of government
> control over the media, contrary to the initial beliefs of many. The reverse in fact
> has happened. As we have tried to indicate, over the past decade, the main forms

of control over the media – legal, political and economic – have certainly been

tightened. (p. 15)

Therefore, the deregulated industry is actually being regulated by the government through

the various laws enacted to control the operation of media organizations. Zaharom and Mustafa

(1998) reiterated that this *liberalization* is a result of the Malaysian privatization policy that, in

turn, has caused greater commercialization of the media, and hence resulting in more media

being offered. This privatization trend, again, mirrors the scenario of British privatization as a

form of control as described by Curran (2000b). The *liberalization* in the Mahathir regime is also

resulting in a proliferation of more Internet-based alternatives as an avenue for voicing

dissenting opinions, and they have not come under the government's censorship axe. However,

Zaharom (2002) reminded that this *freedom* "needs to be seen within the context of the regime

not wishing to discourage foreign investors from investing in the much-touted Malaysian

Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC)" (Zaharom, 2002, p. 137). MSC is the Malaysian version of

the U.S.'s Silicon Valley.

In fact, Malaysian Internet-based media is the only source of information that is not

governed and does not come under the purview of tight regulations by Malaysian government.

This is because the Multimedia Super Corridor's Bill of Guarantee, which was created to

produce a conducive investment environment in the MSC, stipulates that Malaysia will not

censor the Internet. The Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 contains a "no censorship"

clause under its Section 3 [3]. This law is considered radical in the context of the over 42 laws

governing the traditional mass media (non-Internet based) in Malaysia (Gunaratne, 2000; Mohd.

Safar, Asiah, & Gunaratne, 2000). However, as Zaharom (2002) has pointed out, this does not in

any way indicate a freer press because the law has to be enacted in such a way if Malaysia

wanted to entice investors to MSC. In fact, the enactment of the seemingly radical and liberal

law is not a sincere move to free the press. Instead, the "no censorship" clause has to be included

in the new law in order to entice investors and ensure that Mahathir's brainchild, the mega MSC

project will succeed. Nevertheless, this "bane" of MSC has become a boon to Internet-based

media operators, particularly the alternative media, who saw this "loop hole" of the law as a

means to start a web-based newspaper which they otherwise would not be able to. This is

because it is of common knowledge that it is almost impossible for anyone to obtain a license to

operate any alternative media under the tightly regulated media industry. Although the web-

based alternative media could be set up because of the "no censorship" clause, the fact remains

that it cannot totally escape the government's slew of laws at its disposal, by invoking the some

42 laws governing the mass media. Among the powerful and repressive laws are the Official

Secrets Act and the Internal Security Act, which could be used to clamp down dissenting voices.

The recent ranking for press freedom in Malaysia by Freedom House (Gunaratne, 2000) is a case

in point about the artificial liberation of the mass media. The ranking does not show any

improvement despite the so-called liberation of the "no censorship" clause in The

Communication and Multimedia Act 1998, which came into force on April 1, 1999. It was

reported that the media ranking agency, Freedom House, has notched up Malaysia's press

restriction score by five point to 66 in its January 1999 survey (Gunaratne, 2000). The same

report worsened the score of repressive action on broadcast media from zero to three, where the

maximum is five. Further, political pressures and controls on print media content increased from

13 to the maximum of 15. In fact, it has placed Malaysian press in the "not free" category based

on the political pressure and legal constraints on media content (Sussman, 1998). Wang (1998)

reiterated that, before Malaysians could even hope for access to information that is not

adulterated by the ruling government, "laws that give an enormous amount of power to the dominant ruling elite would have to be amended or in some cases removed altogether" (p. 80).

In fact, Malaysian mainstream media are being used to maintain the hegemony of the ruling government as shown in a major political event some years ago. The event saw the hegemony of Mahathir's coalition party, BN, was put to a test when he sacked his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim on 2 September 1998 over the allegation of sexual misconduct (Mustafa, 2002). The dismissal, seen by many as a political conspiracy, mobilized great anti-Anwar protest and demonstration, only to be clamped down by Mahathir again. This was done by using the press, especially with the sacking of two editors-in-chief of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*. They were known to be closely aligned to Anwar and had been handpicked by Anwar for their appointments to the positions.

Another "highlight" of the control over the Malaysian media also occurred during Mahathir's tenure as a Prime Minister. It was also a period when the government's hegemony was challenged. The control was exercised through what was infamously known as *Operasi Lalang* or literally means *Lalang* operation. *Lalang* is the name of a common weed that can grow up to about three feet high. It is a stubborn weed that is a nuisance to rubber trees and rubber planters who have to use paraquat to destroy them. Paraquat is also commonly used as a suicide poison by those from the lower income group. *Operasi Lalang* was launched between October 27 and November 27, 1987 (Mohd. Safar, 1996). A total of 106 people were arrested and four newspapers were banned from October 28, 1987 for publishing news that threatened national security and public peace. They were only allowed to resume their publications at the end of March the following year after appeals were made. The four newspapers were one English daily,

The Star, one English weekly, *The Sunday Star,* one Malay daily, *Watan,* and one Chinese daily, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*.

Indeed legal control is one of the most apparent features of the media ownership in Malaysia. According to Zaharom (1994), the introduction of the Printing Presses and Publications Act in 1984 and its 1987 amendments created a tightly regulated media industry in Malaysia. Elsewhere and earlier, Zaharom's (1991) analysis showed that the number of titles of local newspapers, magazines, and journals in circulation increased by 80 percent from 52 to 102. He pointed out further that the increase was between 1981 and 1985 alone. Zaharom (1994) said, "Indeed, going by crude quantitative indicators, it would appear that Malaysians are currently spoilt for choice, being well served by the media" (p. 182). However, he cautioned that while the figures were impressive, they camouflage some important facts especially "those regarding concentration of ownership, elements of legal, political, and economic control, and their implications for newspaper content and choices" (p. 182). He pointed out further that all the four national-language dailies, *Berita Harian, Harian Metro, Utusan Malaysia,* and *Utusan Melayu*, are published by just two local media giants. Furthermore, the two media conglomerates also published two influential weeklies, *Berita Mingguan* and *Mingguan Malaysia*.

The relationship between politics and concentration of media ownership is a mirror of the concentration of wealth of Malaysian society. Local political economists, Gomez and Jomo (1999) have theorized that political patronage influences the accumulation and concentration of wealth in Malaysia. Their theory is a result of their analysis on the impact of party politics and economic development, and how this, in turn, affects the relationship between politics and business in Malaysia.

As a conclusion, the present state of media ownership in Malaysia is essentially a government-controlled and government-owned one. As Mohd. Safar (1996) has pointed out, the present form of press ownership in Malaysia is subject to two rigorous controls – laws and politics which is exercised through leaders of the political parties. The Malaysian author has conducted research on the development of the press system in Malaysia covering a period of almost 200 years. The year 1806, when the first newspaper was published in Malaysia, was taken as a departure point of his study. Tracing Malaysian press system, Mohd Safar noted that the British left behind its legacy of press system when it granted Malaysia independence in 1957. This included press laws that were enacted during the British rule period. Therefore, Mohd. Safar observes that laws formed during the British period became the main feature of press ownership during the early stages of post-independence era. This has now shifted to the present state of press ownership where investments of media organizations are in the hands of political parties' members or corporations that are close to the ruling political parties. However, Mohd Safar (1996) is quick to point out that the present state of press ownership by political parties is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia. In the 1920s, the Chinese *Kuomintang* political party had in fact owned press in the Straits Settlements and the Federation of Malay States. Straits Settlements is the name of the three regions in Malaya (the old name of Malaysia) where the present Penang and Malacca states are located; and Singapore which was part of Malaysia until 1965. The Federation of Malay States then consisted of the ten states in the present Peninsular Malaysia excluding Penang and Malacca.

Media Ownership, Organization and Power

I will now discuss the second body of literature - media ownership in relation to organization and power. The analysis primarily focuses on the power of organizational ownership from the perspective of organizational study and design.

Where there is an organization, there is an ownership. Organization is a living organism and is owned and run by humans who have specific reasons for setting it up. When there are humans, there will be interplays of power in the organization. In the case of concentrated media ownership, ownership is not only reduced to the hands of a few, but these very few are linked to other power in the system. Indeed, studying mass media, including media ownership, cannot possibly ignore the fact that mass media are the interdependent parts of a total social system (Hendrickson & Tankard, 1997). Hendrickson and Tankard likened the media organization as existing in an ecological system with subsystems and these subsystems are affecting each other.

According to Weber, the ownership of production determines the ownership of power. When this concept of power is applied to organizations, the owner of an organization has the power to decide what to produce and how it is to be produced. The employees of the organization are expected to take orders from the owner of the organization on how to produce. The media organization has a wide range of common feature with organization's way of production – they manufacture goods, too (Golding & Murdock, 2000). They described the goods produced by media organizations as "newspapers, advertisements, television programmes and feature films," which "play a pivotal role in organizing the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world" (p. 70). Regarding the control on media products and production, Murdock (1982) saw it as taking place through an operational intervention where an effective way of control over the allocated resources is utilized to ensure that dictated policies

from the owners are implemented. Other writers have noted how the production of goods in news organizations reflects Weber's notion of ownership and control over production (Switzer et al., 1999). They argued that the control over the production of news products demand conformity:

> The production process is characterized by a hierarchical system with clear lines of authority and procedures for rewarding and punishing employees. As cultural workers, journalists are guided by professional practices, customs, and code of conduct. News produced as a commodity is essentially ritualized news: News sources, news stories, and news events are predictable, repeatable, and in continuous production. (p. 32)

This form of continuous production eventually points to the fact that the performance of the organization is the ultimate objective, in this sense, financial and ideological gains.

The connection between ownership and production is perhaps stronger in press organization compared to many other types of organizations. This is because press organizations operate in a cultural industry (Goldsmiths Media Group, 2000; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972). Horkhemer and Adorno posited that, as a player in the cultural industry, the media influences society while being influenced by society at the same time. In other words, press organizations are capable of setting an agenda that influences society, creating the notion of the importance of certain topics or issues in the society; the society, in turn, reacts to the agenda, disagrees or agrees with the agenda, thus creating a new meaning to the agenda. Whatever the society's reaction is to the agenda, the agenda set has influenced the society by merely creating some reaction to it. Indeed, according to Hoijer (1992) and Corner (1996), media audience understandings are cued although they are not necessarily determined by the ways in which communications are encoded. Therefore, as one of the key players in the cultural industry,

owners of the press organizations have the power to dictate the culture of the organization. Switzer et al. (1999) described how this could be dictated: "News is constructed within a corporate culture that is not unlike the cultures of non-media corporations. It is selected with reference to a matrix of values, and it is packaged and distributed as a commodity" (p. 32). Therefore, the product of the media is packaged with cultural values according to the owners of the press organizations' desire. They can be choices over what kind of news to be published to influence and shape the discourse of the society, or even creating a dependence among consumers on certain popular culture products such as music, film or the Internet. To many media researchers, this can be an impediment to the active participation of citizens in a society's and country's decision-making processes.

Organizational Culture, Structure and Learning

From the perspective of the organizational culture, Alvesson and Deetz (1996) pointed out that organizations have the power to inculcate an accepted corporate culture or to hegemonize culture within the organization. On the meaning of culture in organization, one of the famous authors of organizational studies (Schein, 1992) has defined organizational culture as being:

> Concerned with certain values that a managers are trying to inculcate in their organizations. Also implied in this usage is the assumption that there are better or worse cultures, stronger or weaker cultures, and that the "right" kind of culture will influence how effective organizations are. (p. 3)
>
> Organizational cultures are created in part by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership is the creation, the management, and sometimes even the destruction of culture. (p. 5)

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However, contrary to what many may assume, Alvesson and Deetz (1996) asserted that organizations do not achieve corporate hegemonization by controlling the behavior and labor power of the employees. Instead, a higher form of control and new social condition is created when the "objects for management control are decreasingly labour power and behavior and increasingly the mindpower and subjectivities of employees" (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996, p. 192). Therefore, what is implied here is that hegemonization through the culture of the organization is not achieved by changing the behavior of employees, because what is changed can revert back to its old way. Instead, a more permanent way of control is achieved by having an absolute control over the mind or a complete mutation of the mind of employees so that they will be transformed to think alike at all times in resonant to the organization's culture and way of operation. After all, according to Schein (1992), organizational culture is concerned with "*structural stability* in the group" (p. 10) by ensuring that "certain things in groups are *shared* or *held in common*" (p. 8).

With concentrated press ownership, particularly in a government-controlled ownership, this hegemonized culture is further cemented and it serves as an ISA (Althusser, 1971) to ensure that journalists work within the boundaries of the hegemonized working culture. However, rather than an economically led press power, the hegemonized culture perpetuated in some countries, such as in Malaysia, is led more by the power of the "political elite" when the "political elite generally uses state power to develop a clientelist system of patronage and influence"(Curran, 2000b, p. 133). Therefore, the political elite, through their cronies who are the press owners, dictates what goes or does not go into print and journalists have little or almost no power of negotiation in some obvious cases. Or, the hegemonization process is achieved by inculcating the

notion that the press is to function as a tool for national development (Atkins, 2000, Lent, 1982) and dissenting voices will be seen as a threat to *national security*.

Press ownership is a form of unequal and yet systematic arrangement of power and a way of corporatizing the state (Clark & Dear, 1984). This form of power is a feature of a capitalist society and even in societies where there is non-government-controlled press ownership, such as in the USA, the press are controlled through legislation, for example the FTC (Sterling, 1979b). In Malaysia, the state is corporatized by owning the press through proxies, in the form of political cronies' ownership, thus unequal distribution of power exists even among the cronies. For the journalists' practice, this means they work for the state's latent interest in a corporatized state and under the obvious business ownership. Journalists struggle to work within the ethics of journalistic practice while trying to balance it with the corporatized state's journalistic practice. From the organizational theory and learning perspectives, journalists struggle to learn under press ownership while the organization strives to preserve its culture and to ensure that learning occur within the boundary set (Weick & Westley, 1996). Hendriks (1995) noted that media organizations are part of a system of organizations of the state, and any change the press organizations make would affect the structure of the system. Hence, there is an attempt to equilibrate power when each tries to *change* and adopt a certain *culture*.

Mintzberg's (1981) analysis of organization design is useful in discussing the structure of concentrated press ownership and power. He asserted that it is important that organizations have the right design in order to function effectively. He reiterated that:

> Like all phenomena from atoms to stars – the characteristics of organizations fall
>
> into natural clusters, or *configurations*. When these characteristics are mis-
>
> matched – when the wrong ones are put together – the organization does not

function effectively, does not achieve a natural harmony. If managers are to

design effective organizations, they need to pay attention to the fit. (pp. 103-104)

He identified five configurations or designs in terms of the structure and situation of

organization. Of the five designs that he articulated - simple structure, professional bureaucracy,

machine bureaucracy, divisionalized form, and adhocracy – the divisionalized form describes the

media organization best. The divisionalized form is:

Not so much an integrated organization as a set of rather independent entities

joined together by a loose administrative overlay.

Not a complete but a partial structure, superimposed on others….

Divisionalization *does not* amount to decentralization, although the terms are

often equated with each other. Decentralization is an expression of the dispersal

of decision-making power in an organization. Divisionalization refers to a

structure of semiautonomous market-based units. A divisionalized structure in

which the managers at the heads of these units retain the lion's share of the power

is far more centralized than many functional structures where large numbers of

specialists get involved in the making of important decisions. (p. 110)

This divisionalized design is a common structure of concentrated media organization,

especially in Malaysia. This is particularly so because concentrated media ownership structure is

rather *independent* and *loosely* joined together, and is superimposed on others through cross

ownership. This cross ownership creates *divisions* under the same owner to create market-based

units for profit. For example, a national oil company that owns a fleet of diversified companies,

including a press company, will have to have divisions of different companies where each of

them creates and serves a particular market. In the case of Malaysia, press organizations are

rather *independent entities* because they are business enterprises that are under the direct, and yet loose administrative power of the government through individuals owners who are aligned to the political parties that form the government. Although Mintzberg (1981) has said that divisionalization does not amount to decentralization, he also observed that in actual practice, divisionalization involved centralization. He gave the example that:

In fact, the most famous example of divisionalization involved centralization. Alfred Sloan adopted the divisionalized form at General Motors to reduce the power of the different units, to integrate the holding company William Durant had put together. That kind of centralization appears to have continued to the point where the automotive units in some ways seem closer to functional marketing departments than true divisions. (p. 110)

His description above fits a media organization's structure that reduces the power of the different units in order to integrate the holding company for more control over the production of the entire organization.

Mintzberg (1981) also pinpointed the problem of divisionalization which is exactly the *problem* that concentrated media organization structure seeks when he said that:

From a social perspective, the divisionalized form raises a number of serious issues. By enabling organizations to grow very large, it leads to the concentration of a great deal of economic power in a few hands. And there is some evidence that it sometimes encourages that power to be used irresponsibly. By emphasizing the measurement of performance as its means of control, a bias arises in favor of those divisional goals that can be operationalized, which usually means the economic ones, not the social ones. That the division is driven by such measures

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to be socially unresponsive would not seem inappropriate – for the business of the

corporation is, after all, economic. (p. 111)

Therefore, concentrated media ownership structure allows organizations to grow very

large when it causes ownership to fall into the hands of a few. In fact, Mintzberg's description of

divisionalized design shows that organizations have the prerogative power to choose a structure.

In the case of media organizations, this helps to enhance and strengthen media ownership when

they are able to grow and ownership is further reduced in the hands of a few. This happens as the

press has now become the subsidiaries of other industries (Curran & Seaton, 1997), and power is

compartmentalized under the subsidiaries or divisions. This compartmentalized power is then

linked and integrated to the holding company which paves way for more control in the

organization. Therefore, the choice of organizational design determines the power structure in

media organization and may well affect how learning activities are shaped and are being carried

out in an organization.

The Dimensions of Power in Organization

The discussions above portray the three forms of power that Lukes (1974) identified. The

first is a "one-dimensional view of power" where it focuses on "behavior in the making of

decisions on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests,* seen as

express policy preferences, revealed by political participation" (p. 15). In the context of press

ownership, press as organizations induce journalists to practice in a certain way under an

observable conflict of interests – the organizations are guarding its own interests of ownership

and ideology while the journalists work to uphold their journalistic ethics of practice. In other

words, press organizations are seen as "A" who could exert power over "B" (the journalists) to

do something that the journalists would otherwise not do under the ethics of journalistic practice.

The second form, the two-dimensional view of power, exercises coercion, authority, force, influence and manipulation (Lukes, 1974). This form of power is exerted when compliance for various authoritarian and suppressive press laws is demanded. Non-compliance would result in the retraction of operating license for the press organizations – a form of deprivation under Lukes' two-dimensional power concept. It also involves "non-decision-making" as press organizations are clearly aware of the apparent "decision" that has to be made or face the fatal repercussion.

Lukes' three-dimensional view of power asserts that there is a political agenda and the existence of latent conflict – "contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude" (pp. 24-25). While power may be seen as latent, Lukes also seems to see it as involving a constantly changing equilibrium because the concept of power is "essentially contested concept" (p. 26). This is similar to Hardy and Clegg's (1996) idea of power when they said that, "power does not involve taking sides, identifying who has more or less of it, as much as seeking to describe its strategic role – how it is used to translate people into characters who articulate an organizational morality play" (p. 632).

While Lukes' view of power is essentially rooted on the power over the subjects, Hindess (1996) argued that power has the capacity to create an equivocal relationship with that power as a right. In other words, he implied that the power itself does not have the absolute power to determine a relationship. He added that "this results from the understanding that political or sovereign power rests on the obligation of its subjects to obey, so that the holder of such power appears to have both the capacity and the right to call on their obedience" (p. 138). Therefore, he raised a good question about obedience by the subjects that serves as a form of hegemonization, because hegemonization cannot occur if there is no obedience.

Applying his thesis to the context of the media implies that journalists have the choice not to submit themselves to obey the organization's power. However, as Hendrickson and Tankard (1997) have noted, the mass media operate as interdependent parts in a total social system. Therefore, journalists cannot stand alone; hence, Hindess' view, although sounds empowering, is simplistic in this respect. This is especially so in the context of the Malaysian media which are operating under a surveillance and licensure by the government. Further, there is a limitation of power of employees within the sanctioned framework, as pointed out by Clegg (1979):

> The power that employees have is a capacity which is *only possible within the*
> *framework of hegemonic domination* [italics added] to which they would first
> have to submit – the possibility of an issue would have to be framed within the
> dominant theorizing power for it to be ruled admissible. (p. 148)

The question then goes back to the power of superstructure in the system as Hendrickson and Tankard (1997) have noted and other political economy theorists of press ownership (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Murdock, 1982) and media historian (Curran, 2000a, 2000b).

<center>Theories of Learning and Journalists' Learning in Practice</center>

The discussions above on the power of the press and subsequently, the power of ownership and production from the perspective of organizational studies, raise a question regarding its impact on journalists' learning in practice. Journalists learn in and through practice. They learn to work by carrying out their work like many other professionals perhaps, but this is more so for them. It is a profession that stresses the internship as an integral part of its training (Hilt & Lipschultz, 1996). A census on the enrollment for journalism education in the U.S. shows that more than 95 percent of journalism and broadcasting programs includes internships in

their curricula (Becker, 1990). This trend for the inclusion of internship as an integral component of mass communication training shows the importance of learning on the job, the need for an accumulation of experience by acclimatizing students to the profession's environment. This process of learning through internship does not stop at the point of actual entry into the profession when they are employed by media organizations after graduation. They continue to learn while carrying out their professional responsibilities, and learn the tricks of the trade while in the environment of concentrated media ownership.

Journalists' Learning in Practice

Many studies have been conducted on pre-entry professional journalism training at college level. However, little is known about journalists' learning. It is rather surprising that no empirical research could be found about journalists' learning at workplaces and under a practice that is very much steered by the structure of the organization through concentrated media ownership. Further, the workplace has always been a contested terrain and it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine that workplace learning is free from the implications of power plays in practice. Besides, adult learning is very much a struggle for knowledge and power (Cervero & Wilson, 2001).

I conducted a simple content analysis covering a period of 23 years from 1970 on a journal devoted to journalism education, *Journalism Educator*, which was subsequently renamed *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*. The journal is published in and for the U.S. market but it also discusses worldwide journalism education. I first reviewed all the titles in the journals between the said period to identify the themes on learning and critical theoretical framework. I then analyzed the contents of the identified articles.

I found that critical discourse about journalism education in relation to media ownership began to surface slowly only from the late 1980s and is more prominent in the late 1990s. Prior to the late 1980s, there was an almost absolute silence about the need to examine journalism education more critically to reflect the actual practice of journalism. Terms like critical study of press, critical communication theory, and critical-cultural studies began to make their appearances in the literature especially in the late 1990s. However, most of them are targeted for undergraduate and graduate journalism school. Despite the change in the discourse in 1990s, deliberation of journalists' learning is generally at the level of the adult learning theories espoused in the 1980s. Journalism education is only starting to discuss reflective thinking and learning (Wilkins, 1998), experiential learning, and critical incident (Carter, Kang, & Taggart, 1999). However, discourse about journalists' learning at workplaces is still nowhere in sight. Journalism education is relatively slow in catching up with utilizing adult learning theories compared to other areas of continuing professional education.

This trend makes one wonder if media researchers are *taking for granted* that journalists' learning at workplaces and in practice needs no further discourse as it is only natural to assume that their learning is shaped and steered by the organizations that employ them. Perhaps, we already know the answers and can safely predict the outcome. However, while this may sound logical and convincing to some, empirical studies about journalists' way of learning in and through practice would further inform the political economy aspect of media ownership. It also contributes to the discourse of the relationship between learning and ownership in general. Further, there has been an accusation of the apathy in the Malaysian press, contributing in part by the journalists who serve as mouthpieces of the government (Zaharom, 1998). He pinpointed the problem of structures and socialization of the media as the reason to the conforming practice of

journalists although some tried to be critical in their writings. Other authors have also speculated

about the socialization of media employees to conform to the practices of the corporations

(Curran & Seaton, 1997; Goldsmiths Media Group, 2000). This is essentially based on the notion

that the news media in a capitalist democracy fails to be objective. Goldsmiths Media Group

(2000), which consists of a few media researchers, has this to say about the socialization of

journalists:

> The news media, although a site of social conflict, relay the 'dominant ideology'
>
> of the ruling class. Economic concerns ('economic determinism'), to a greater or
>
> lesser extent, guide the production of news. Journalists and consumers, while
>
> believing that they act autonomously, are in fact socialized and guided by
>
> economic conditions and the dominant ideology of the ruling class.
>
> Independent journalism is also affected by the fact that news is a business and is
>
> widely influenced by economic considerations. (p. 22)

Curran and Seaton (1997) noted that media owners abuse their power by influencing the work of

their employees and the political process to their corporate gains.

All these are speculations without any evidence of empirical study. And if they are true,

the question then is, how does the socialization process actually happen among journalists? This

socialization process can only be understood by examining their learning process, how they

socialize in learning to become who they are and what they do. However, we know little about

how these journalists landed themselves in such a pathetic state of practice.

From the perspective of adult education, this research proposal helps to further develop

journalism education, particularly continuing journalism education, CJE. CJE is obviously a very

neglected field in journalism education and in adult education compared to many other

continuing professional education programs. This is perhaps due to the fact that journalism, especially that of the British, has traditionally been rather skeptical about the value of formal professional training (Ramanathan & Frith, 1988).

One of the early works that links the notion of media ownership to learning is that by Picard (1985). He questioned journalism training and stressed that journalism students must be "taught to think about journalism" (p. 30). He reiterated that journalism education should stop living with the myths. He identified three myths – the concept of citizen participation in democratic societies, the marketplace of ideas, and the notion of free press. Regarding the first myth, he said that:

Much of the philosophy and political and legal theory behind journalistic practice revolve around democratic institutions and the role of public participation in society, yet few undergraduates get an accurate portrayal of the issues of democratic philosophy and its development. They do not recognize that democratic governments regularly regulate the scope and nature of participation permitted to citizens, and they cling to the myth that American democratic rules operate unfettered and that it is the mass of people who really control society. (p. 30)

He debunked the second myth that marketplace is needed for ideas to operate. He stressed the need to understand "the relationship of the marketplace of ideas to the political economic concept of the marketplace of goods and service and the basic requirements for a marketplace of ideas to operate" (p. 30). He reiterated that the absence of competition and direct controls actually halts the operation of the marketplace. He discovered that there is a myth that the notion of press freedom is equivalent to an absence of governmental controls. The media

economics theorist opined that "nothing is said about and little is understood about, the extensive economic or social controls that also affect press freedom" (p. 31).

Other literature on journalism education has noted that media organizations are ever interested in producing "ideologically reliable" behavior among journalists who are subservient, and who toe the line of the company's way of working, thinking and making profit all the time (Lafky, 1993, p. 17). She rejected such "economically determined control" of journalists and called for a theory and practice of educating the "ideologically unreliable journalists" who will have the consciences of their workplaces (p. 17). The media owners know better about the importance of having ideologically reliable journalists in their organizations by exploiting knowledge management in human resource development. As teamworking, learning and working through a community of practice can be best managed within groups (Gourley, 2001), having ideologically reliable journalists is a way of ensuring effective knowledge management.

Based on the above arguments and suggestion for a *realistic journalistic journalism education*, I have analyzed some literature on adult learning theories, and how they relate to journalistic practice. I aim to show that learning activities among journalists in organizations are inevitably steered by media ownership. Three main learning theories are discussed, namely, the reflective practice, communities of practice and situated learning.

Reflective Practice

The proponent of the reflective practice is Schon who espoused it through his seminal work (1983) and subsequently in his other later works (1987; 1995). Schon, whose Ph.D. dissertation (Schon, 1954) was based on Dewey's thought, stressed the importance of experience in learning and practice. He coined different terms such as knowledge-in-practice (professional knowledge that are used in practice), reflection-in-action (reflection process while in the action

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or practice context), reflection-on-action (reflection process or a "post-mortem" done on actions or situations that have taken place). Reflection, to him, is an essential and efficient tool for practitioners as they often have tacit knowing that informs their practice but it poses difficulty in articulating. He described the use of tacit knowledge in reflection-in-action as:

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action. (p. 49)

Wagner and Sternberg's (1986) work on professional learning concurs with Schon's idea of tacit knowledge. They argued that tacit knowledge matters most to professional performance in real-world setting and that knowledge is usually not openly expressed or stated.

Schon (1983) opined further that professional practice and learning is not a process of problem solving. Instead, it is about making sense of uncertain situations. Schon (1983) also cited the different ways professionals learn through experience. Learning is seen very much as a conversation a professional makes with situations in practice. The conversations and situations culminate in the accumulation of experiences for reflection and the cycle repeats. Hence, the repertoire of experience is important to Schon.

Journalists learn to constantly reflect on what their practice entails while learning in practice when they encounter different uncertain situations in practice. The learning process of journalists is dynamic as they often learn about the subject they write from their informants,

press conference and reading. Each encounter at work or at the field is, thus, a tool for reflection and adds to the repertoire of practice. Schon's reflective practice, then, is highly applicable in the context of journalists' learning. However, we know little about how journalists use reflection in learning. Schon (1983) himself pointed out that "we know very little about the ways in which individuals develop the feel for media, language, and repertoire which shapes their reflection-in-action" and "this is an intriguing and promising topic for future research" (pp. 271-272). Almost two decades after Schon's observation, we still do not know how journalists actually reflect in practice.

However, like any other theory, Schon's (1983; 1987; 1995) reflective practice is not spared from criticism and is subject to empirical test. In a qualitative study that documented the use of reflection-in-action in problematic situations, it is found that experience alone is not the ultimate factor for learning to take place among experienced practitioners (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998). However, the same study conducted in two phases involving 52 novice and experienced educators confirmed that experience and reflection-in-action were helpful and versatile for novices in solving professional problems. It further indicated that "reflection-in-action has become an unconscious response for the reflective practitioners to problematic situations" (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998, p. 111).

Another critique on Schon's work is that by Cervero (2001) who pointed out that Schon did not locate his theory to any socio-political theory of events. Cervero felt that Schon's reflective practice has a void of consideration of the "asymmetrical social and political contexts in which learning takes place and to know whose interests reflective practice is serving' (p. 216). Despite these critiques, Schon's reflective practitioner is undoubtedly useful in providing a framework of learning for journalists in organization because it does acknowledge the

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importance of situated nature of adult cognition, and it locates learning and knowledge in experience and practice. However, as Cervero (2001) has pointed out, the lack of consideration on the context of practice and for whom the reflective practice is serving in practice or workplace remains an unanswered question. This same question can be posed to journalists' learning in concentrated media ownership environment, albeit in a different form: What kind of reflective practice do media owners want from journalists and for whom and why? The answer is to eventually serve the interest of the owners who need journalists to carry out the media organizations' objective. Therefore, journalists' learning can be construed as a way of fulfilling media organizations' economic purpose, and one that is embedded in a deep political-economy terrain with the purpose of setting its agenda.

Situated Learning

Another theory of learning, situated learning, has espoused learning as social activities (Lave, 1988, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Based on learning in the context of apprenticeship, and drawing from the principles of situated cognition, it focuses on the importance of the context where learning and practice take place simultaneously. The key principles of situated cognition are that learning is a social activity, it is contextualized, it takes place in realistic settings, and it is about the application of prior knowledge into the context of practice. Drawing from this notion, situated learning is about learning in social context and applying knowledge learned in context to practice. The main proponent of the theory of situated cognition is Lave (1988) who essentially sees learning as being a process that links one to the context of practice. In her later work (Lave, 1997), she added that situated learning is an enculturation process that takes place on the rich settings of practice which would help generate knowledge for learners. Further,

situated learning is to provide a venue for dilemma in practice, "opportunities *for* practice," and not "specification *of* practice" (Lave, 1997).

This notion of venue for practice and learning was addressed by Wilson (2001) in a somewhat different manner. He raised the question of the political aspect of places where adult education or learning takes place. His idea also centered mainly on the premise that the place where learning activities take place is not value-free. Wilson's (2001) work seems to come close in discussing learning in relation to ownership. However, he falls short of that discussion by looking at the place where adult learning activity occurs as exuding some form of credibility to the education program when it "plays a significant role in shaping continuing professional education" (p. 228). He sees place as the venue that exudes credibility to knowledge gained, and credibility in the marketing of learning programs. His idea does not see learning activities as being influenced or shaped by the ownership of the very organization, and the place where learning occurs. In other words, his notion of place for learning is about the political implications of place on the learning program. He did not address the relationship between ownership and learning. This notion of the political implication of place is rather common in the field of public relations where the venue chosen for any event is based on the power of the place in shaping the image and credibility of the event.

A critique on situated learning by Hansman and Wilson (2002) about experience is worth exploring here. They have pointed out that many adult education writers, in their eagerness to adopt situated learning theory, have failed to consider the underlying issues of power and knowledge in learning. Earlier, Wilson (1993) pointed out that although experience is adults' activities of learning, "adults no longer learn from experiences, they learn *in it, as they act in situations and are acted upon by situations* [italics added]" (p. 75). Therefore, learning takes

place *in* a context and environment of learning. In organization and learning in practice, this environment is produced and shaped by the owners who are not neutral. In other words, although situated cognition seems to speak about individual learning, it is not really about learning in isolation per se because situated learning is about learning within the fabric of social context. However, this is not quite the same as organizational ownership although it does create the context. To a certain extent, journalists' learning is very much embedded in the traditional apprenticeship form as espoused in the theory of situated learning. But, as pointed out by Hansman and Wilson (2002) the application of situated learning ought to take into consideration the context of power relations in learning, not just the context of practice and learning; journalists learn within a complicated web of power relations in organizations. Hence, the issue of organizational ownership cannot possibly be pushed aside in the discourses of learning in an organization.

Situated learning provides a contextualized place for learning under the power of ownership. However, this notion of the relationship between ownership and learning is different from the relationship between press ownership and learning. Ownership in situated learning is more of a traditional patriarchal and paternalistic relationship where employees or the interns learn with an almost unquestionable loyalty and submission to the owners' way of teaching and practice. Besides, the factor of economy in ownership is almost non-existent in situated learning as ownership is more of an individualized and localized one and a diverse vested interest is thus minimized and limited. This is very different from learning under concentrated media ownership where ownership spans across the political and marketplace boundaries creating a much wider interest. Therefore, learning in such organizations is also exposed to more power plays.

Communities of Practice

The profession of journalists involves a great deal of fieldwork, a term that qualitative researchers will use, and is known as assignments in journalistic terms. As many qualitative researchers agree, power relations are not absent when doing fieldwork (Babbie, 1998; Cole, 2001; Emerson, 2001). And the same is true during assignments for journalists. Journalists deal with informants and, compete with co-workers and counterparts from other press organizations in assignments. Most learning may also occur outside the premise of the organizations where journalists are attached. This, however, is considered as part of an informal on-the-job learning. Indeed, most learning at workplaces is informal (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). This form of learning is also a reflection of the way professionals learn through communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Theory of learning in a community of practice posits that learning takes place among practitioners in the same community of practice. According to this theory, there are four components that are necessary for participation in a community of practice and learning (Wenger, 1998). Wenger noted that in order for one to be accepted as a member of a community of practice, one learns through: Learning to claim a sense of belonging (community), learning as becoming (identity), learning as doing (practice), and learning as experience (meaning). In another work, it is noted that initial peripheral participation is important for professionals to increase their repertoire of experience and gradually engage in more complex tasks (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As Lave and Wenger have reiterated, it is through participation in actual setting and doing the things that experts do that novices acquire the knowledge and skills tasks. An observation made on the practice and education of journalism in China has pointed out that some compulsory journalism courses offered in college were meant to determine the nature of news - the product of media organizations (Chu, 1980). Further,

according to Chu, many leading figures in the field of Chinese journalism were purged during the political turmoils between 1966 and 1976, and the publication and circulation of their works were suspended. This chronicle of the practice of journalism in China and in many other countries by other authors (Atkins, 2002; Lent, 1971; Zaharom, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998) where the media are controlled by the government, show how unlikely organization ownership does not dictate, or at least indirectly sanctions certain types of learning to achieve the objective of production.

The notion of learning through participation as espoused in communities of practice has been addressed in some other adult learning literature. Billet (2001) argued that learning is shaped by the work practices in which individuals participate. He further reiterated that the quality of learning depends on the kinds of activities individuals engage in and guidance they can access. He stresses that:

> It follows that not only are learning and everyday thinking and acting irreducible, but what individuals learn is shaped by the kinds of activities in which individuals engage, and also the interactions with social partners and sources that are afforded by the workplace. (p. 20)

Therefore, interactions with social partners and sources at the workplace are important in shaping learning at workplaces. And often, the owners of the media organizations shape and provide these resources, interactions and context of learning for journalists.

Another author, Fenwick (2001b), argued that learning is a continuous intervention and exploration, and is embedded in the conduct and relationships among systems and sub-systems. Based on an enactivist theory, she is of the view that knowing resides in participative networks of action. She has therefore, challenged the experiential learning that essentially sees learning as

taking place in individuals' heads. She further challenged the notion of the concept of

autonomous individual mind of learning as a form of participation.

The connection between achieving the objective of production and politics of learning at

workplaces has been addressed by some other literature on workplace learning. These literatures

have begun to see workplaces as sites of struggle for learning where power struggle, particularly

socio-cultural struggle takes place (Fenwick, 2001a; Livingstone, 2001; Solomon, 2001;

Spencer, 2001). Their discourses are more closely related to the question of ownership, although

not in a precise manner. Fenwick (2001) opined that "workplace is a highly political space" and

"educators cannot ignore the economic pressures and sociological issues underpinning questions

of learning and education in work" (p. 5). This notion echoes some of the tenets in the media

economics study that looks at media ownership from an economic perspective, and not political.

This is because workplace learning within contemporary conditions, especially in a globalized

capitalism and knowledge-based economy, can no longer operate in a simplistic environment.

Issues about flexibility of labor, control of powerful corporations in the market, and survival of

corporations have all contributed to a more encompassing view of workplace learning. Learning

is no longer seen as purely a process of learning, but a process of learning within all these

embedded factors that inevitably make workplaces highly contested areas.

Other works on adult learning have also questioned the notion of power at workplaces

(Butler, 2001; Schied, 2001; Schied, Carter, & Howell, 2001; Wilson & Cervero, 2001). Butler

(2001) pointed out the power of work-related learning:

Learning for and about work is social, political, economic, and cultural. It is

public and private. It moves between and across zones of time and place. It

crosses so-called sectors of education (formal-informal, compulsory-

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postcompulsory, institutionalized-community). Work-related learning is

everywhere and, perhaps, also nowhere. (p. 62)

She also questioned the meaning of work-related learning, how the meaning is

constructed, by whom the learning is for and why. Schied et al. (2001), in their critique on

human resource development (HRD) learning program, accused HRD professionals "lack an

adequate analysis of the power inherent in their practice" (p. 48). They opined that: "One of the

characteristics of adult education is that it is usually voluntary, and learners select the

experiences and construct expectations for themselves. In contrast, adults involved in HRD

programs are often not there voluntarily" (p. 47).

Wilson and Cervero (2001) pointed out that a struggle for knowledge and power is

inextricably linked to the politics of learning at workplace. They reiterated that:

In order to see the fundamental politics of adult education practice, we have to see

the struggle for knowledge and power as a foundational constituent of that

practice, which consists of structuring and (re)structurable conditions that shape

our work. Foundational does not mean essentialist (in the manner reminiscent of

the generic adult learner) but conditional; that is, struggle structures, and is

structured by, practice. (p. 272)

They further questioned, "who gets to learn what, and who gets to decide who learns

what?" (p. 272). This question is relevant to the context of journalists' learning under the power

of media ownership. Journalists learn in and through practice and their context of practice is

often shaped by the owners (Curran & Seaton, 1997; Lafky, 1993; Zaharom, 1998). Therefore,

what they get to learn is very much determined by the owners who decide who gets to learn what

through practice when journalists are given certain assignments to perpetuate certain desired agenda. Indeed, as Fenwick (2001b) has pointed out, workplace structures do matter in learning.

A literature, probably the only one so far, that touches right the heart of this discussion of learning under the power of media ownership is that by Foley (2001). His very basic tenet of argument for learning at workplace is, what do people actually learn in work when the workplace is a site of changing political economy. What they are suggesting is that, the question is not about whether one is able to learn at workplace, instead, *what do people learn at workplaces*? He asserted that it is important to look deeply into the political economy of workplaces and the causes, processes and outcomes of the workplace change. Political economy of workplace, to him:

> Explores relationships between economics and politics. In both academic and
> public discussion of workplace change and learning the complexities of these
> links and determinations are rarely analyzed. In general, the "shaping context" of
> workplace change is treated in a simplistic and deterministic way. (p. 55)

Foley's view of the simplistic notion of shaping context of workplace has actually been addressed earlier by Wilson and Cervero (2001) when they questioned who benefits from adult education when the "everyday experiences of the workplace" will "revealingly illustrate the high-stakes position adult education plays in the distribution of knowledge, power, resources, and opportunities" (p. 272). This view is parallel to Foley's assertion that the wider context of workplace change from the perspective of political economy has been particularly neglected in the human resources and adult education literature, and even seems alien and abstract to practitioners. This, perhaps, answers my earlier ironic bewilderment of why no empirical study

of journalists' learning under the powerful concentrated media ownership can be found, when media researchers have always been concerned with the issues of media ownership.

Summary of the Chapter

I have analyzed four bodies of literature. The first was an examination of mass media from the perspective of its power, the global trend of concentrated press ownership, the inextricable relationships between power, press ownership and economics. The second body of literature examined was the power of the media, the phenomenon of global media ownership and the relationships between economics and politics, and media ownership. This included the political economy theory of media ownership (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Goldsmiths Media Group, 2000; Murdock, 1982) and the theory of media economics (Albarran, 2002; Albarran & Chan-Olmsted, 1998; Albarran & Dimmick, 1996; Alexander et al., 1998; Compaine, 1982). The third body of literature that I examined was the discourse about the conception of ownership and power in relation to organization. I analyzed the different discourses of power in relation to organization, particularly an organization's structure and organizational ownership. The last body of literature that I examined was the theories of learning in relation to journalists' learning in organizational setting. I have analyzed this by looking at the theory of reflective practice (Schon, 1983, 1987, 1995), situated learning (Hansman & Wilson, 2002; Lave, 1988, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wilson, 1993) and learning within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). I have attempted to show the interplays of power between concentrated ownership of media organization, organizational study and power, and their implications for learning among journalists.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how journalists in Malaysian learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities. This study assumed that journalists' learning is influenced by the structure of media ownership because ownership determines how goods are to be produced. Journalists are to learn how to produce these goods, or news, according to the demands of their organizational context. This is particularly so in the context of Malaysian media ownership where ownership is not only concentrated in the hands of a few, which mirrors the global phenomenon of media ownership, but is also controlled directly by the government through various legislative and political processes.

Design of the Study

A qualitative research design was selected for this study because qualitative research assumes that meaning is socially constructed through humans' interaction with their societies, experiences and lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research design enables a researcher to record detailed descriptions of situations, events, people and direct quotations from people about their experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts (Patton, 2002). The learning activities of journalists are very much imbedded through their experiences of carrying out their work and human interactions. Journalists learn by interacting with co-workers, counterparts from other media organizations, and informants of their stories. It is these experiences and interactions that journalists have gone through that my study was interested in documenting and analyzing. This

was done through I, as a researcher, documenting the experiences of the journalists' learning

processes. As Creswell (2003) has pointed out, qualitative research enables researcher to be

actively involved in the experiences of participants. Therefore, qualitative research design allows

for a direct and close examination of how journalists construct their ways of learning under the

influence of press ownership. This chapter describes the qualitative methodology used in this

study. Sections include the research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis

procedures, self-disclosure of the researcher and, ethics, validity and reliability.

<div align="center">Sample Selection</div>

The data for my study was collected from print journalists practicing in Malaysia from

the period between July and October 2003. The majority of my sample was journalists practicing

in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. Two of my respondents practiced in other major cities

in the country. The reason I purposefully chose Malaysia as the site for my study was because

the structure of media ownership in Malaysia presents an environment that shows strong traits of

concentrated ownership in terms of economic and political control. My study aimed to examine

how such a structure of ownership influences the ways Malaysian journalists learn. It also

attempted to investigate how learning among journalists is produced, their choices of learning

and their actions in organizations. Therefore, Malaysia provided a good site for me to understand

the problem of learning among journalists and answer my research questions. Creswell (2003)

pointed out that it is important to purposefully select sites of study in order to "help the

researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185). Purposeful sampling was

used for sample selection of this study (Merriam, 2001).

Sample selection was from among journalists practicing in big print media organizations

where the phenomenon of concentrated press ownership is visibly obvious. Such big media

organizations are also generally known as the mainstream media or press, those that are seen as echoing the voice of the government, if not acting as mouthpieces for the government.

The criteria for my sample selection were a result of my reviews of my two pilot studies. The main result of my reviews showed that my sample should not be new journalists because my study needs my respondents to relate their learning experiences. The data from my pilot studies also found that new journalists often relate the technical aspect of writing because it is the writing skill that they need to master before anything else. Journalists with substantial years of experience would have had experienced varied learning processes and the politics in practice. A repertoire of experience will enable them to reflect on their learning (Schon, 1983). Therefore, my first criterion of five years of working as journalists was a safe number of years for them to have experienced different learning processes.

As this study looked at how concentrated media ownership structures could affect journalists' learning, my second criterion was that they have experienced working in organizations that are owned under such a concentrated structure of ownership. Most of these organizations are the mainstream press and not the alternative press which has emerged recently due to the proliferation of the Internet and domestic political uprising (Mustafa, 2003a).

The third criterion was that my respondents are to represent all the main language newspapers that is, English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil. This represented a more balanced voice and the different types of ownership according to the political parties their organizations are affiliated to. This helped in showing how political power and press ownership is racially and hierarchically embedded, and how learning may even be affected by such power relationships. Each of the political parties in Malaysia, after all, represents each ethnic group.

My last criterion was that the journalists interviewed write on different topics. They each write on one or more subjects such as, politics, health, education, environment, business, entertainment and crime. This gave a wider representation of data as each subject of writing yielded different insights and enabled my study to analyze the effects of media ownership in the different areas of journalism.

A total of 15 journalists were interviewed. The total number of journalists interviewed was determined after a point of saturation, where further interviews yielded little new knowledge (Kvale, 1996) or no new information was obtained (Merriam, 2001). Merriam (2001) opined that the number of respondents to be interviewed is not as crucial as the potential of each respondent to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon.

My personal networking was the first major method that I used to select my sample. This is because not only do I know several journalists personally, but also I have worked with them whether as co-workers or counterparts. More referrals were obtained from my respondent through the snowball sampling method (Merriam, 1998). This was helpful especially to enable me to interview journalists whom I did not personally know. This led me to identify the eligible respondents for my study because Malaysian journalists often work in a community of rather tightly knitted practitioners.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Several methods were used to collect the data for this study. They were face-to-face interview, e-mail and telephone interview, archival research, and participant observation.

Face-to-face Interviews

All the 15 study participants were interviewed face-to-face. Face-to-face interviews is one of the three traditional methods – interviews, observations, and documents – for collecting

data in a qualitative research (Merriam, 2002b). An interview is also "one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to understand our fellow human beings" (Hodder, 1998, p. 47). It allows for a greater depth of probing on the topic being studied, and it is also often useful in gathering data for a study that is complex (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). My research topic is rather complex because I needed to examine the political economic relationship with how the structure of Malaysian press ownership affects learning among journalists. Further, Malaysian press ownership involves a lot of intricate political and legalistic matters. An interview also serves as a useful method in soliciting detailed descriptions because it is a friendly conversation (Spradley, 1979), and a structured and purposeful professional conversation (Kvale, 1996). It has served as a useful tool in my study for me to elicit thick descriptions of my respondents' learning experiences.

In order to obtain information about my respondents that would answer my research question, the critical incidents method of interviewing was used. The critical incidents method involves asking questions that require my respondents to recall an incident or incidents that they can remember vividly. Critical incident, a concept developed by Flanagan (1954), is defined as "any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the persons performing the act" (p. 327). Cranton (1994) noted that critical incident is a social science research technique that is used for obtaining qualitative data. She described the ways the technique is used:

> Individuals are asked to describe a specific event that is related to a certain topic
> or theme – one that stands out in their minds as being especially positive or
> negative. The researcher may ask for both positive and negative events. Usually, a
> set of questions in provided such as Who was involved in the incident? What were

the characteristics of the individuals involved? What made the incident positive or

negative? And What insights did you gain as a result of the incident? (p. 184)

Other authors, Wagner and Sternberg (1986), opined that the advantage of using the

critical incident technique is that "it is much more feasible than round the clock observation as a

method for identifying competencies especially important for a particular occupation" (p. 438).

For the purpose of this study, the use of the critical incident interview was to enable respondents

to recall incidents which occurred at workplaces that have impacted their practice and learning.

The ability of my respondents in providing critical incidents was important in my data

collection process. In order to enable my respondents to do so, prior to the interviews, each

respondent was sent a written brief description of the critical incident process and my study (See

Appendix A) via e-mail. The purpose of the description was to explain to my respondents in

laypersons' terms what the critical incident is. It prepared my respondents to think about the

critical incidents they have experienced and make some notes about them before our interview

appointments. This also paved the way for my study to obtain more specific and carefully

recalled learning experiences that my respondents have gone through. Most of my respondents

made some mental notes prior to our interview appointments, and one respondent made written

notes.

I used a semi-structured interview format (Merriam, 1998) accompanied by an interview

guide. Kvale (1996) notes that the qualitative research interview is essentially semi-structured.

This is because it is neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. Although

an interview guide charted the direction of the interview, it was interjected with suggested or

follow-up questions. The interview guide (Appendix B) that was used for this study consists of

specific questions related to experiences and learning that take place in the organization. This

can be learning activities that occurred while carrying out work responsibilities which are related to issues in the organization.

Due to the nature of my study which was rather political, all possible efforts were taken to conduct the interviews away from the office of my respondents because the office would increase the possibility of meeting someone that we know. However, due to the schedules of some of my respondents, a few of the interviews had to be conducted in their offices. They were conducted in a private reception room or meeting room which was away from the editorial room in their office premise, and where I did not have to show my presence in the editorial room. Besides the offices, the other venues of the interviews were my home, interviewee's home, hotel room and restaurant or coffee house.

Field Notes and Observation

Field notes were also made in order to reference non-verbal cues such as body language and gestures during particular segments of the interviews. I also kept a journal of personal observations, which recorded the hunches, from pre to post-interview interpretations and the surroundings where the interviews took place. I particularly made notes on the developments related to the media industry throughout my data collection and dissertation writing period. This was because my data collection was conducted before Malaysian fourth Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad, handed his duty to his successor, Abdullah Badawi. Mahathir stepped down on October 31, 2003 and Abdullah took office the following day. Therefore, a large portion of my field notes also included noting the political developments related to the change of premiership and the data of my interviews. This was important because Malaysian media are closely related to politics. For example, the sacking of the Group Editor-in-Chief of the *New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) (NSTP) Berhad*, Abdullah Ahmad. NSTP is a large media

conglomerate which is known to be owned by Abdullah Badawi's political party, *United Malays*

National Organization (UMNO).

On the other hand, observation is a bedrock source of human behavior. Fontana and Frey

(1998), in tracing the history of interview, revealed that participant observation goes hand in

hand with interviews. It helps the researcher to observe the doings of the researched. Participant

observation is also noted to "traditionally been its noninterventionism" and "observers neither

manipulate nor stimulate their subjects" (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 80). They argue that this is

because researchers, as observers, can neither manipulate nor stimulate, or deliberately provoke

their respondents.

However, although Adler and Adler's advice about the *neutrality of observation* may

sound logical, conducting participant observation was not a prudent method to be used in my

research project because of the sensitivity of the research topic. Observation, I believe, if not

conducted carefully, could cause bias in qualitative research. This is because the mere presence

of me in, for example, the editorial department of my respondent, may stir up some questions

which otherwise would not have surfaced without my presence there. Or, my conducting of

participant observation by following my respondent to his or her assignment would expose our

researcher-respondent relationship. Prudent answers would not guarantee that guesses and

rumors could be quashed. This might cause some discomfort to my respondent who might be less

open when being interviewed. Or, my respondent might not be telling the whole truth, and this

would affect the validity of my study. Therefore, in order not to expose our relationship that

could in turn affect the information that I could elicit from our interviews, I decided not to

conduct any participant observation. This has not, in any way, affected my understanding of my

respondents because I am a former journalist in Malaysia. Therefore, I am familiar with the

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environment Malaysian journalists work in. Instead, a more useful observation that helped me to understand my respondents was doing an archival research about my respondents, which is described in the section below.

Archival Research

The archival research was an important step in my data collection process. It also served as a vital initial data collection process. I conducted a substantial amount of archival research throughout my data collection and dissertation writing period. The main method for archival research that I used was examining my respondents' published writings and examining the main issues published in the major newspapers. Throughout my data collection period, besides subscribing daily to one of the main English newspapers, the *New Straits Times*, I also bought other newspapers on random days. On days when there was important news, I made notes on the different newspapers' coverage on the same issue. This helped me to gauge more the political climate and how each of the newspapers prioritize news related to the political party that owns the news organization, or highlighted some news or pictures of certain influential politician. For example, during the run-up to the stepping down of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on October 31, 2003, there was a very obvious pattern of how the *New Straits Times* used the picture of a politician, Najib Tun Razak, who was rumored to be promoted as the Deputy Prime Minister. The successor of Mahathir, Abdullah Badawi, has long been determined, but the biggest question on everyone's mind was who Abdullah would choose as his deputy. The *New Straits Times,* a paper that is controlled by the political party, *United Malay National Organisation* (UMNO), would have to ensure that they played up the right politician's picture and news. (At the point of writing the last part of this research project, Abdullah has named Najib Tun Razak as his deputy). Such archival analysis helped prepare me for a better

understanding and analysis when I connected the findings from my archival research to my respondents' description of critical incidents which revolved around such issues.

Newspapers are useful documents for conducting archival research in understanding matters related to my respondents' organization and my respondents' published works. Examining such documents was necessary because although I am a former journalist, and thus an insider, I might no longer be familiar with the current practice situation. For example, I might not know enough and be familiar with each of my respondents' organizational setting and context. Bartunek and Louis (1996) stressed that it is important that an insider understand the context of the research setting in order to be an effective researcher. Other authors also pointed out that it is important to understand the particular setting of a study because the context where the data are extracted from the researched are produced in their setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Therefore, important sources of information about the setting of my respondents' organizations that were collected before I started interviews with my respondents and throughout my active data collection period informed my study.

Archival research, besides helping me to understand the setting my respondents are in, was also useful in providing important insights about my respondents. Hodder (1998) noted that "material traces of behavior give an important and different insight from that provided by any number of questionnaires" (p. 113). He argued that "what people say" is often very different from "what people do" and written texts could provide a truer indication of meanings searched for (p. 113). He also reiterated that a full sociological analysis of a study cannot be restricted to interview data.

Besides the explanation above, there were several ways I conducted archival research in gaining knowledge and understanding about the settings and organizations my respondents are

from. I analyzed news cuttings written by my interviewees. The analysis of news cuttings written by my respondents helped me to assess the way the news articles were written. I also analyzed news regarding the marketing and public relations events organized by the organizations my respondents are attached to. I paid attention to news concerning the businesses my respondents' organizations were involved in. Business news concerning the press organizations where my respondents work were important observations because my research aimed to look at how press ownership can influence journalists' learning. Therefore, any business decision, such as takeover of other business entities by the press organization, has the potential of influencing journalists' learning.

The other form of archival research that I conducted was examining official annual company reports of my respondents' organizations. This enabled me to ascertain whom the company belongs to, the pattern of ownership such as what are the subsidiaries the company owns, and who is who in the company executive positions.

E-mail and Telephone Interview

The e-mail and telephone interview methods were used for follow-up purposes for four reasons. The first was for verification of data. The second reason was logistics where e-mail and telephone interview methods were practical alternatives to face-to-face follow-up interviews, especially for my respondents who were not based in Kuala Lumpur where I was. The third reason was to accommodate the erratic schedule of my respondents. It's a more practical alternative because most of the journalists had a rather erratic schedule where they might be recalled to work on their off days or their working day schedule is very unpredictable. Although they were very cooperative with fixing an appointment for a face-to-face interview, follow-up interviews through telephone or e-mail were a more practical and realistic option.

However, as much as possible, the use of e-mail and telephone interviews for follow-up purposes were avoided or minimized. They were used when my study participants were not available for a face-to-face follow-up interview and when I needed to verify a few minor details of the interviews that we had conducted earlier. Telephone interviews were tape recorded by using a telephone set that comes with a recording function on micro-cassette tape. They were then transcribed verbatim.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data (Merriam, 1998). This involved identifying emerging and recurrent themes and similarities of categories across all the verbatim-transcribed interview data. The transcripts were numbered sequentially by lines in order to provide ease for reference. I looked for recurrent and key issues, events or activities that would become categories that I would focus on. This was first done during the stage of interviewing as data analysis should be done concurrently with data collection (Merriam, 1998) and data analysis "is not sharply divided from the other activities in the [data analysis] process, such as collecting data or formulating research questions" (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Creswell also pointed out that data analysis "is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Therefore, I had been alert to emerging themes throughout all my interviews so that I could ask probing questions as soon as I detected the themes. This has enabled me to get better insights from the data. Such concurrent, continuous reflection and immediate detection of themes allowed me to also conduct triangulation with my respondents.

I continued analyzing and reflected on the data from my first transcribing task on the first interview. This was the second step of my data analysis. I noted the line numbers where data

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suggested themes or categories. I prepared three sets of papers. The first set was called "analysis" which also contained the pseudonym of the interviewee and the date the interview was conducted. This set of papers was divided into three columns. The first column on the left was for the line numbers, the middle column was for listing the categories or themes; and last column on the right was for listing cross-reference of similar categories or themes whenever I discovered them as I progressed with transcribing more interviews. I noted the pseudonym and line numbers for such cross-references in this column. The second set was entitled "probe questions" where I listed down the line numbers of the data where more probes needed to be carried out. The third set was "reflections" where I made notes on the particular interview.

The third step of the method was to read each transcript thoroughly after they had been transcribed in order to familiarize myself with each set of data. I created another set of A4 papers, "coding" with the name of the pseudonym only as the heading. I shall refer to this as the fourth set of papers. I also divided this set of papers into three columns, similar to the first set of papers. I noted the themes on this fourth set as I read the transcript thoroughly without referring to the themes that I had jotted down earlier in the first set of papers. I also marked the themes on the transcript with different colors.

The fourth step involved comparing the themes that I had noted down on the first and fourth set of papers. This served as an exercise to counter check the themes. The themes and subsets were further refined and noted on index cards. Each card has the pseudonym of one respondent and the cards were arranged in alphabetical order. Each of the themes was color-coded for easier process of locating them throughout the analysis process. Each theme was assigned a different color, with the corresponding line number(s) on the transcript in brackets.

The final step of the analysis involved writing up tentative categories by referring to the themes on the index cards and the first and fourth set of papers - "analysis' and "coding" respectively.

Pilot Study

I also conducted two pilot studies, one each in the United States and in Malaysia. I interviewed two journalists in each of the countries. The pilot studies were to help me develop my interview guide and confirm the usability of my interview guide. Being one who has been away from the journalism profession for some years, the pilot study conducted in Malaysia also helped me to have a fresh feel for the practice environment. It has also helped me to re-familiarize and re-establish my network of journalists, especially among my former co-workers. However, the data of my pilot studies was not used for this research.

<div align="center">Ethics, Validity and Reliability</div>

The setting of Malaysian media practice warrants a more detailed and prudent handling of ethics and culture. Malaysia is a multi-racial country and although I was born, grew up and educated in Malaysia, I am not able to claim to fully understand all the different races' cultures. In fact, no Malaysian can. Therefore, matters pertaining to ethics and cultures in my research were closely related to issues of validity and reliability.

Internal validity is generally about the congruence of data with reality (Merriam, 2002a). Validity determines whether the findings are accurate from the perspective of the researcher, the participant, or the reader of the research findings record (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell and Miller also used words like trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility to mean validity. Kvale (1996) defined validity as efforts of ensuring quality of craftsmanship in research when he says that: "Validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (p. 241). This

definition of validity is synonymous with ensuring quality control in management or production of goods in factories. Therefore, quality control endeavors are a continuous effort, and the findings of a study are the final product and the ultimate concern of the research.

Reliability is a concept that depends on validity because research cannot be deemed reliable if it is not valid in the first place. Indeed, Merriam (2002a) has pointed out that "there is no point in considering reliability without validity" (p. 27). Reliability generally refers to the consistency of the research findings (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 2002a). Merriam referred to reliability as, foremost, whether the research findings are consistent with the data collected, and secondly, the extent to which research findings can be replicated.

Despite the definitions, determining validity and reliability in qualitative research is always problematic and no consensus has been reached among researchers as yet (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 2002a). However, generally, there are eight strategies commonly used for checking and promoting the validity of research findings (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002a). Some of the strategies the two authors suggested are labeled differently but they essentially mean the same thing. They are triangulation, member checks, peer review, researcher's position, reflexivity or bias, prolonged time spent in data collection, maximum variation in sample selection and presentation of discrepant information, audit trail, and rich and thick description of the data. I will explain the strategies as I employed them in promoting validity and reliability in my research. Although both Merriam (2002a) and Creswell (2003) suggested essentially the same strategies for promoting validity and reliability, Merriam distinguished more precisely their usage. She divided validity into two – internal validity and external validity. Three of the eight strategies – triangulation, peer examination, and researcher's position - are used for promoting internal validity. I will now discuss several of the ethical issues that I faced, and my positionality

as a researcher. I will then describe some ways of ensuring higher levels of validity and reliability in my study.

Issues of power are omnipresent in all qualitative research albeit in different degree of intensity. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) warned that all research findings have political implications as the field of qualitative research itself is "inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions" (pp. 6-7). I had anticipated that my data itself would be rather highly political in nature and could implicate my respondents, for two reasons. The news industry, in many countries and particularly in Malaysia, is closely related to politics where press organizations are essentially controlled by the government through ownership (Cheong, 1993) and legal control (Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). In Malaysia, the situation is more serious in the sense that major newspapers in Malaysia, which are also generally referred to as the mainstream media, "are owned and/or under the control of the Barisan Nasional parties" (Loh & Mustafa, 1996, p. 54). This study needed my respondents to divulge such information in order for me to analyze how it has influenced their way of learning. For example, my respondents revealed some insider stories such as how their organizations decided not to publish certain news following some high level political intervention. Explaining explicitly such information might expose the identity of my respondent which could have unforeseen negative repercussions. Furthermore, the community of journalists is not large in Malaysia. According to the latest unpublished annual statistics from the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Malaysia, there were 1,375 unionized journalists working with seven newspaper organization as of March 2003, that could make identification easy (National Union of Journalist Malaysia, 2003). However, since journalists membership with the NUJ is not compulsory, it is estimated that there is a total of about 3,000 to 4,000 non-management level journalists or 5,000, including staff in positions as high as Group

Editor-in-Chief in Peninsular Malaysia (B. H. Hong, National Union of Journalists Malaysia General Secretary, personal communication, January 3, 2004). Further, as Zaharom and Mustafa (1998) have noted, although there are four national language dailies, they are published by just two local media giants. It should also be pointed out that their analysis is compounded by the fact that the news organizations' publications are further divided into essentially three different languages. Also, the essentially ethnic-based political parties in Malaysia control media in their respective languages besides English. For example, a Malay-based political party controls the media in Malay and English. A Chinese-based political party controls media published in Chinese and English. Likewise, an Indian-based political party controls the Tamil language newspaper only.

The above-mentioned descriptions about Malaysian journalism practice bring in the question of ethics involved in handling information about my respondents which is connected to the question of presentation of research findings. Omitting specifying some details of the critical incidents described by my respondents' as a move to protect them might eventually affect the presentation of my research findings. This issue of presentation of findings is both an ethical and a validity dilemma. Cole (2001) raised this dilemma when she faced the difficulty of searching for a form of telling that is both safe and authentic in order to protect the identity of her respondents. She found that in doing so she risks leaving the major part of her participants' stories untold. Although she suggests the use of fiction to present the findings, this is not practical for my study. This is because presenting the real context of my research is more important and crucial in the discussion of the findings of my study. Instead, her statement that there is a need for researchers "to push beyond the bounds of academic convention to find more appropriate representational forms" is more appropriate and suggests for creativity in protecting

respondents' identities (p. 169). I have used some creativity in protecting my respondents'

identities which I shall now describe. I shall first discuss how I handled ethical issue before

linking it to how I presented my research findings.

The foremost task that needed a very prudent manner of handling was to make

identification a difficult task and to preserve the anonymity of the respondents of my study.

Second, the need to preserve the confidentiality of information also presented challenges.

Identification can be particularly easy in the context of Malaysian journalism due to several

factors. The first is through the race of the journalist and the language the journalist writes in. A

Malaysian race is usually easily identifiable through name. Therefore, it can be assumed that a

respondent with a Malay name points to the possibility that the respondent writes in either Malay

or English language. There is no Malay or Indian journalist who is known to write in Chinese

although there is a high possibility that it may happen in the near future. This is due to the

education system in Malaysia which is essentially made up of three languages schooling systems,

particularly at the elementary school level. In other words, there are three types of school using

three different languages as the medium of instruction. The first is the national type school where

the medium of instruction is Malay language. The second largest type is the Chinese type school

with Chinese as the medium of instruction. Lastly, there is the Tamil type school that uses Tamil

language as the medium of instruction. Regardless of the type of school one is enrolled in, Malay

and English languages are mandatory subjects in the schools. Parents have absolute freedom to

send their children to the type of school they prefer. Nevertheless, choice of school is still

essentially an ethnic-based exercise where parents prefer their children to have their respective

mother tongue as the medium of instruction in school. The Malay parents usually send their

children to a national type school. The Chinese parents choose either a national type or Chinese

type school, with most choosing a Chinese type school, especially nowadays. The Indian parents, too, prefer either a national type or Tamil type school. However, the choice of school has somewhat changed since a decade or so ago where more non-Chinese parents have started to send their children to Chinese type school, a rather rare practice prior to that. This is partly due to the opening up of China's economy that many foresee the importance and economic value of mastering the Chinese language. It can also be safely assumed that no Malay or Chinese writes for a Tamil newspaper. This is because traditionally speaking, it has always been extremely rare for a non-Indian child to be enrolled in a Tamil language school.

Therefore, the first strategy used to conceal identity is not to reveal the language my research participants write in. However, the language one respondent wrote in had to be revealed indirectly because the data by the respondent called for a discussion on language in the findings chapter. The pseudonyms used are also based on the ethnicity of the respondents because one of the findings of this research was related to ethnicity. Therefore, giving a pseudonym that does not reflect the real ethnicity of the respondent would not enable me to discuss the finding. The pseudonyms are only the given names as in Malaysian culture whereby the Malay and Indian names consist of one word while the Chinese names are usually made up of two words. The pseudonyms given were checked against the bylines of journalists that appeared in all the major newspapers from time to time during the active data collection and writing up of the research findings. This is to avoid, as much as possible, giving pseudonyms which are the real names of currently practicing journalists. The Malay pseudonyms given are of the more "westernized" type, which is a practice of many Malays recently, thus, further reducing the possibility of similar names with current practicing journalists. For example, the usual Malay spelling for a syllable is a combination of a consonant and a vowel, or a consonant, a vowel and another

consonant, such as "rin." Therefore, the name of "Amrin" is now spelled as "Amreen." Chinese pseudonyms are given based on the standard Chinese pronunciation system, *Han Yi Pin Yin*, which is a more common practice of naming nowadays. However, in the case where the pseudonyms appear to be the same as that of the practicing journalists, whether during the period or after the period of research, they are mere coincidences.

Another more crucial strategy to preserve the anonymity of informants is not to mention the political party aligned to the news organization as described through the critical incidents. This is because the language of Malaysian newspaper can be easily linked to the political party that controls it and thus risks revealing the exact name of the newspaper and exposing my respondents' identity.

There are several other strategies to preserve anonymity. The main principle that I used to preserve anonymity was to give as little information as possible about my respondents. I have given as little detail as possible regarding the nature of the newspaper my respondents write for such as the size of the newspaper, whether it is a tabloid or broadsheet sized newspaper. I also gave as little information as possible about my research participants' demographics. Besides giving the pseudonym, ethnicity and gender, I only mentioned the number of years each of them has been in the practice without the number of years the journalist has been in the present organization. I also did not mention their age.

Since many of the critical incidents narrated by my study participants were of public record, where they might have been published with their bylines, more conscientious efforts were needed to present them in this study in order to preserve anonymity. The detailed descriptions of the critical incidents have been camouflaged and made as obscure as possible while not sacrificing giving a rich and thick description of my study. The exact name of the place

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where an incident has taken place is mentioned as obscurely as possible. For example, for an incident that occurred in a historic town, the name of the town and the particular history or artifact involved that could provide some possible hints to its whereabouts, is not revealed. The name of a well-known person(s) involved is not mentioned, for example, a politician or a VIP, particularly the political party the person represents. This made identification of my respondents a more difficult task while preserving the context of the incidents that have taken place. A rich and thick description of the context of the incidents that have taken place is more important than explicit mentions of persons and places involved. This was an important ingredient that was needed in discussing the findings of my study. A rich and thick description is important because it provides a contextualized description of my study. Readers would also be able to determine how much my respondents' situations tally that of the research context. It also serves as a strategy for promoting validity.

In line with the effort to preserve the context of research, I have retained the use of Malaysian English, also widely known as "Manglish," in all the quotes that I have used for this study. Lee (1998) observed that the use of Manglish involves a "generous sprinkling of many Malay and Chinese words in Malaysian English without any translation" (p. 9). She pointed out further that it also includes hybrids of words from the various languages spoken in Malaysian society, permutations of the English language, and the use of tail-enders "lah." It is usually spoken in informal settings especially among Malaysians. Another author, Dodds (2003), observed that an important difference between Manglish and English is that the former is generally a spoken language, not written. He added that most Malaysians speak English and Manglish is a second spoken language.

I have particularly retained the use of several tail-enders, which is one of the common features of the use of Manglish among the different ethnic groups. Among them is tail-ender "lah" which is the most common one used by all the ethnics in Malaysia. I have also retained the use of tail-ender "mah" and "ah" which are more commonly used among the Chinese. They are essentially used to emphasize a point one makes or to soften one's manner of speaking. They are being used as a suffix of a sentence or word, and I used a hyphen to denote the tail-enders which are also in italics. However, I have also edited some Manglish used by my respondents for the purpose of comprehension especially if it is too "mangled" for non-Malaysians to understand. Indeed, as Dodds (2003) has analyzed, "Manglish can be so 'mangled' that it hardly resembles Standard English at all" (p. 10). He pointed out that, "sometimes there is not even a phrase in Standard English that we can use to replace our Manglish" (p. 11). This, he said, is because Manglish is closer to Malay and Chinese in sentence structure and grammar.

Due to these reasons, as much as possible, I have tried to retain the use of Manglish if they do not affect non-Malaysian readers' comprehension or they could be explained briefly in brackets following the Manglish used. This is to give the data a "local flavor" and sound more "natural" within the context of Malaysian society. The use of some Malay words have also been retained. Explanation of such words used are made in brackets and a glossary of the words in alphabetical order is listed in Appendix C.

I have used other creative ways to camouflage the identities of my respondents and to make identification of race a more difficult task. I have included newspapers published in the different main languages to ensure a higher level of validity. I have included journalists from the Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil newspapers as my respondents. This also allowed the experiences of journalists working in different languages of media as a way of conducting cross

member checks in research. Qualitative researchers have suggested member checks as a way of verifying tentative interpretations by presenting the findings to respondents from where they derived the data (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 2002a). Member checks was another way for me to ascertain the accuracy of my tentative interpretation of findings (Merriam, 2002a). I did this by bringing the data and tentative interpretations back to the people I interviewed to ask if they are consistent with their information given earlier.

Cross member checks allowed me to bring my tentative interpretations of one journalist that I have interviewed to another journalist who is also my respondent for verification. The cross member check is mainly to serve the function of verifying the logic and rationale of the data analysis. Verifying with another respondent helped to reveal more information about the respondent whom I obtained the data from. The actual member checks for verification for validity purpose could only be done with the respondent the data is obtained from. Cross member checks provided a form of verification from another insider who knows and is in the practice of journalism to detect the reliabilities of stories told.

Merriam (2002a) noted that triangulation involves collection of data through a combination of methods such as interview, observations, and document analysis. However, as described earlier under the subsection of data collection, my research essentially used interview and document analysis methods. This is because of the sensitive nature of my research topic where it is unwise to conduct any participant observation. Nevertheless, I "made up the loss" by conducting a more intensive document analysis and communicated with other journalists who were not my respondents. I found out more information about my respondents from other journalists whom I know through informal interactions with them. For example, I have called some journalists whom I know personally for a personal chat or meal, in order to obtain as much

information as possible about journalism. This helped me to gain a wider perspective about journalists' practice. I have also talked to some journalists who are union leaders in various capacities and levels to obtain a more balanced view of the current practice. I have also conducted a substantial amount of archival research, such as annual company report, to see the pattern of my respondents' organizations' ownership. I also read some of their published writings.

Interviewing journalists writing in different languages is a method of maximizing variation on the use of a diversified sample selection (Merriam, 2002a). This enabled me to find out if journalists' learning processes are influenced by press ownership regardless of the language the newspapers are published in. This provided a wider range of application of my findings across the different organizations, and the control exerted by the ethnic-based political parties.

I had anticipated that my interview questions about how journalists learn might result in replies mainly about the technical aspect of learning how to gather news and write up news stories. This anticipation was proven true. The culture of learning in Malaysia is such that it is generally perceived as a formal activity that takes place in classroom setting, a formal teacher-to-student/learner instruction, such as through an in-house training program. The most common form of in-house training program is where editors or experienced journalists are invited to teach and share their experiences of writing good stories, or what are usually called "scoops." Therefore, I had expected the critical incident method of interviewing to result in respondents relating experience about the technical aspect, and how-to type of response. In order to avoid such problems, a pre-interview explanation of critical incidents and my study (Appendix A) were sent to my respondents. They were mostly sent via e-mail. I had also anticipated that more

probing questions were needed, especially about how their learning activities that took place while they were carrying out their daily responsibilities were intercepted by editors or their supervisors. This method helped to promote reliability in terms of my skill in interviewing (Kvale, 1996). I did not face much problem interviewing as I am familiar with interviewing people due to my previous training and practice as a journalist. Qualitative research, after all, is influenced by journalistic practice through a former-journalist-turned-qualitative researcher, Robert Park (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Although I am an insider in my research field and to my respondents, power relations are omnipresent between the researcher and the researched. Even in interviews, the researcher and the respondents are never on equal footing. Kvale (1996) explained why there are no equal partners in a research interview although it is a conversation:

> The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The topic of the interview is introduced by the researcher, who also critically follows up on the subject's answers to his or her questions. (p. 6)

Due to such an unequal hierarchy of power, I dictated the topic of conversation, which might not be comfortable or might have resulted in my inability to elicit frank responses from my respondents. Doing some archival research on my respondents' writings minimized this problem of validity because I was able to prepare myself for the possible power relations involved. This issue of unequal power is related to Bartunek and Louis's (1996) point about the importance of taking into consideration the local theories of insiders – the perspective and subjectivity of respondents. They point out that theory is not the sole province of academics, as being assumed by many. In my study, although I am somewhat an insider, they are true insiders. I was once an

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inner insider but am now an outer insider, with my positionality as a researcher who is trained and still being trained to conduct research by looking from the theoretical perspective. The combination of my inner and outer insider gave me a great advantage to understand my participants' experiences. However, as Bartunek and Louis (1996) have also pointed, there is no evidence that the theories academics produce have substantial impact on either insiders or the local theories they hold. This was a point that I took into consideration because of my outer insider now where I might be ignorant of some journalistic practice that I have left for years by now. My present training as a researcher might produce bias that affected the validity and reliability of my study.

Although I have a multi-lingual ability, I am not able to understand the Indian Malaysian culture as much as I could the other races' cultures. This is because I am totally illiterate in Tamil language (the common language of the Indians). This could pose some questions of interpretation of my respondents' data when they tried to explain some of the cultural matters peculiar to the Indian society, although the interview was conducted in English. This could cause me to fall into the danger of translation competence that seeks to bridge the subtle difference in culture between that of the informants and the researchers (Spradley, 1979). This will affect the validity of my study. A way I used to overcome this was by conducting a member check by bringing my tentative interpretation of my data to my respondents for verification of accuracy of translation, understanding and interpretation (Merriam, 2002a). I also spoke to my Malaysian friends of Indian descendent to find out more about the Tamil newspaper and culture.

The other issue of validity of my research pertains to questions of how frank my respondents were in divulging information. This is both a problem of the political nature of my study and a matter of integrity and ethics in journalism. In order to protect their pride and

integrity as a professional journalist, my respondents might not be comfortable in admitting that what they did was contrary to their ethics of practice. For example, they might realize that what they have been doing is not the ethical journalistic practice because they have to succumb to the way their organizations work. This is an intricate matter and needs a prudent way of validating their data. One of the ways that I did was to talk to as many journalists whom I know personally and trust well enough for me to understand such matters.

Self-disclosure of the Researcher

My working life has been in the corporate sector with about 5 years of experience as a journalist in two press organizations in Malaysia. They are both mainstream press, government-controlled, and owned by huge organizations.

I left my profession and my country for graduate school abroad about eight years ago. However, I have kept in touch with some of my former co-workers and visited them whenever I was back for a holiday in Malaysia. I have been back for an average of once a year. Therefore, to my former co-workers, my going back for data collection was like another of my previous visits home. Besides my former co-workers, several journalists from other organizations still know me.

The question of my positionality is not a dichotomous insider or outsider but of an insider and/or outsider. As four case studies involving six researchers across the continents by Merriam et al. (2001) have shown, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to delineate between insider and outsider researcher. Cole's (2001) experience also showed the often overlapping of the two positionalities. Thorne (1988) notes from his experience that this can involve a simultaneous dialectic of insider and outsider while Emerson and Pollner (2001) regarded it as a "continuously negotiated posture" (p. 256). My discussion on positionalities can be seen from two perspectives.

The first is my positionality within the research domain, and the second is within the power domain.

Besides my being a Malaysian who grew up and was educated in Malaysia, my ability to understand multiple languages – English, Malay, Mandarin and several Chinese dialects – renders me an insider. It also endows me with a "translation competence" where I have the "ability to translate the meanings of one culture into a form that is appropriate to another culture" (Spradley, 1979, p. 19). This translation competence is critical for my study because although my interviews were conducted in English, there were some interjections of non-English words and sentences throughout the interviews. This is the usual way most Malaysians speak. There was a need to translate these words and sentences into English and a translation competence that includes an understanding of the culture is of paramount importance. Further, as Spradley (1979) cautioned about the danger of translation competence that seeks to bridge the subtle difference in culture between that of the informants and the researchers, being an insider to the culture and language helped me to minimize such danger.

A more critical aspect of translation competency is from the research perspective. Being a former journalist in Malaysia renders me an insider in conducting this research. It is an advantage because it avoids double translation competence, where a word or understanding of a context is translated two times, and hence part of the meaning might have been altered. Although Spradley's (1979) idea of translation competence is embedded in ethnographic study, it is applicable in my positionality as a former journalist-turned-researcher. My study required me to understand the practice and culture of journalists and to translate it into a research culture. Therefore, my past journalism practice provided me with a direct translation competence of my respondents' practice. This also enabled me to be a more effective researcher, and enhanced my

ability to discern potential problems and issues to expect in the study. Regarding being such an effective researcher, Bartunek and Louis (1996) have pointed out the importance of understanding the practice of my respondents:

> Insiders need to understand their setting in order to be effective as actors and action takers. Relative to outside researchers, insiders typically see the setting under study as a source of greater and more enduring consequences in terms of economic security, social affiliation, self-esteem, challenge, and fulfillment. (pp. 2-3)

My hard-to-conceal identity as a former journalist might have placed me within the same perspective and identification of my respondents. My respondents were able to identify with me, in expecting me to understand their experiences as they related their critical incidents to me. There were times they did not explain some things that were important to my data analysis because they assumed that I would know and understand. For example, remarks like "you were once a journalist, so you should know…" were rather common in a few of my interviews with them especially when I probed more. This is not surprising as previous research by an insider (a Malaysian) and outsider (an American) team in Malaysia has shown that respondents assumed that an insider (Malaysian) researcher knew and understood some obvious statements, and follow-up questioning was thus seen as ludicrous (Merriam et al., 2001). I handled such remarks by saying that I needed to hear it from them for the sake of my research or that everyone has a different understanding or experience on the same issue.

Another issue of insider from the research perspective is a baggage of heavy responsibility and accountability. Being one coming from the same community of practice, I was constantly more aware of the repercussions and implications of the insider stories of my

respondents' experiences of learning. I treated with more caution the details of the inside stories in order to protect my respondents' safety and to preserve their confidentiality, so much so that there was a possibility that I fell under an unconscious ritual of self-censorship when writing the findings of my research. My dilemma resonates with the question of the paradox of researcher privilege as experienced by Cole (2001), who conducted research among those in her profession. She reflected that:

> I was well aware, even when they were not, of the political implications of their open participation. They would speak forthrightly under the guise of academic freedom but without its full protection. Besides, is there such a thing as full protection anyway, especially in the academy where much of what happens with respect to faculty hiring and firing is clandestine – opaque at best?…What would I be asking of the participants in my study? What were the risks for them and for me? (Cole, 2001, p. 166)

Likewise, the insider researcher privilege that I was *endowed* with produced the same opaqueness of freedom, especially as my respondents are journalists who may be having the belief of freedom of speech when their freedom could be very much under the surveillance of the Malaysian government-controlled mass media environment. Besides, as the community of the profession of journalism is small and is very much concentrated in the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, more cautious handling was warranted. A few of my respondents were rather open and did not see any need to be cautious. This was shown in their almost "nonchalant" attitude by asking me to conduct the interview in their office. This was also partly due to their erratic schedule that made scheduling an appointment outside the office a more difficult task.

However, a few of my respondents, particularly the Chinese journalists (who generally feel marginalized in their own country), were more cautious when approached to participate in my study or when interviewed. One actually decided not to participate two weeks later, after voicing his concern regarding anonymity. The reason given was a rather culturally polite one – the subject was too difficult for him. Another voiced her concern after the interview ended, about how I would preserve her anonymity. Such reaction from the Chinese journalists is not too surprising a discovery as the Chinese-Malaysians are usually more politically insecure because political power is in the hands of the Malays according to the "interpretation" of the constitution. For example, only a Malay can become a Prime Minister. And in practice, Malays hold all the major and important cabinet positions such as Home, Education and Finance ministers. Such division of power is partly due to the history of politics of Malaysia where the Chinese ethnic-based political party has the financial power and depended on the Malay ethnic-based political party for political support (Gomez & Jomo, 1999).

On the other hand, my insider positionality as a Chinese-Malaysian helped in soliciting more open discussions during the interviews with my Chinese respondents. They were also more open in critiquing the policies and also sailed along with my insider positionality by not seeing the need to elaborate some "obvious" political situations that implicate the Chinese. Or they did not relate some incidents, which were the data that I looked for, because they might have found it to be the givens of the situations until I probed later. Their openness to me as an insider was also displayed when they addressed the "otherness" notion when they related political intervention in the profession by referring to the Malays, who holds the political power in Malaysia, as "they."

The issues of power in this study might have possibly presented some ethical concerns for me as a researcher. My past profession and my affiliation with my former organization and

the community of practice could make me an outsider. Which organization did I work for

before? Who, in my previous organization, were seen as affiliated with me, or seen as my

liaisons? Or, who was I in the picture of their past learning experiences? Another problem is that

my former organization may be the business rival company of my respondents. Perhaps, the

people whom I was and am still assumed to be associated with may not be on the same power

level with my respondents. All these might have caused them to avoid relating some of their

learning experiences to me, which might have informed my study better, for fear of negative

repercussions. After all, media organizations are politically imbedded in nature, and for whom I

worked for in the past may connote my ideological belief, which they might not have found it to

be in resonance with theirs.

As a conclusion, due to my past professional experience, I was an insider in terms of

access to my respondents. At the same time, I was also an outsider as I have left the profession

and my country for years and this has detached me from many things and happenings in the

country. Further, some power relationships rendered me an outsider to my respondents.

However, I was generally well received by my respondents due to my personal networking as

described earlier. Most of my respondents were very cooperative by immediately setting aside

some time for our interview sessions as soon as I approached them.

Summary of the Chapter

This study used a qualitative research design as it was the best method to explore how

journalists learn under the power structure of concentrated media ownership in Malaysia. I used

a semi-structured interview format that employed the critical incident method to interview

journalists practicing in Malaysia. I also used several other methods, such as archival research,

participant observation as my preliminary research in order for me to understand the context and setting of each of my respondents.

I interviewed 15 journalists. I transcribed all the interviews, and used the constant comparative technique suggested by Merriam (1998) and Bogdan and Biklen (1998) to analyze the data for categories of meaning and themes that recurred. The technique involved coding each interview transcript for themes that would be developed from each prior interview and those that emerged from each subsequent interview. For the purpose of validity and reliability of my study, I used several strategies for promoting validity and reliability as suggested by Merriam (2002a) and Creswell (2003). I then wrote up the findings of my study.

CHAPTER 4

PROFILES AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS FOR THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Fifteen journalists agreed to participate in this study, as outlined in Table 1. This chapter

introduces the participants alphabetically, presents a brief personal profile and a description of

their critical incidents. All study participants are referred to by a pseudonym according to their

ethnicity. Six participants are Malays, seven are Chinese, and two are Indians. Eight are males

and seven are females. Seven are at mid-level to senior positions in their organizations. They

range in age from late-20s to early 50s. Their number of years in practice is between seven and

25 years. Six of the participants have worked for less than ten years in their current organization

including one who has stayed on for five years – the minimum number of years required to

become a respondent for this study. The longest period of time any of the participants has stayed

in one organization is 15 years. The 15 respondents are journalists from ten Malaysian

mainstream print media organizations, published in four languages – English, Malay, Chinese

and Tamil. Mainstream media is a term generally used to refer to government-controlled media

in Malaysia. The ownership pattern of the ten media organizations is similar; they are owned by

people related to the ruling political parties. The respondents write in a variety of subjects such

as politics, economics, education, entertainment, crime, motoring, environment, sports, and

court. Most of the participants are journalists based in the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur,

with two based in different state offices or bureaus of the press organizations.

Each of the participants agreed to share critical incidents that were self-identified as

significant experiences in their practices. However, a few mentioned that there were many

Table 1

Research Participants' Demographics

Name	Ethnic	Gender	Years in Practice
Amreen	Malay	Male	9
Azzaddin	Malay	Male	16
En Lin	Chinese	Female	11
Gunasegaran	Indian	Male	10
Jian Sheng	Chinese	Male	25
Jin Ping	Chinese	Female	10
Ke Mei	Chinese	Female	21
Ramanesh	Indian	Male	15
Shaesta	Malay	Female	8
Shahzam	Malay	Male	15
Shan Jie	Chinese	Female	7
Shukran	Malay	Male	9
Siti Zulaida	Malay	Female	10
Wen Gang	Chinese	Male	13
Yi Ying	Chinese	Female	9

incidents that they had experienced throughout their career experience and it was difficult for

them to specifically cite any of them as a critical incident that had impacted their practice.

Therefore, some shared only one critical incident although I had requested at least two incidents

in my e-mail to them prior to our interview appointments. One participant insisted that there was

no one critical incident in her practice that she could recall and qualify as a critical incident. Instead, she believed her learning is a daily continuous process and an accumulation of various experiences throughout her career. Therefore, the description for this particular participant's "critical incident" consists of her sharing of the idea and notion of learning and some examples she gave to support her descriptions. Table 2 on the next page summarized the participants' 32 critical incidents.

This chapter reviews the primary incidents described by each of the journalist. Supportive references were made to their incidents and other descriptions that they did not mention as critical incidents, but had been found to be of some factors related to learning in their practice. The use of Malaysian English or Manglish has been retained in quotes particularly the use of tail-enders like "lah," "ah," and "mah," and "what." They are usually used by Malaysians in spoken Manglish to emphasize a point or to soften a sentence. These tail-enders are indicated by a hyphen immediately at the end of the sentence or point made, and are in italics. The use of other Malay words in Manglish has also been retained with their brief explanations or translation in bracket immediately beside the words. Two glossaries, C and D, are also attached for more detailed explanations of the use of tail-enders and Malay words, respectively.

<div align="center">Amreen</div>

Amreen is a young Malay male who regretted not joining the profession earlier although he knew of one person who was already in the practice when he was a schoolboy. Joining the profession at a rather young age, he now has nine years of experience on his resume. The profession has been a wonderful experience for him. He obviously never regretted a single day of his journalism life. Besides the daily assignments given by his editors, he has also ventured into writing areas of his personal interests, among them is motoring.

Table 2

Summary of Critical Incidents of Study Participants

Journalists	Incidents
Amreen	Learning to handle different ethnics' funeral and religious cultures at assignments taught him about communication skills
	Senior co-worker's remark over his biased to-be-published car review article
Azzadin	Dealing with an artist who tried to complain to his editor about her dissatisfaction with a concert review write-up, and used a journalist in another press to criticize him about the write-up
	A famous personality approached his editor to get him change certain facts reported in a news that indirectly implicated the famous personality
En Lin	The experience of seeing her 25-paragraph court story on a complicated legal case being edited to a mere 5-paragraph, led her to learning on ways to secure publication spaces
Gunasegaran	Handling a legal suit over his article of a crime incident, a suit which was eventually dropped
	Dealing with an insincere politician who gave him false claims and facts for his news story, and confronting the politician on paying journalists to write favorable articles
Jian Sheng	Dealing with a woman implicated in a news that he wrote and her attempt to seek the local community's leader's arbitration on the matter
	His company's prioritization over political issue causes his articles to be sidelined as they are regarded as deep subject that are difficult for readers to understand
	Gaining understanding on matters that he could not gain access to through journalists from his sister newspaper organizations
Jin Ping	The takeover of her company by a political party
	Change of perception on a certain political party following her experience of pursuing a politician abroad over a news story
Ke Mei	No critical incident was shared but reflections of learning to work within the reality of journalism practice throughout her journalism career life
Ramanesh	Experience of covering news at mortuary which was a flop
	Being "blacklisted" by a government officer when he became more critical in his writing on issue the officer was handling
	Regret over following an editor's instruction to pursue a story that implicated a politician and resulted in the death of the politician's wife
Shaesta	Exposure to communication and interaction with subjects of her writing
Shahzam	Overcoming difficulties in gathering information when being sent for overseas assignments made him learn to be a resourceful journalist

	The 1997 economic crisis that led to the domestic political rift between the former Prime Minister and former Deputy Prime Minister, and his handling of writing about the subject
Shan Jie	The takeover of her company by a political party resulted in more interference on the practice of freedom of press and made her disillusioned with journalism practice
	The political incident where the Deputy Prime Minister was expelled and was subsequently jailed made her more aware of what she writes
Shukran	Learning the art of interviewing at a course that improved his performance
	Learning by observing a senior journalist handling a telephone conversation with a subject at the office
	Dealing with CEO briefing that implicated his handling of articles and his relationship with companies he writes about
Siti Zulaida	Handling threats from people implicated in her writing
	Facing critiques from her counterparts on her articles that she wrote after an overseas assignment that she went with them
Wen Gang	Experience with a legal suit because of a news article he wrote
	Learning from the Chinese press journalists when he was a new journalist
Yi Ying	Being caught in between three parties over an issue that she wrote about and accused of incorrect reporting
	Interference by the highest authority to censor details of a news report about a legal case involving a politician and made her realize her company's effort to shape and condition her during her initial learning and career period

His first critical incident happened during his early days in the profession. He was faced

with covering assignments that took place within the environment of Malaysian ethnics'

religious and cultural practices. One particular assignment was where he had to cover a funeral

ceremony of a few family members who died on the spot in one tragic road accident. Amreen

was expected to get some human interest stories from the family members of the deceased. He

shared his culture shock and dilemma,

> It was a…Indian or Chinese family? All I know it wasn't a Malay or Muslim,
>
> therefore naturally it was a very new experience to me. I've never attended a, a,
>
> something like that, you know. To go to the house and see how they go about,
>
> how they do it, how they bury or cremate the, the dead and the prayers, the wake,

you know. There is no such thing as a, a, a proper wake in, for Muslim. You will

only get to see the dead, right? Before he or she is buried. There's no, OK, the

wake is scheduled to be held this Sunday at his residence from 10am to 7 pm. No,

there is no such thing [as a wake for Muslims]. So, to me, to attend a wake is

something new. It was totally new. So, you know, what am I supposed to wear?

What am I supposed to say? How, how am I supposed to stand? Everything. It's

totally new to me, you know. Uh…things that you don't learn at school. At school

you only learn what to wear if you attend a Malay wedding ceremony. What to

wear when you go to, to *kenduri* or, what to wear when you go for a job interview.

But nobody tells you what to wear, what to say, how to behave at a wake.

Amreen learned how to handle such assignments from his colleagues. He first asked a Malay co-

worker who has had the experience of covering such assignment. In order to make sure that he

has obtained the right advice, he also asked another co-worker of the same race as the deceased

family members. He recalled,

So, yeah, I asked around, my, my colleagues, so, I'm attending a wake, what am I

supposed to do? Well, the safest way is to be sensitive, to be subtle…to say lots of

comforting words even though you are a total stranger, you know. But at the same

time, do your job, get the details. Everybody is crying, everybody is sobbing, we

cannot say, can you stop crying for a moment, I need to get the details here?

Maybe you have to follow them all the way to the crematorium, to the, to the

cemetery [to get the details], you know.

Amreen learned from this incident that as a journalist, he needed to detach his emotions

from his professional responsibility while maintaining his professionalism. He said,

Sometimes it's not easy not to get emotional. [If] you are able to be, to remain cold, either you are being very professional or you are simply a, an insensitive person, or both, or both. In my case, I have to be both, to be strong, because I need to do my work. And, and not, and to prevent myself from writing so much out of emotion when I go back to my office, you know. Because, whatever it is, it's still a news, another news story. It cannot take up the whole page, two, three pages of the newspaper.

He shared how he learned to balance the emotional element while carrying out his professional responsibilities,

It's to remain professional, to be sensitive to the surroundings, depending on what type of surroundings, to know what angle I'm supposed to go for. If it's, if it's death, go for the emotional angle. Make it a sob story. But don't go overboard. If it's an entertainment angle, then do the need, necessary. If it's technical, be technical, as much as I can. But not too much. Otherwise, the reader would find it boring. They are reading a newspaper, not an engineering journal. Not a technical report. So, I know, I have to know, I have to know what the story is about, you know. And from there, I work on what the angle would be. Find an angle.

This incident has taught him another important matter related to culture – to have empathy. He discovered that by having empathy for the subjects' culture would make them more relaxed and therefore, it was easier for him to solicit information. He said, "I found out that to know the basics of their cultures will make them more relax, and maybe they'll talk a bit more. Because the more you talk, the more you reveal about yourself." This skill has been further

sharpened to human communication skills especially when dealing with people of different culture. He shared,

> I am able to handle any kind of people I come across. I, I know pretty much how to make people talk especially when you know more about them, when you, when you beat their curiosity, or their interest, when you share their interest. Or at least you pretended you share their interest, at the end of the day, it's simply to get information out of them. So, you have to make them feel at ease.

This experience has also toughened him as he realized that,

> So, I, I, it's very hard for me to get nervous nowadays when I am assigned something. Because not much is new. More or less it's the same thing at the end of the day. You can break it down into [covering] crime, environment, politics, entertainment, sports, you know. You can sectionalize them.

However, despite the importance of such experience through assignments, Amreen opined that one of the best ways to learn is by observing other journalists work. "I learned that [communication skills of making someone more relaxed to talk] by observing other reporters, other people, you know. Uh, yeah, there are too many things that, in fact, every other assignment teaches you something new," he added.

His second critical incident taught him about being objective in his writing while dealing with power relationships in journalism. It was an incident where he had to test-drive a luxury car and did a product review on it. He said he almost "put down" the car so much because he felt the manufacturer was trying to create a new car with a classic antique look that did not quite look like one. "For the price that I have to pay for it, no, no way I'm going to pay [for] this car. To a certain extent, some of it, some parts of the car look ugly, and tacky," he recalled. But before he

could submit the article for publication, a remark by a senior reporter made him see the importance of being objective in reviewing a car:

> *Eh* (Hey), young man! You cannot say that, you cannot say that on behalf of everybody that this car is ugly…. You have to remember, they don't make the car for you. You might not like it, [but] there'll be 10,000 other people who are, who lo—ve to have the car in their garages, porches. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholders. So he told me, they make cars not just for you. They make cars for anybody, for people who can afford to pay for it. And, out of one million people, maybe you are the only one who doesn't like the car. The, the rest they, they consider the car is so beautiful, so good, so high tech and yet so retro looking. So, you, at least, word your opinions carefully next time because otherwise people will look at you as, gosh, he's too cocky. People will even think that I have bad taste, you know.

This incident that happened when he was in his second or third year in the profession made him rethink his way of writing. He reflected,

> It made me realize certain opinions I better keep to myself, so as not to make myself look too bias. Or stupid. Uh, you know, uh, it, it make [sic] me, makes me become [a] more neutral, neutral person. I can still mention in my story, let's say I'm still writing about [name of the car], at the end of the story, my conclusion is: I don't like this car, but *ah...* that is simply my personal opinion. I'm sure millions out there uh, love to have a [name of the car] each. There are millions other people who, who, who consider it as the most beautiful car ever made.

Amreen also pointed out that he was not ignorant of one factor - the reaction from the car manufacturer. He admitted that,

But then I have to also be careful so as not to be too pro, you know, to the manufacturer. Otherwise, I look like I'm, I'm, I've been paid to write the story [review article]. I've to write a balance report [car review].

He related the occasional occurrence of such conflict, and gave the example of his counterpart who had a showdown with a car manufacturer over a car test-drive review article. It was a review on the same car that he did where the manufacturer was upset over a not "all-glowing" review by his counterpart. Amreen said they concluded that the car manufacturer expected too much, and only "all glowing remarks, all nice [remarks], buy, buy, buy, buy, buy this car, buy, buy now, go buy!" The last straw came when his counterpart retorted by telling the car manufacture off that, "Why don't you take up advertisements in our paper? Where it will sell, it will tell only the good things about the car?" The car manufacturer reacted by canceling an existing advertising contract with the company. However, for Amreen, so far, he has "been able to make everybody happy."

But Amreen has certainly learned the art and reality of trying to make everybody happy. He said,

Uh, if I go to a car launch by Toyota for example, I don't think, I'm, I can, why should I wear a T-shirt with big words that says, Honda! You know, you, you want to please your host, as they want to please you. So, if it's not necessary, don't offend people. The small things, they really do matter.

But he also retired to the fact that,

You cannot satisfy everybody. Some, there are some things the manufacturer will not be happy with. That's where you have to be careful, you have to pacify them, then sometimes they will call, eh, Amreen, why-*lah* you say these things, that, those things, these things, this and that about our car?! If it's true, then, why should I be worried? I'm just telling the truth. And if they complain about certain opinion which sounds personal, I'll tell them, well, that is personal. I'm not telling everybody don't buy this car. I'm just stating certain things that I don't like about the car. And you have to admit it because it is on the car, you know, uh, and I don't like it. But I mentioned in my story that some people might like certain features that I don't like. So, it's a free world (laughs)

Azzaddin

Azzadin is a Muslim, Malay male journalist and has vast experience working in different press organizations and writing on different subjects. He seems like a pious Muslim because throughout the interview he repeatedly talked about God and thanked his God for leading him to his career. He believes in being sincere and ethical in his practice. However, he admitted that at one point during his early days of practice, he almost fell to the temptation of using his power of pen to focus on some politicians he met often in the Parliament for his personal gain. He figured that since he had the chance to rub shoulders with many politicians in the Parliament, perhaps, he could try to catch their attention by highlighting them more in his report. By doing so, he also thought that he would benefit in the long run especially if the politician he became close with was eventually promoted to become a minister of some important portfolios. His conscience told him that it was not a proper practice to be too close to the person one wrote about and he decided not to do so.

In his practice later, he experienced how by being not too close with the person he wrote about, he could write a more objective article. He realized that people implicated in his articles had often tried to approach his editor with the hope of amending some facts, which were not to their likings. Or, famous personalities would try to approach his editors to change certain facts about an incident that he wrote just because they thought it looked negative on them.

The first critical incident he described was about a famous artist who reacted rather negatively to a review article he wrote about her concert. Azzaddin criticized the artist for not behaving according to the Malaysian culture in her concert. The artist tried to contact his editor and complain about the review article. It was not a successful endeavor because the editor was not in the office. The artist was referred to the editor's assistant but decided not to speak to her. About this, Azzaddin opined, "The artist, upon hearing my editor's assistant's name was like suddenly, she did not want to talk to her because she is a very vocal journalist." When the artist did not manage to speak to any of his superiors, the artist went a step further by using a journalist from another press to "attack" him through an article. He said,

> When I read the article [by a journalist in another press], I knew the article was
> used to attack me. It was an all-praise article about the artist. That's why I was
> wondering, sometimes I don't know what has happened to our colleague. Why
> they do not write about what has really happened in a concert? You have to write
> everything. Let's say if the artist did something negative that should be
> commented on, then we have to comment on it so that the public knows what has
> happened.

Azzadin felt that the artist could have approached him directly about the issue and not go to his editor or through a journalist in another press to launch a personal attack on him. This incident

has further reinforced his belief that one should not be too close to one's subject of writing. He said, "If you are too close to them [artists], sometimes they make use of you." He believes that by not being too close to an artist would also enable him to critique that artist objectively. It would also gain him respect as a journalist from those in the entertainment industry. Azzaddin learned that the artist tried to call him initially but he was not in the office whenever she called. He has somewhat let the matter rest and did not bother doing anything to amend the relationship. Azzaddin said,

> [The name of the artist], I think until now she's angry at me (laughs)…. Hm, [she] never called [since then]. I think after she's made the statement [through the article in another newspaper] in [name of the newspaper], [there's] no need to call me-*lah*. It was clear that they [artist and the journalist of another press] attacked me in [name of the other newspaper], that's enough-*lah*.

Azzaddin's second incident was reporting a minor crime, which was related to a moral issue among the Malay community. The crime was committed by some people working in the entertainment industry. This time a personality related to the entertainment industry walked into his editor's office trying to ask them to change the name of the place the incident occurred, which was a fact given by the police. The personality was not among those nabbed nor involved in the case. but the place mentioned in the news implicated his name indirectly, which he was not happy about. He lamented, "That's why sometimes when we write about all these artists, we have to be careful." The personality's effort in approaching his editor did not pay off because his editor did not ask him to make any change to the fact of the news as requested.

Regarding the two similar incidents, where artists walked into his superior's office to voice their displeasure about some things mentioned in his articles, Azzaddin said it could land

them in troubles at times. He also learned that this was one of the ways artists get even with

journalists who were normally quite vocal at critiquing artists. However, he said, how successful

the artist in using such way depended on the editor's manner of handling the issue concerned. He

explained that sometimes, his editors defended him too. However, he said editors usually

"entertain" the artists who came to see them because as a newspaper, they have to deal with the

public. He was also upset with Malaysian artists' mentality because "They used to call our boss-

lah. The Malaysian artists' mentality, they will come and see our boss over every little thing they

are not satisfied with." He gave the example of another famous artist who called up his editor

asking why no journalist from his organization covered his function. Azzaddin said he actually

missed the transportation provided to the function's venue which was away from the city. He

concluded that,

> We have to, anything happens, we have to stick to our principle-*lah*, I believe.
>
> Even if you are dating my boss, let's say one day I attend your assignment, even if
>
> you don't like [what I am going to write], I will still write. I am not going to be
>
> bothered with my boss. It depends on the editor-*lah*, whether you want to publish
>
> my article or not. I believe in sincerity, ethics, ethics-*lah*. As a journalist, you
>
> have to have ethics.

He said he had proven his sincerity in upholding ethics as a journalist. In the first critical incident

that he described, he said he went ahead with writing the news article although his family

members tried to persuade him from doing so because one of those nabbed was related to him.

En Lin

En Lin is a Chinese female journalist who found herself blending into the profession

rather easily right from the beginning. She said she did not face many problems because she did

not "fumble" and was not "lost," knew what she was doing and was able to carry out her work without much difficulty. She attributed it to the professional training that she received at college and a short internship as a journalist at one of the mainstream press while in college.

However, she admitted that a formal on-the-job training program that she attended during her early days at her company was beneficial in helping her to carry out her professional responsibilities. It was a two-hour training session for a day that lasted for four days only. Although trained in journalism and had an internship as a journalist before, En Lin discovered through the training program that what she had learned in college could not be applied in a wholesale manner in practice. "There are certain times when your 5Ws and 1H are scattered throughout the story, not necessarily [in] the, the intro [introduction]," she explained. The "5Ws and 1H" is the term used in journalism to describe the five Ws and one H in any news story, which also forms the basics of journalism. The 5Ws are the initials of answering the questions of what, where, when, why and who. The H refers to how in a news story. She explained further that, "[For] different stories you have to start differently. It doesn't have to be all the Ws in one paragraph." She also noticed that her earlier knowledge and skills were reinforced after she attended the training program. She realized that,

> He [the facilitator in the training program] was trying to teach us that, what we
> learn in universities for example, because the university paper [campus newspaper
> where she had to do another of her compulsory internship] was basically a paper–
> *lah*. But, it's a very good training ground, but sometimes it's not what it is in the
> real, like human interest story. We don't have much human interest stories in
> [name of her campus newspaper]. It was really hard news. You know, we didn't
> have the space, we didn't have the time. We were full-time students, you know.

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But working in a full-time, um, working in a real newspaper, you, you have areas

to explore-*lah*.

The training program had further shaped her understanding of the practice. She said,

It gave me a sort of direction in what [the name of her company] wants, you know,

because [name of company] would be different from [name of the newspaper

where she had her internship], right? So, um, that training helped me in that, um, I

can sort of gauge what kind of lead, intro [introduction] [the name of her

company] would prefer and all that. Um, and because I was going to court

reporting at that time, so training really did help me to find out what I need to find

out in court, you see. Like I need to know the charge sheet, you know, because

that was my first ever court training because I never learned all these in [name of

college]. I didn't learn it in [name of the news organization where she had her

internship] as well. So, what I learned from the training program, the court

reporting was quite, quite, quite wonderful-*lah*, because I learned what document

to get, what questions to ask-*lah*, basically.

Although the training program had reinforced her knowledge of the basics of journalism,

En Lin opined that a lot of her learning occurred "on the job" while her "stories are being cleared

[edited]" by her editors who sat through with her while editing her articles. She learned more of

the writing skill such as the house-style, and the questions that she should have asked at her

assignment venue. However, she said she did not learn many of the skills of gathering news from

her editor in that process. Instead, she felt,

It's [the acquirement of news gathering skill] more on the job training. You just

have to use your own instincts. I learn a lot from my peers actually. From the

people that I report to, who are much more senior than me. Like from other organizations, I think I learn a lot about asking questions and how you lead your interviewee to answer what you want by leading the question. You know, just leading, for example how, how you get the question there, you see, by watching out how other journalist works, who are more senior-*lah*.

She shared only one critical incident in my interview with her about an "embarrassing mistake" committed after she had been in the profession for about two years. She had difficulty writing a complicated court case which involved a lot of technical legal terms and different sums of money. She related the incident,

So, um, my story was very, very long and in the end, um, they chopped off - a few things-*lah*…. It was the, either the news desk or the subs desk who… who took out [some of the paragraphs] to cut the story. And in the end the story came out, it lost all its meaning. It was just, um, what the sue [suit] is about, hm, this much [of] money was involved and, um, a thirty para [paragraph], no, a 25 para [paragraph] became a *filler* [brief news] in the end. And the horrible thing was it carried my byline. And, no one [would], it was a very strange thing that you give me a byline for a five-para story…. So in the end my story didn't have the story of the claim neither did it have statement of defense, you know…. What I have learned is, you have to sim—plify…uh, uh, you cannot give a 30-para story.

En Lin has "kept on to that rule ever since" and "it hasn't happened to me again-*lah*." She learned from this incident that "space is king," that a ten to 15-paragraph story has always been a more acceptable length as far as her company is concerned, and that she has to "work within the system." She noticed that,

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I'm more streetwise, as in whenever I get a story, if I think it's very, very

important, I will brief the news desk. And after briefing the news desk, I go one

step further. I even talk to the subs [subs-editor], and even ask him how much

[publication space] I have…. I realized that subs desk is the key to everything

(laughs and then giggling away). Subs desk. The subs are the key to how much

space they have. And, er, I, I, I listen to them. It makes everybody's job easier.

The news desk job [gets] easier because they don't have to cut so much. And

especially the subs, you don't have to cut and it makes me happier also because I

know my story don't have to be cut. You know, and that size will, my, my entire

story will get in because I gave them that space-*what*. I think, most, most senior

journalists do it. They're very smart as in they brief, they just tell the news desk,

that this story is coming and they walk straight to the subs desk and [ask] how

much space do I [they] have.

En Lin has also learned to write concisely since the incident. She learned it mainly on her own,

while on the job, by looking at her seniors' past news clippings at the library.

Gunasegaran

Gunasegaran is an Indian male journalist with a great interest in journalism since he was

in primary school. He said he was particularly selective of which press organization he would

join because he wanted to work in a "neutral" newspaper organization. After holding a

temporary job for three years to support himself financially, he chose an organization that he

believed was "less political." He did not have many problems learning the basics of journalism

because he had been exposed to news writing since youth. After a month of learning from his

editors and following his seniors to assignments, he had somehow mastered the basics and was

on his own.

Gunasegaran's first critical incident was an experience of handling a legal suit over his

article on a crime incident, which the plaintiff eventually dropped. He said he and his

photographer visited the survivors, a couple, in the hospital, took pictures and published the

article just like any news story. However, a year later, his company received a letter from the

couple's lawyer. In a shocking tone he said, "We were thinking, we've got the police report, we

just reported [the event] accordingly." However, he said,

> Immediately we called for a meeting in our office. The lawyers came together.
>
> We discussed what kind of news to report and how to report. We discussed for
>
> one week, everyday. On the last day, the editors came to tell us, my photographer
>
> and I, that this incident made us learn how to report. Last time we didn't know
>
> that we have to publish crime news that has got a police report. This case
>
> happened to be one with a police report. So, we learned that we have to write
>
> news with police report.

Gunasegaran said the legal suit later became somewhat like a case study and lesson to his

other co-workers who were reminded to write news story that was substantiated with a police

report. They were further told never to reveal names of the accused in a crime case. His company

told the plaintiff's lawyer that they would see them in court because they were confident of

having enough evidence to win the case. However, the couple did not pursue the matter and his

company believed that the couple was just trying their luck to get some compensation because

they faced some problems with their business, which was run from the house where the event

occurred.

Gunasegaran's second critical incident involved his encounter with an insincere politician. He had earlier interviewed another politician, from political party A, who was also a councilor of a City Hall. He interviewed him because he had heard good reports about this councilor who had helped many residents under the City Hall. While interviewing him, he was told that the other politician, from political party B, did nothing to help the community. Gunasegaran had earlier experienced some unpleasant encounter with the insincere politician from party B. He recalled,

> One day I called him and wanted to interview him. He just *make don't know* [ignored me], don't want to *layan* [entertain] me-*lah*. I *fed-up* [got irritated and angry] with him. Just fated-*lah*. So, one day he called me. He said you don't cover [interview or attend his assignments] me, huh? I said if you need news coverage, you should ask me. When I went to see you, you just *make don't know* [ignored me]. [He said], OK, OK, you come [and see me].

During the interview, the politician from party B told him that the politician from party A did not do what he claimed he had. After the interview, one day, Gunasegaran happened to bump into the President of the City Hall and chatted with him with the intention of finding out the truth about the two politicians' stories. He found out from him that it was the politician from party A who actually did service the local community there. Gunasegaran went a step further to verify the matter by talking to the residents living in the area under the administration of the City Hall. They confirmed that it was politician A who had helped them relentlessly, such as finding new houses for them as compensation when their houses were taken away for development projects. Or, he would help them find houses near the area where they could buy at a lower price. They even told Gunasegaran that the politician from party B did "nothing" to help them. Gunasegaran

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was angry and at the same time he also heard story that the politician from party B had been paying journalists to do some publicity write-up for him. He decided to test him by making a telephone to him, saying,

> OK-*lah*, you can pay more to me, I can cover your news. Straight away [right away] he said, you come, you come, you come now…then I knew that [he used money to buy publicity]. [I was just] simply asking, [and he answered] how much? [He said] I can give you. I told him this fellow [politician from party A] never tried to give me money…. I also told him that I didn't write the article about him because if he really did the job, I'll definitely come and cover. But you are now saying that you are offering me money. [Do] you work for money or what? I asked him.

The politician from party B became angry and said, "Hey, you [are] talking to me like that-*ah*? Hey, why are you talking like that, nonsense, to me?" Gunasegaran challenged him by saying, "If you want to complain about me, you [go and] talk to my editor. No problem." The insincere politician insisted that he should get credit for the projects that he wrote as being carried out by the politician from party A in his article. He then called Gunasegaran's editor whom Gunasegaran had already briefed about the matter earlier. His editor answered him by saying,

> I know everything about this, but, uh, I don't think you did a good job there, that's why we didn't cover [his assignment]. Normally we don't cover [the name of the political party] story. But since you also tried to give money to him [Gunasegaran], that's why we don't cover it [all the more]. We don't like to do the coverage. You are not a minister or what [some important politician], you are

a YB [*Yang Berhormat*, member of Parliament]. We don't particularly cover

YB's story.

Gunasegaran said money journalism was not something alien in the profession because some companies had offered him money in the form of gift when he attended their assignments. He said this usually happened when journalists travelled to a far location to do the coverage of the company. However, he said he had always refused to accept except for one occasion where he "had no choice" because the company insisted on it and it was in the form of an *angpau* (gift of money that is usually given during Chinese New Year by married couples to children and unmarried adults) that was handed to every journalist present. He said,

> This one is *angpau*. But it's not Chinese New Year [Chinese festive season], it's
>
> not *Deepavali* [Indian festive season], it's not *Raya* [Malay festive season]. [They
>
> said] this *angpau* is for you because you cover [this assignment], you all came
>
> from such far place, that's why my company decided to give you *angpau*.

<div align="center">Jian Sheng</div>

Jian Sheng is the oldest among all my study participants and also with the most number of years (25) of experience as a journalist. A Chinese male, he has struggled in his journalism career from the bottom and professed that most of his learning experience in journalism is through "self-learning" and his "instinct." He opined that in journalism, 90 per cent consists of practical hands-on experience and the remaining five per cent is the principles of journalism that one has learned in college. Among his first learning experiences were two incidents of dealing with the community in a town he was posted to in his first few years of career. He wrote news about how a fruit seller quarreled with his talkative homemaker customer and died of a heart attack the following day as a result of the quarrel. The homemaker complained to the community

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association chief upon reading the news. The chief tried to arrange for an arbitration meeting for him to make an official apology to the woman. However, Jian Sheng refused to do so saying that he was writing as a matter of fact and he could not possibly apologize to someone whose name he did not mention in his article. The meeting did not take place. Jian Sheng suspected that the woman finally saw that she had no grounds to demand for an apology.

The second critical incident was about a gang fight in a nightclub which belonged to the head of a gangster group. He tried to "exaggerate" the scene of the fight by describing how there were flying saucers, plates and bottles in the nightclub during the fight. The business of the nightclub was affected after the publication of his news. The gangster head tried to get another press head to make Jian Sheng apologize to him. Jian Sheng refused to and he was blacklisted by the gangster head and people associated to him. In those days, journalists often had to canvass for advertisements. Jian Sheng reflected on his learning that,

> No matter how small a story is, you have to be fair to all the parties-*lah*. Even you
>
> presumed that it's the action of the housewife which caused the death of the, the
>
> fruit seller. But you must give some grounds-*lah*. Not to jump to conclusion that
>
> she caused the death. But I'm writing in [such] a way that she caused his death.
>
> But I'm not saying that. It's up to the reader to interpret-*lah*. So, this reinforced
>
> my understanding of my writing skill, that you should not jump to conclusion
>
> even [if] you know that that is true. You are not a judge. Let, leave it to the judge,
>
> to the court to decide, if the case goes to court-*lah*, who is right and who is wrong.
>
> So you can present two sides of the story, let people have a fair say-*lah*.

He further connected the two incidents and reflected that,

So, these incidents are from the crime side (laughs), crime story side [that] I can

remember, which have some impact on my, the way uh, I tackle stories-*lah*. I

mean my integrity-*lah*. To be impartial, about not going, sometimes not to base on

assumption-*lah*, even [if it's] to make the story interesting. Otherwise you might

get yourself into trouble, you might not be writing the facts. You are

exaggerating-*lah*. It's also something like sensational [news]-*lah*.

Later, a senior journalist from another newspaper said something that further reinforced his

learning from the two incidents. He recalled,

He said, when you write something about a person, who is involved in a crime,

crime activities, and it's reported without [a] report [police report], obviously it

wasn't reported to the police. When you write this kind of story, you should not

be too descriptive about the person's particulars. If you are going into too details,

then, even if you don't write his name, it means him. A conclusion can be made

that oh, this person-*lah*, the readers read the story, oh, this is the one, that fellow-

lah, Lim Ah Chai-*lah*.

He has since learned the expensive lesson on writing crime stories that under no circumstance

should a journalist mention the name of the criminal or person involved. He had also since then

learned to write objectively.

His third critical incident was about his early years of interaction and rapport building

with his counterparts from other newspapers, especially those from his bigger sister newspaper

companies. He recalled,

At that time, the Chinese papers were basically not particularly interested in the

government news, you know. Uh…certain uh, government functions they might

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not even want to invite Chinese press. I don't know-*lah*, maybe it's my bias. But

it's, the Chinese Press is not given the priority, given the rights to cover these

stories. So, by building up good rapport with colleagues from other sister

newspapers' journalists, I've got access to the government sectors. And then, I

start to learn from there-*lah*. I start to understand the government policy, how the

government operates. Uh, even something which they might not tell you, but we

understand what they are doing…. They've got certain things which you have to

uh, you have to go in to understand, you know. National interest, let's say. Uh,

NEP [National Economic Policy], let's say. Uh, how to achieve NEP target.

Sometimes political matters come in. Uh. So you have to learn from there-*lah*. So,

if you go in, you can understand. If you don't have [a] pass to go in, then you

might be looking from the outside…. But as a journalist, responsible journalist,

you must understand, you must be able to tell yourself, even if you cannot tell the

readers. Because at that time it can be quite sensitive [to write], certain things.

Jian Sheng's fourth critical incident involved his daily work where he tries to get his

articles published. He is aware that he is inclined to write "hard news" and on topics that his

company doesn't prioritize:

Because I'm doing [writing] different things-*mah*. I'm doing [writing] things

which might not be acceptable to…uh, to people who are promoting this

uh….popularity-*lah*. That means certain news [are] very popular among, certain

news they perceive to be popular. Popular and easy to understand, and easy to

write, and have time factors…. Sometimes, some of them-*lah*, not all-*lah*, they

intend to focus on daily happenings and in Malaysian political interest. I'm

writing something which is not [of] political interest. Which is something [that]

we need [mental] realignment, you know, which is, which might not be so popular.

He said he often receives excuses from his editors that the content of his writing is "too deep,"

"intellectual," and very few people would read such articles. But he argued that,

> You know, they've got a stand…. This, you have to go back to macro-*lah*. The
>
> macro policies, Malaysian policy. Because Malaysia, all the time, Malaysian
>
> paper [newspaper] ah, generally-*lah*, not specifically, are politically inclined, you
>
> know. Maybe that's the way where the power comes from-*lah*, because they're
>
> not, if they're not so uh, politically inclined ah, then they might loose some of the
>
> connections. Some of the requirements. I don't know-*lah*. Because this is a very
>
> complicated one, complicated matter.

When asked to elaborate what he meant by using the word "requirement," Jian Sheng explained,

> Maybe the authority wants it [the way of doing things] to be that way? I said
>
> maybe-*lah*, ah? Ah? (raising his eyebrows) Sometimes my writing can be very
>
> critical, you know. But I'm not politically inclined. I want, I want to initiate
>
> changes or changes among the people and also the government. I criticize the
>
> government, for not doing enough.

However, Jian Sheng also is resigned to the fact of the survival of his organization when his

articles are not accepted for publication.

> As I've said, certain news they might not publish-*lah.* They might even censor the
>
> news. Certain part of it. That's a practical aspect-*lah*, that they do it due to the
>
> paper's policy-*lah*. I can understand that-*lah*. Because paper [the newspaper] has
>
> to survive,… Because sometimes someone writes something which is not so

receptive to the government and they might not, and then the officer wakes up on the wrong side of the bed (laughs) and then they might do something drastic [canceling the permit of publication], you know. It still can happen, the possibility, the likelihood is very low-*lah*, you know.

Jian Sheng said he tries to "adjust a little bit" by making his articles written in a simpler and more understandable manner so that they get published.

Jian Sheng felt that his organization's stance is a hindrance to him personally. He said, "Sometimes it can be a hindrance. But to my some other colleagues, it's not [a] hindrance because they are not writing the stories." However he said that it does not affect his learning because,

When you learn something, you don't think [of] political interest-*lah*. You just learn-*lah*. And then, but you, after you have learned something which is worth sharing with the readers, you have to put it in a way which is acceptable.

On the other hand, he said the impact of learning is on his output where he feels a little constrained in his practice.

Jin Ping

Jin Ping is a Chinese female who is rather established in her career considering the fact that she has been practicing for about 10 years only. Like another respondent, Shan Jie, whose experiences would be described later, the takeover of her company by a political party is also an incident that affected her practice. However, unlike Shan Jie, she seems to see the takeover in a more optimistic manner. Although the period during the takeover was more emotional with factions in a political party interfering in the daily running of the newspaper, she said the

situation has calmed down now with less interference. She sees the interference now as an

arbitrator's act to reconcile the situation:

> If you define in the US term, yeah, we [can] have the press freedom to report
>
> whatever you want to. But in Malaysia we are used to the culture that that is not
>
> too free. Even the government will come and interfere [with] you.
>
> She referred to the government interference as the invocation of the Printing Presses and

Publications Act 1984 in having the newspaper banned. It is also popularly known as the

Kementerian Dalam Negeri (KDN) or the Home Ministry permit. However, she sometimes sees

the interference from the political party as advice for the survival of her company. She explained,

> Hm…sometimes they will help, you know, this [name of political party that owns
>
> her company now], the leaders. Because they are with the cabinet, they know
>
> more what the government will like to do. So, [I] cannot say [it's an] interference,
>
> maybe they advise you? Try [to ask you] to behave because this issue should not
>
> be played out today…like SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Symptom], the case
>
> in Singapore recently? ….If let's say we still keep on reporting this, we don't
>
> know what will happen. So you can say it's a very good advice from them [the
>
> political party], not interference, right?…. We can stay for long, we can get our
>
> KDN every year (laugh). [It's] not easy. We've been monitored, always, by the
>
> Home Ministry.

She cited the example of a "very good lesson" by another newspaper, *The Sun,* which has

become a free newspaper now because of loss of revenue from advertisement after publishing

news about the former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. *The Sun* reported that there was a

plot to murder Mahathir. As a result of that, the newspaper was said to be given warnings by the

government and was punished, and advertisers shunned it. Jin Ping said *The Sun* misfortune could have otherwise be avoided if there was such "interference." She said, "This is what happened-*lah*, if you are talking about no interference. If you say press freedom, yes, we are free to report," but added that one would have to face the repercussions.

However, she said the takeover has affected learning in general in the sense that it has generated more understanding of learning about press freedom. She reasoned that,

Yeah, maybe they'll [journalists] learn [that] what they have learned in colleges

or universities where they were taught that they have total press freedom, but

when they come out to work, it is not that way. It's not that just because you want

to report whatever you think…like about this people, A, blah, blah, blah, you will

report everything, no….[We often] try to avoid [using] some words.

She also found that the stance journalists take for learning after the takeover

might be different. After a long pause she said,

Initially when we first became a reporter or a journalist, we said we write from the

eyes of the readers, as the third party. After that [the takeover] we are one of the

interested parties in the, like, [name of the political party], we are one of the

[actors], [in] the EGM?

However, Jin Ping said the learning of the knowledge of journalism could not be affected by the takeover. She cited the example of the rule of thumb of exclusion of certain sensitive information when writing any article at any time where,

It's hard to say that how we write is due to the takeover. Not even when you

interviewed other people before the takeover, they'd scold the government,

[saying the government is] not fair to them, or the Malays get better benefits. You

won't always write these down, right? You don't write all of them down. That's

the way we write….That's a sensitive issue.

Jin Ping's second critical incident was her reluctance to track a politician overseas. She

had been directed by her editor to interview the politician for exclusive stories about the fate of

the politician's career. She said, "I flew there…. And it helped when, because I know some of

the leaders [politicians], I knew his whereabouts, [name of the city]. So my boss said, OK, you

just follow them. Try to interview him." She managed to and even had the chance to be invited

for a lunch with the politician.

Her learning experience with this incident is that her perception of the politician, the

political party and machinery system of the country has changed. She shared,

> How to approach [a politician], without being seen like a stranger? For me, I'm
>
> quite a shy type of person to disturb… you are not invited, not like how we are
>
> invited for assignments everyday, we are invited to, to interview people. I began
>
> to know him quite well after that. I remember when I first became a journalist, we
>
> were like being educated not to like [the name of the politician] very much…. So
>
> after I started working as a journalist, I mixed with them [politicians], I know
>
> more than what we read from the paper…. I know how it [the political party]
>
> works, how these people [politicians], and the constitution, how it works, the
>
> procedures, and the government sector. It made me know more things. [I realized
>
> that if] you want to be a very good journalist at general desk, [it can happen] only
>
> [through writing] political news, not others.

Jin Ping's third critical incident was covering the general elections in 1995 and 1999,

particularly in 1999. The 1999 election was the most shocking to the nation then because the

famous leader of the opposition party, Lim Kit Siang, lost all the seats he contested, one each at the parliamentary and state levels. The two general elections assignments enabled Jin Ping to learn more about the machinery of the government. She said,

> We understand more. We use to say that we have to know a lot of things when covering general news. Like how a cabinet is formed, how a government is set up. In general election, we have to follow the development right from the beginning. The candidate, when he contested for a seat and won, and became a MP [member of Parliament] or has been appointed to a post in the cabinet, we follow all his development from 1995 until 1999 [general election]. We know him well, so it's easy for us to catch up with him. We know his idea, keep in touch with him, then it becomes easy [for us] to get some exclusive news from him. And the skills of writing will build up from there. (long pause). How to write better news. We learn from other newspapers [counterparts] and our seniors.

She went on to share that she was able to build up her network of people through the two incidents where she tracked a politician overseas, and covering the general elections. "Like with [the politician's name], I get to know him myself, not through a third party," she said, adding that it gave her "direct access" to the politicians whenever she needed to double check or counter check some "truth." She attributed this skill that she had learned to her seniors at her organization. Describing her learning experience with her seniors she said,

> You need to ask from them [seniors] these, uh, people's contact numbers, how to keep in touch with them…. So I'll get some contacts from them. Then you refer to the telephone book. It's helpful. So [through] trial-and-error, you just call up these people, and we go to Parliament to mix with all the politicians and ministers. So

from there you build up your own [network] when you are independent one day…. Uh, during my time, I think there were about 15 or 16 seniors. So I just learn from one or two of the most outstanding ones.

As for learning through the general elections, "When I covered the general election, I learned through hands-on experience on how it was done." She compared this with her college journalism education that "never teach you how to become a professional journalist." She compared that,

The college only teach you uh…the, the…very basic knowledge like the constitution, what legal action you may face if you reported this, this news. But when you come out to work, it's totally different…. I do appreciate what one of my lecturers said. He told us very frankly that you do not need to study these two or 20 over subjects. It won't help if you really want to become a journalist. He said you must be good in your languages…. These are [the] very basic things. Whether you understand what the PM [Prime Minister] said. But when you come out to work, it's much more than that. You need to know what will happen to our country and to the world outside there. That's not what you can learn in college.

<div align="center">Ke Mei</div>

Ke Mei is a Chinese female with 21 years of experience. She is the only journalist interviewed who insisted that there was no critical incident that has helped or hindered her learning in becoming a journalist. Instead, she shared at great length on the importance of learning to work within the various constraints which she termed as system and sub-system. System to her is,

The whole country, you know-*what*? They have all these so-called multiracial

[factors to consider], and then you have to be sensitive to things [when writing]

and so on. It's the big system. We work within a confine, you know, uh, of many

factors like uh, uh, media freedom, press freedom…. I have to work within the

confines of company's policy, the political scenario.

She said these restrictions came in the form of "directives from the above." Her writing is set

within this understanding of system when she said that she is aware that,

Journalism is not [about] writing, you know, or getting news, you know. It's an

all-rounded thing, you know. You must understand the whole situation, the whole

picture, you know, before you can put in something, you know, intelligent. It's

not, OK, I've this experience, now I know. [It] doesn't work that way.

She emphasized that, "So, you know, you work in a particular system, you know, of course you

know the system. You know when to act, how to act, how fast to act." She gave an example of

the need to act fast when working within the system, a word that she mentioned 24 times in my

first interview with her. She said,

Vision School (A controversial proposal to integrate schools in Malaysia), you

have to be very fast-*what* [in writing and getting it published before the issue gets

monitored by the government and "banned"]. Even [if] it's a very sensitive

subject. That means-*ah*, Vision School, you know, we ask those uh, new reporters

[about it] they don't know, you know. Of course you must know something about

Malaysian politics, MCA [Malaysian Chinese Association] politics, language,

Chinese school, history of Chinese school, in the present context. All these, you

must have all these information, all these knowledge which you read, you know,

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gather, then it's inside you, you know. Then only you can assess. You cannot

simply judge or assess something without all, all these er…er…knowledge or

information in you. Because judgment is not a skill, you know. It's like rich

information, the knowledge, your exposure, when people come and talk to you.

She explained further that the system consists of "legalized controls" - the various Acts enacted,

for example the Seditious Act. She said,

It's the entire system, you know. Nowadays, you, you don't talk about freedom of

press, you know. There's no 100 per cent freedom, you know. Everybody, every

journalist should know about it. If you think you are going to have 100%

freedom-*ah*, then you might as well don't become a journalist…. It's just [that]

people don't admit it only-*what*! There is no 100% freedom of what you can write,

right?

She continued saying,

You know, the system you are working in, sub-system, the entire system, you

know, you must have all these, you know. You know, in you, so that you know

how to, you know, to mix around doing things.

She asserted that, "You have to work within a system-*lah*, whether you like it or not."

The sub-system, on the other hand, according to Ke Mei is,

It's the office-*lah*. Office policy. You know, it's so obvious-*what*. The bosses will,

you know, hand down things, you know. Uh, OK, you know, you all can't write

about this, you know, because of, you know, uh, very sensitive-*lah*, you know.

They like to use the word sensitive…and then [they] like to use the word like,

play safe, you know. The office is the sub-system. Of course within the sub-

system there is also sub-system like there are editors, higher ups, you know, who,

you know, like to pose their own restrictions?…I think everywhere also [is] like

this. Maybe only *Malaysia Kini* [a web-based alternative newspaper in Malaysia]

it's not [posing any restriction] (laughs).

She opined that there are more constraints in the sub-system as far as learning to carry out her

professional responsibility is concerned. She pointed out that "bosses control the sub-system"

and they are "friends" to the politicians who use them to carry out orders.

However, she believed that learning involves a continuous process through her daily

professional responsibilities. She said she learned at the early stage of her career by processing

press releases and covering many different types of assignments throughout her career life. She

said,

You learn everywhere, you know. Different phases of life you learn different

things. You cannot actually say at what point I learn what. You won't know. It's

like all these [learning experiences] will make you as what you are [now]-lah.

And it's a continuous process.

She likened learning in journalism to music where "Once you know the basic, you keep

on practicing, you read all these things-*ah,* and then you just grow better by the days, that's all."

Learning is also an unconscious act, said Ke Mei who opined that,

Learning is an ongoing [thing] that you don't know actually you are learning, you

know…. Like the SARS-*ah* (Severe Acute Respitory Syndrome, which attacked

many Asian countries and North America in the middle of 2003), SARS was

never in our vocab [vocabulary] [prior to the epidemic], you know.

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Ramanesh

Ramanesh is an Indian male with 15 years of experience in the profession. Although not trained as a journalist, he underwent some intensive formal in-house training program after joining the company for a while. However, he said most of his learning was on the job although the formal training was helpful. He felt that every journalist should have some kind of such training. Most of his learning was based mainly on observing his senior co-workers at work including some informal guidance from his editors. One of his critical learning incidents happened when he had just joined the company and was released into the field without much guidance. He was asked to go to a mortuary to "sit down there" and wait for bodies to be brought in. He recalled,

> You sit from 9 o'clock to 5 o'clock [at the mortuary]. And you come back to the
> office and you say, today this guy died, brought this body, you know. He died in
> an accident. Where was the accident? You don't know. What time was the
> accident? You don't know. So you get a right royal abuse from the boss because
> you didn't ask the question. You'll be abused verbally, told all kinds of names
> you know. The bosses then were much more [abusive]. Now they are all very
> polite. Like, why didn't you ask this question? Those days they'll, you know, use
> the most abusive term. Bosses those days abused people, whether girl, boy,
> homosexual, bisexual, everybody they abused. To the *pondan* [sissy-looking man]
> they really shout in the office, you fellows *pondan*!… you know.

Reflecting back on the incident, he said he did not ask those questions "because nobody told me to ask those questions."

Ramanesh said the incident shaped his alertness as a journalist and not to accept facts at

face value. He said,

It taught me that if you go to [an] accident [scene] don't accept it for what it is.

There I saw [the] body, I just got the detail of the death guy. Never bothered to

find out where was he from, where was his address. So that was the first lesson if

you ask me who, what, when, where, why, how. The 5Ws 1H [of journalism].

He also learned that he had to learn to ask questions under any circumstance. He experienced one

immediately after the first incident where a teenage woman was widowed with a child and was

crying at the mortuary and he was trying to ask her some questions about her husband. But he

believed in not risking his life at his job, especially when covering a demonstration. He learned

to stand behind the police and as far back as possible from the crowd. Besides learning to ask

questions, Ramanesh also learned to establish better relationship with the staff at the hospital,

particularly at the mortuary, so that he could have better access to information that he needs for

his news story. He bought public telephone cards or drinks occasionally for the staff there. He

also gave them his company's complimentary copies of newspapers.

Ramanesh's second critical incident happened in 1998 when he covered the nation's

water shortage crisis. He said,

When I covered the water crisis, I accepted everything. In the initial stages, I

accepted everything they [the water management authority] said, you know? I

accepted everything they said, you know. So I was on good terms with the

director of the [name of the water management authority], he was telling me

stories. But it was not getting me anywhere…you know. It was not getting me

anywhere. But, people were complaining [of no water supply although the

authority insisted there was no water crisis], you know. Then I wrote critical

pieces. I said, what's this, you are saying one story, the state government is telling

another story. This is a good example of the left hand not doing, not knowing

what the right hand is doing…. I was not welcome there anymore.

He was treated like an outcast since he wrote those critical pieces. He shared,

You know, I went for the press conferences but they were very cold towards me.

They only provoke me to ask more questions. But after a while, I realized that,

you know, if I don't ask the critical questions, the nasty questions, nobody is

going to respect you…. You suddenly consciously come to realize that although

you are [on] good terms with the director, he may be your friend, he takes you for

granted.

The lesson that Ramanesh learned from this incident was,

He's [the director] more attentive and respectful to the reporter who writes critical

pieces, you know? So that is one lesson I learn. And I think it lasts till now. You

know, in…in times of crisis, you have to ask the question. The earlier one was

purely for survival. The hospital incidents, you know, where you know you have

to ask the question. After that you ask the questions that are expected of you…

He found out from the staff working in the water authority that they appreciated his critical

articles because they received more funding from the federal government as a result of that

publication. He said,

You have to write the story, whether you like it [or not]. You may not please

people, you know, but you just have to write it. And I think, that was the case, and

I think it's a defining moment because after that I felt I became a better journalist

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because I covered the elections [general elections], I went to the ground, I saw the

candidate, he may be from *BN* [*Barisan Nasional*, National Front Coalition party],

you know, he said rubbish I wrote-*lah*, (hands gesture of writing on a notepad) he

said rubbish.

Ramanesh's third critical incident was a regretful and remorseful one. As a junior

journalist, he was asked by his editor to pursue a politically related story of a politician from the

opposition party. He was asked to confirm some rumors about the politician's personal family

life. The night the story went into publication and before it hit the street the following morning,

the wife of the politician committed suicide. "My God! I felt so bad, I felt responsible for the

woman's death," he said while shaking his head with a remorseful facial expression. He said in a

regretful tone about the lesson he learned from this incident:

You have to defend yourself if you feel strongly about a story. You see, I was not

happy doing the story because so what if a [name of opposition party]

assemblyman was [details of the politician's personal family matter]? How does

that affect the voters? …. And I said I think it's not a right story to do. So, I think

it's his personal life, how does it affect the community at large?

However, Ramanesh also realized that he could not negotiate with his editor when instructed to

pursue the story then. He said as a matter-of-fact,

We were all obedient, we are foot soldiers-*what*, we obey! When you are a junior

reporter, boss tell you do, you do. But when you are, now like me, 15 years [of

experience], I can tell junior reporters, HEY! Do this! It comes with the, you

know, stature.

He added that he also had to think about survival then because of the small community of journalists. He said,

> You don't want to antagonize anyone. In this country, the network is such that if you are seen as too, uh, disobedient, if you left [the name of his organization], and you wanted to join another newspaper, if you want to do [write] in [the language he is writing now], there's only [the names of the other newspaper in the language he is writing now]. Bosses are people. They do talk to each other. They are friends, you know…. You know, or they'll call somebody in [name of his organization] who they know, is their friend, hey, this guy, what's his story, huh? Why is he leaving you all, huh? So, [factor number] one, you don't want [to] jeopardize, you don't want [to] build a reputation as a rebel or a troublemaker. Number two, you want to…er…preserve yourself, for promotional prospects. Not all bosses can take criticism…. So you don't want to land in trouble. These are the two major factors.

Nevertheless, after the incident he said,

> I told myself, if I was not comfortable with a story, I'll tell the boss to his face – look, forget it! You know. I don't want to write the story this way. Or I want to write the story that way. Uh…

A politically related case recently proved his point in case about his ability to exercise his power with his seniority. There was a rumor about the existence of a picture that implicated a politician negatively. Ramanesh refused to let his newspaper publish the picture because he was not convinced that it was authentic and no authority would confirm it then. He said,

I refused to use the picture simply because I felt there was no justification for it!… I said this is a very serious allegation. And when it's a serious allegation, somebody must, we must attribute it to somebody. So that they won't look at you and say you fabricated the story. OK, my credibility is on the line…. Uh…seniority, that counts-*lah*. But with seniority comes respectability…you know. Like they say you age better, just like wine-*lah*. The older it becomes, the better it tastes and that sort of thing, you know.

The picture was eventually published after some authority confirmed the authenticity of the picture and his company even consulted him before doing so.

Regarding the death incident of the politician's wife, Ramanesh was aware that his editor had a personal agenda for pursuing the story and "he's trying to suck up to the bigger bosses-*lah*!" His editor tried to get even with the opposition party on behalf of the pro-government political parties.

<div align="center">Shaesta</div>

Shaesta is a Malay female who has been a journalist for the last eight years. She said she was fortunate to be guided by an editor during her early days in her career. Her editor gave her ample opportunities to learn on the job, to venture and try different things. He encouraged her to attend dinners organized by organizations or bodies related to her area of writing without expecting her to get any story from there. She said he trained her to learn to communicate and establish contacts for her writing through attending such events.

She shared about her experience of being asked to cover sports assignments during her second year in the profession. She was under tremendous pressure because she realized that she would be pitting her rookie journalist status against the many senior journalists from other media

organizations who were also experts in the specific field. Besides, she did not know much about sports. Her editor made her attend the training sessions of national sportsmen and sportswomen for three consecutive months. She recalled the tough time,

> Everyday my assignment will be [watching] training [session], training, training. It just that. There's no particular news there. You just have to sit down, look at how they train, observe what's happening there and you get your story. I mean you pick up from there what to ask, and, that's your story, you see. So when you are new, you go for something like that. It's really difficult because there's nothing that will guide you. It's totally up to you. It's how you, uh, observe, how you ask questions, how you make contact with these people, you know, that will help you to get your stories. But when you are new, that's not easy, you know. And then the players, they won't trust you just like that, you see, to give you information, especially on anything that's critical. Whatever [it is] they don't simply give you if you're new…. I must come back with at least one story, you see. Must. So, it's difficult and I get bored at that time, you see. Just imagine for months you have been doing the same [thing].

Her first shock and learning came when she discovered she was scooped by journalists from other news organizations. What was more shocking to her was that, they were not at the training session the previous day when she was right there. It happened a few times. She noticed that not all the senior journalists from other organizations were there at the training session everyday, but yet they often managed to write news stories that she could not manage to get despite being there. She recalled in a somewhat frustrated tone,

Sometimes, OK, sometimes you go there [and] you are on your own [alone], with

no seniors or whoever, and then you come back with one story. The following day

you look at other papers [newspaper], huh! They have so many stories you know,

on [name of the sports she writes on], you see. And they were not there! You

thought you're there, [but] not there, but they have their own ways to get

information. So then, you know, when you look at that, it's really frustrating, you

work there [at the training sessions], but you still don't get good story.

Shaesta said the incidents made her stronger and more determined to improve although she was

bored with attending the training sessions and was feeling frustrated.

Shaesta learned through this incidents that she had to learn to "tackle this association [the

sports association] people, the sportsmen and sportswomen" and "make sure that they trust you

to give you the things you need for stories." She learned the principle of,

Get their trust. So at first when you, uh, uh, get a story, just a normal story, it's

nothing [great though]. But then, that's how you gain [their] trust. Once they trust

you, if there is any critical thing or anything that is, uh, I mean, uh, anything that

is not supposed to be exposed or [the announcement is] supposed to be delayed,

whatever, they will tell you but you have to ask them.

She also started gaining the association officials' and the sportsmen's and sportswomen's

trust by talking to them and interviewing them for personal write-up articles. During tournaments

seasons when she had more chances and longer time to mingle with the association officials,

sportsmen and sportswomen, she took the opportunities to strengthen her relationship with them.

She also often dropped by the association's office to have a casual chat with the officers without

any specific request for information for her to write a news article.

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Shahzam

Shahzam is a Malay male journalist who considers himself relatively established in his career. He has 15 years of experience writing on different subjects. Although he did not go to any journalism school, he had always been intrigued by the profession through movies about journalists at work. But after he became a journalist, he soon discovered that what he saw on movies was not quite the reality of journalism. He said the movies often portray journalists as being on the edge in war scenes with unpredictable working hours. However, he realized that that was not what most journalists do although there was always a possibility to do so. Although he had received some form of formal in-house training from his company, Shahzam's real training was on the job. He referred to his daily on-the-job learning in his first few years of practice as a process of building "basic groundings." He said it was an important period albeit it being the most "demoralizing" and "worst time" in his career life where he gained understanding of the government system and its workings. He elaborated rather extensively the importance of understanding the system and explained,

> You must have ample grounding, you must have the knowledge about the system.
> So, you know, basically the first few years is giving you that grounding where
> you go and cover the ministry for example, obviously [it] is to get an
> understanding of how the ministry operates… or perimeter set by the ministry.
> The other things that are going on, I mean, individually how do these ministers or
> officials work in their personal capacity. So, you have to know the inside and
> outside of this particular ministry, government system, and that (emphasized with
> a firm tone) gives you an idea.

Regarding the system Shahzam said,

I mean the system of government, for example, the police system, uh, the, the, the

system of politics. We are talking about the different, different, uh, institutions

within, within a nation. I mean basically [when] we talk [about] the nation, we are

going back to the government, the political system, the custom, the cultural er,

what do you call it? The baggage that they carry. So each and every one have got

their own idiosyncrasies which are, we sometimes depart from what the textbook

provides us.

The first critical incident that he shared was about following up an issue that took him to

a foreign country for the first time in his fourth year as a journalist. It was an issue regarding

some top Malaysian government officials being arrested in jail after being alleged of committing

a crime in the foreign country and while waiting to be charged in the country's court. He was

trying to get access to the officials but he faced two main difficulties. The first was to convince

the all-powerful head of the area, where the officials were being jailed, to allow him and his

photographer to see them. The second was finding an interpreter. He realized through the

incident how shallow the knowledge he had about the country despite it being Malaysia's

neighbor. He also realized how helpless he was then because he could not find an interpreter in

that area although he was given money, for the first time, by his company to engage an

interpreter. He finally resorted to contacting the Malaysian authority near the area and found an

interpreter after much difficulty in locating him. Reflecting on the shock he experienced through

this incident, Shahzam said,

That gave me a realization that, hey, we thought that you're so close to [name of

the country].... But yet I did not know much about the system. And within the

short period of that few days you know, I discovered there were a lot of things

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that I did not know about my neighbor…. And at that time also, the, the need to

learn about how to approach them, how to talk to them, how it is to be considered

to be rude, how it is to be, you know, proper. And I also learn at the same time,

the Western press, they come to interview them, and behave in a rude manner

they do accept it, because they are foreigners, to them. But you from Malaysia,

our neighbor, how can you not know our culture? You know, that kind of thing.

That's one thing that impacted, it had quite a bit of impact on me. Because [by]

then I started, hey, despite thinking that I know so much about [the name of the

country], as how I know about, about [names of other neighboring countries]

Shahzam's learning experience from his first overseas assignment was "to get as much

understanding about the subject matter" and not to assume. After the incident, he said, he became

a better journalist in the sense that he was a "go-getter" and was prepared to push himself to get

any piece of news. Most importantly, he learned to be more resourceful, a skill that had been put

to use in many of his overseas assignments since then. He said in a confident voice,

So, I mean, from then on, I just thought that, if there is a piece of news, I get the

tip off, give me, er, call me, tell me, that they heard about this, I'll get the news. I

started building myself, so to speak, that I would be able to get any news that I

want, provided that you tell me. I mean, if let's say I can't get all the tip off that

this is happening, that is happening, but if you heard something, something down

there, if there's anybody that you can trust in getting news, so to speak, you know

that kind of confidence after that? Because I saw that hey, despite the difficulties I

could get the news… I could even threaten the head of the area, OK, when [at]

first he refused to allow us to go in [to see the officials in the jail]. He said take

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my word they are OK, they are fine. No, no, I said, I'm not going to go back and

write and say that everything is fine, because I didn't see them. You know you

have that kind of, er…pressure, putting pressure on them, you know. I felt I was, I

was ready-*lah*, I was ready to handle any issues, any crisis, any kind of news that

the, the [news] organization may want. I know somehow or rather I would get it.

Whether it is to their expectation or not is another thing, but I know I would be

able to get something at the end of the day.

Shahzam's second learning experience was the economic crisis that hit the country in

1997. This was followed by domestic political conflict where the former Prime Minister

Mahathir Mohamad sacked former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. He said it was a

difficult and a politically emotional event, not only for the journalist fraternity but for the whole

nation too. He realized that the event required him to put in extra care in handling his analytical

article because of the sensitivity of the issue. He shared,

Generally people want to know how you conclude it…. And so when I made my

conclusion, I got a bit of, er…what you call it, response, from readers who were,

regardless [of] which angle I take for my conclusion. I mean the, the, Reformasi

[the name of a movement] side, if my writing doesn't seem to be very credible to

what they are doing, I get very strong reaction [from them]. If I write something

that is not very credible to the UMNO and Mahathir side, I get strong response

from them too. So, you know, we are not a judge, you know, when we weigh both

sides of decisions. Here, we are writing the issue. So this issue I think, that is not

the way to do it. So you give back up, reason, why, but if people are not going to

see the reason, why, how you come to that conclusion, people are just looking at,

are you with us or not? You know, the either-with-us-or-not puts you in a very

difficult position because you can't argue the case anymore.

He put this issue in a wider context of Malaysia's practice of journalism. He said in a

rather slow and carefully worded tone,

To me, it's pretty simple, you know. Every newspaper you work [with] would

have a certain degree [of] which side they want to be, you know. People choose

side. Er… but in our case, our problem, it's probably we do not have the choice of

choosing side.

He continued in a firmer tone,

We are told which side you should be, you get what I mean? That kind of thing.

That's the only problem. But at the end of the day, I think I, I look at it as just …

a challenge to Malaysian journalists how do you work within that system which

has already decided for you which side you should take, which is to be on the pro-

establishment side. So how you work within that system which has already

decided for you [which side to take]. You know, it's, it's, it's different, in, in,

England for example. You join The Sun for example, they decide to change side

from pro-conservative to pro-laborer, you know. So, [if] you work for The Sun,

you automatically become a pro-labor writer, so to speak.

Working within such a system made him learn the need to negotiate for an assignment or

a write-up on an issue that he believes is important. He stressed that,

Let's say, I know I am banging my head against the, the wall to try to, to push, try

[working on] an issue that is not taking me anywhere… nobody wants to take up

the cause…. Then probably, I'll put it aside for the time being, it's probably our

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colleague, I said I probably shouldn't be fighting it now. It's probably what I

would call it, we describe it as strategic withdrawal, I said I wouldn't want to, to,

to loose the war. You know, I would rather fight the battle and keep it when I

think when the right time comes. When the right time comes, in a way [when]

things are a little more in perspective, we live on a day-to-day basis. Sometimes

you see, now it's the time to try, so to speak, if you know you should have a say

on that particular subject. So I would write it immediately. So again it's also how

you strategize your approach to subject.

Shan Jie

Shan Jie is a Chinese female journalist with the least number of years of experience

among my respondents – seven. Shan Jie's tone throughout the interview was of a rather

disappointed one and somewhat disillusioned with the environment of journalism practice in

Malaysia. There were a lot of pauses as she answered my questions throughout the whole

interview session. She explained her pauses indirectly when she answered my question about

how she handled the condition of journalism practice. She said that she found it difficult and was

hesitant to answer my questions because she has not thought much about it despite feeling

disappointed and disillusioned with the profession. Two political incidents were the cause of her

feeling and opinion on the profession. It was also due to her being more exposed to covering

assignments related to politics at the later part of her career. The political incidents were also her

critical incidents that have helped her in learning the reality of the practice of journalism.

Shan Jie's first critical incident was the buying of her company by a political party. It was

emotional and an event that caused much dilemma for her. She lamented that,

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We really hoped [the name of the previous owner of her company] just sold [the name of her newspaper]. But, what we didn't want to see it happen was, (laughs) a political party took over [name of her newspaper]. But at the same time we can't do anything because [name of her newspaper] is a listed company. [Name of her company] is a listed company. Whoever has the money can buy the share. So we can't do anything.

Such was the effect of the takeover on Shan Jie's that she even thought about quitting the profession. She kept on lamenting the fact that she "can't do anything" now with the takeover. Although she admitted that even before the takeover, the political party that now owned her company had some political interference in the running of her company, the degree was less and from different factions of politicians. Speaking about interference, she pointed out that in the first place, one has to understand and accept the fact that there is no 100 per cent press freedom in Malaysia. She said as-a-matter-of-fact,

We really have to face, we really have to accept this fact [that there is no 100 per cent press freedom]. It's just that, sometimes, we really feel, maybe not hopeless-*lah*, but we really feel that we cannot do anything. We just can't do anything. It's just that, sometimes we feel like um…quite down, you know…(laughs and then sighs)…. Um (long pause), this, I think, uh, I think, if I want to, if I want to um (pause), as I've said this is the fact, uh. So, it depends on what, what kind of journalist you want to be (laughs)…. This is the thing that I've learnt. And this is, this is, this is one of the things that I have to learn-*lah*. I mean, because, um…that's why if you want to be a Malaysian journalist, you have to accept the fact [that there is no freedom of press]. Because as journalists we also…the

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government also has the Acts to control the press. Like the Publishing and

Printing Act [Printing Presses and Publications Act], and then the OSA [Official

Secrets Act], even the ISA [Internal Security Act]

Shan Jie's second critical incident was the national political event involving the sacking

of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

The event showed her how precarious politics is and how it can cause a major change in the

country's political climate. She said,

> Once the first man, he doesn't want the second man, he just kicked him out, just
>
> like that. This is the fact, even though we all knew that Anwar might be the next
>
> Prime Minister. But now (laughs), suddenly, he's been sacked and sent to jail.

To Shan Jie, these two incidents were interrelated because they were the major markers

of the political direction in the country that had affected her learning in the sense that she became

constantly aware of what she was writing. She has also somewhat learned to cast her verdict on

the eventual fate of the news story that she writes before it is published. She realized that,

> I think I start seeing something that…my way [of writing] has to (laughs), has to
>
> follow some kind of instruction. This is for sure. Now, before I start writing a
>
> news story, I will tell myself, this kind of news won't come out [be published]
>
> very long-*lah*. They won't give big coverage. But this news, I'll know there'll be
>
> a big space for that…so, I think this is the kind of change in my learning and
>
> practice as a journalist if you ask me.

However, she said that she has not changed after her encounters with the two incidents, as far as

learning to carry out her journalistic responsibilities is concerned. She said,

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No doubt I have to write and follow the instruction from the company and predict

how much of what I am going to write would be published, I'll still write like I

used to, any news story. It's just that when they need to change [my story], to edit,

they will tell me (laughs). You get what I mean?

Shan Jie noted that sometimes the instructions from the political party to her company on

how an issue ought to be handled came after an article about it had been published. She

lamented,

Well, actually, this is not good. Although I know we don't have 100 per cent press

freedom, but this kind of instruction is to serve one man or two persons' interest.

Uh…(sigh), uh…actually I can't accept this-*lah*. But at the same time I cannot do

anything. I told my news editor, I really cannot accept this kind of practice but I

respect your decision. I respect your instruction, but for me, as a professional

journalist, I cannot accept it.

She stressed that her learning essentially remains the same whether it was before or after

the incidents. But the incidents, particularly the takeover of her company by a political party,

have mainly affected her working environment. However, she emphasized that such change was

something "expected" and she tries to maintain her neutral position when carrying out her

professional responsibilities.

<p style="text-align:center">Shukran</p>

Shukran is a Malay male journalist who has been a journalist for nine years. He said he

entered the profession by accident because he never thought of becoming a journalist. It was

after attending several interviews for a financial researcher post where he was rejected because

of a lack of experience that he realized the closest alternative was journalism. He said he

experienced a huge learning curve during his first year, especially in the first few months. He recalled those days,

> Basically I, because I don't have a journalism background to ask questions
>
> properly [when interviewing people, at press conference and] things like that. So
>
> basically my experience, the first three months, I would think, is mainly on-the-
>
> job training. Either following a senior [to assignment], I followed senior for the,
>
> for the first week, I think.

Shukran's first critical incident was attending a formal training course on interviewing technique during his second year in the career. He said this course was a "turning point" of his career and had helped him tremendously in carrying out his responsibilities. He attended several in-house courses earlier of which one of them was a study tour to the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. He shared how he benefited from attending the course,

> I think it's not so much [about] what you know because what you know will help
>
> you write the story. But what you have to get out of that person when you talk to
>
> them, when you interview them, you know. That really matters because um, when
>
> you write that story you have to attribute [to] that person, you know. So, you
>
> cannot just simply write the story, um… I think, or rephrase the whole story just
>
> like that, you know. Because what you know, um, you know, you have to get the
>
> subject to say something or, that's how the way I see journalism because you
>
> cannot misquote or you have to minimize that, you know. And, or you have to go
>
> to great length to actually make that person um…um… say whatever they want to
>
> say and really help them to, to get them, the message across to the public or to the
>
> readers, you know. So I think that's the most useful [course] that I've attended.

After attending the course he learned that he could take "one step further" by being the one "who ask the question and get the story that you want." He recalled,

Because I feel that after that course, I can see how easy it is to get around people, how easy it is to get things done, basically, on the phone, uh, as well as talking [on a] one-to-one [basis] and things like that. Because it's so important especially in Malaysia when people are not quite free to talk or people are not, people are more reluctant to talk. They always, they don't try to hide something, it's just that they are not so eloquent on the subject. They are not so, free with, maybe some of them don't speak English well, and so, they don't um, know the subject well. But you can get a lot of things out of them.

Shukran's second critical incident was an incidental observation that he made about a senior co-worker at the office during his first year in the company. He was earlier talking to that senior, with over ten years of experience by then, when the senior stopped to answer a telephone call. He turned back to his seat, which was nearby, and continued with his work while waiting for the senior to finish answering the call that lasted for a few minutes only. He recalled that, "I just happened to be around. Not like eavesdropping or anything like that…. The way he asked, the way he asked was like quite firm, and um… and he gets things done, you know." He discovered from the "eavesdropping" incident that,

He was working on a story, uh, that couldn't get, uh, that came to a dead end, in the sense, people don't want to say things. But then, one thing he did was [to] ask that person, uh, he said, who else he can actually talk to, and then you know ask him other ways, or then he asks him whether he is free for tea, you know, [so that they could talk about] something that he cannot talk on the phone.

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The lesson that Shukran learned from the eavesdropping was, "How he interviewed people and how he got this information. Like, to become resourceful as well." But the skill that Shukran learned from his senior was,

> You have all these possibilities [of getting someone to talk to you] that you can think of. Uh, to me, that person helps you rather than OK, I cannot talk, that's it, that's the end of it, you know? So that phone call teaches me, for instance, OK, the person cannot talk, maybe he can see you. Sometimes you assume the person cannot talk means that the person cannot talk on your story. Maybe he wants to talk later, when he meets you in person. And [the] second thing that I learn [from him] also [is] like, if the person cannot talk, there're other persons who can help you as well. So, so you can actually get the thing from the person who doesn't want to talk, you know. or, you know, so there's few other ways you can go around so that you won't waste your time on the phone, getting nowhere. So, that's what I learn, things like… even if like, no comment, it's a story as well. And, uh, basically, like being resourceful and being persistent you know. And how you can be, you can be persistent without getting too annoying, without being annoying, because you have to notice as well the other person has their job to do, and sometimes when you try to be persistent, that annoys the other person. So, this person has handled it quite well in the sense I don't think he annoyed him, it's just that the time is not right for, for him, or whatever, and he chooses another time.

The lesson he learned from the telephone conversation was reinforced when he recalled his earlier failed attempt to get people to talk to him. He said,

When I first started, I have this experience – I wanted to find out [some

information] about this company. I'd actually like to interview this company. It's

a listed company, and then, uh, he refused. And I was so offended. I was like, hey,

I'm doing you a favor, and you don't even want to acknowledge and not only that,

you, you, you knock me down straight away, you know. And, and I thought I was

so arrogant. I was just like, OK, and I'd start to be offensive.… And I realized that

it didn't get me anywhere either, you know. People got angry on the other side

and I got worked out as well.

Shukran had also learned to observe his seniors at work when they were at press conference or

while covering assignments.

His third critical incident happened when he was more established in his career and

where most senior journalists were invited to attend what is commonly known as "CEO [Chief

Executive Officer] briefing." Shukran said CEO briefing is a time arranged by a company where

the CEO of the company would make the company's official announcement in a private meeting

or interview session with a journalist or a few journalists. He said if the CEO briefing involves

meeting with more than one journalists, the journalists are usually selectively invited so that they

are not from rival organizations. He added that sometimes it could be a very casual meeting with

editors and journalists over a lunch or coffee at some "cozy setting" and information for news

were obtained "just over conversation."

One of the most significant CEO briefings that Shukran has attended was by some

foreign financial institutions. He said besides journalists from wire services and other Asian

countries, only several Malaysian journalists were invited to an all-expenses-paid-for CEO

briefing in the form of a seminar in a posh hotel in a foreign country. However, Shukran only

realized months after the "seminar" that it was a strategically planned public relation propaganda in preparation for the financial crisis that hit the Asian region in 1997, which the institutions were aware of before it happened. However, he said,

> Basically most reporters were not aware of it [that the financial crisis was about to happen]…. And then, uh, basically the briefing, which is very propaganda, all the good thing about [names of the foreign financial institutions], talking about what's wrong with current economic situation, and, um, basically just to give some background, so-called, background, you know, to make it easier for you to write about [names of the foreign financial institutions] later, and we don't know what happen, what's is going to happen later-*lah*…. I just thought that it was a very eye-opening [seminar], you know, to see what the whole thing was.

Shukran said the "seminar" also provided them information about the services the foreign financial institutions had and their current and future plans to help Asian governments. He said when the 1997 financial crisis happened, "naturally…you explained from [names of the financial institutions] perspective." He observed that the seminar shaped the opinion and flow of the news then, which sided with the financial institutions. What Shukran had learned from the seminar and other CEO briefings that he attended later was – "keep an arm's length" relationship with the companies.

However, at the same time, Shukran sees CEO briefings more like a "win-win" situation. He said, "Sometimes it can be used as shrewdly as the one [names of the foreign financial institutions] or it can be used as a way to inform the public." He explained the pros of attending CEO briefing as,

That's the best way to get stories, because, uh, sometimes you heard so many

things in the market, that's the best way because if you know these people, it's

very easy for you to get a story and to get it confirmed and things like that. Rather

than having a story which is half-baked and half-done, things like that…you can

get a lot of stories actually coming out and that really helped your career in

several ways, in many ways. If you are [a] senior [journalist], that's the only way,

because you should be able to lead rather than hoping that the story will come to

you. Because I think if you are talking about percentage of my story, originate

from doing those kind of briefings and meetings and things like that,

um…because I know them and they are comfortable talking to me.

He added that CEO briefings also gave him a platform for networking. On the other hand,

Shukran also realized that,

They [the companies] go to the one they are most comfortable [with when

inviting them for CEO briefings], that they can um, get their message across, you

know…. Sometimes these people are very comfortable with you, and… it's a bit

difficult. Just like you are writing about your parents, you know, you know what I

mean (laughs). For someone close to you, you…you…how much you can be

honest. That's why sometimes this kind of relationship you really have to put [it]

at arm's length rather than to be closer with them.

Siti Zulaida

Siti Zulaida is a Malay female journalist with 10 years of experience. She is one of the

few interviewed who never went to a journalism school nor attended any formal in-house

training immediately upon her joining the profession. She related how she often cried in front of

the computer trying to write her news story when she first joined the company. Although she believed her co-workers would be willing to help her when she was going through those struggling moments, she tried to learn on her own because she did not want to trouble them. For example, she said, she would put newspaper beside her to see how news was being written while she tried to write her own news. She said she also took her own initiative to learn by following her seniors to night assignments to see how they carried out their work. She took about a month to familiarize herself with the job.

Siti Zulaida shared two critical incidents. The first was dealing with a threat from a government officer from a department related to a story she wrote earlier. She had written an article about drinking water pollution in one of the states. The pollution happened due to negligence of management by the government. She remembered the threat was worded something like, "You better stop writing the story or we'll do something to you." She said,

> Hm… I just told the guy [the man who threatened]… uh… [it's a] very wrong
> move [of you] to say that. I said, I'm not scared, because I have all the data. If you
> want to bring this case to the court, I have my data as well. So I don't really
> bother about that and I don't think [he would continue with the threat]… it just
> stopped there.

Siti Zulaida learned from this incident that having evidence to support what she had reported was important. She said she also learned the importance of doing a balanced reporting. She explained that after the incident,

> Uh…every time I get information of this kind of, uh… information, so I, it's
> either I write the story first and I get the explanation after that or before I write I
> get the explanation from them. But, but normally we reveal first, provided that we

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have the data with me. So only then I write first what's the problem blah, blah, blah and then uh, ask, the second day ask them to answer and then reveal the data why we said this, something like that.

But Siti Zulaida also learned hat the incident was not purely a matter of her writing the articles to get the authorities to solve the water pollution problem. She was aware that she was dealing with political statement from some government bodies that wanted to let the matter rest by saying actions had been taken. She said she could not trust the government's statement until she has verified the matter with her own reliable and credible source.

Another critical incident had taught her the importance of verifying information received. This time she was sent for an official overseas assignment to a war-torn country. Although she did her homework about the country before leaving for the assignment, it was not until she got to the ground of the bombed area that she found the truth of the country. Upon returning home, she wrote articles saying that the people have not learnt from the difficulties of the war they had experienced. She received negative reactions from other journalists and Malaysian government officials who were in the same trip who asked how she could come to such a conclusion. She said,

> I said, yeah, that was what I experienced, because I, I, I wrote something different from what people said that they are suffering from this war and everything. I said maybe they are suffering from this war but they should learn how to be, to be a better person… maybe from this war they became tough, but they became very snobbish, you know, these people. They really asked for money…. Everything you have to deal with money. So, I wrote that, the experience there… and some

people who went with me [to the trip], they scolded me, how could you write

this? I said, well, we have to tell the truth also.

Siti Zulaida said the government official there who was supposed to be her official interpreter

asked for money for everything she requested such as to bring her to some places so that she

could get some information for her articles. She was also told that she would have to pay USD50

for a page of information printed from the Internet.

Like the first incident where she would not trust any government's statement without

verifying it herself, she learned from the second incident that one could not trust any information

without being at the place to check it out. She learned to be more critical and analytical of herself

when writing news. Her writing has become more of an experience-based and not merely a

research-based one. For her research, she seeks information from more neutral and credible

bodies.

<div align="center">Wen Gang</div>

Wen Gang is a Chinese male journalist who believed his ambition to become a journalist

was partly molded through his hobby of reading comics such as Superman and Spiderman since

childhood. He was further attracted to the profession by his family friend, a journalist, who

shared his working experiences with him. He also remembered how his secondary school

teachers used to comment that he wrote good essays. Having 13 years of experience in the

profession by now, Wen Gang feels, "the longer you work the easier it gets." He described his

learning experience as one that is "more or less through trial-and-error-*lah*."

Wen Gang's first critical incident was a legal defamation suit that was brought against

him. It was his news story about a civil servant who was arrested for interrogation over a credit

card fraud case. He did not follow up on the case although the man was later found not guilty and

released. Several months later, his company received a letter from that man's lawyer. He went through a series of meetings with his company lawyer to prepare for a court case only to find that his company paid the man implicated in his story without fighting the case in the court. Although he was glad that his company stood behind him throughout the legal case ordeal, he said, "I was not very happy [with the way the case was being settled]. Because I thought maybe they could have fought it out-*lah*, you know." He continued with almost a sigh that, "But after, after all the money didn't come out from company's pocket. It's the insurance company." Wen Gang believed that his company could have won the legal case if it fought it in court. This is because there were some mistakes in the article that he wrote that could not have pinpointed the identity of the civil servant. In an almost embarrassing tone he said,

> There were certain mistakes (laughs a little) in the, in the story, you know. The place of arrest, I got it wrong. And his age, I got it wrong. So, indirectly, we were not pinpointing him. Huh…after all the place of arrest was wrong, the age was wrong, you know.

Wen Gang also pointed out that it was his informant's tactic of giving him "not that accurate" details for the story. This was to protect the informant, "in case the bosses [of the informant] see the story, they can't pinpoint it back to the source."

However, Wen Gang also realized that his company opted for out-of-court settlement because of the police.

> From what I heard, the police was also sued by this particular fellow. Uh, and the police settled out of court with him also. Uh, the lawyer was telling me if the police have fought it out we would have fought it out [too]. But since the police

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settled [out of court], you know, OK, it doesn't, doesn't look that good-*lah*. Uh,

so he said, if the police settled, we settle [too].

Wen Gang's second critical incident was about his learning experiences when he first joined the profession. He recalled,

It was just like I was thrown into the sea, you know, without any life jacket. Uh,

they ask me to go, OK, today you do crime. Uh, so I didn't know anything and

then I was asked to just follow the Chinese press reporters around. And whenever

they go, you follow. And that's what I did. So from there I slowly learn-*lah*.

He pointed out that it was a norm those days for the Chinese press reporters to meet at a certain coffee shop and they would then go and see the police chief for stories. He also noted that other journalists writing in the same language as he did were not that helpful to guide him or they were not comfortable if he followed them. He said, "Because the [language he writes in] press people, they don't work together. [They are] rivals. Uh (laughs). They are afraid of you knowing their contacts and all that." He found such learning on the job to be helpful too especially when his editors asked him to sit beside him while his story was being edited.

Wen Gang's third critical incident was about his attempt to get his article published about a policeman who was involved in drug related crime. He spent one month investigating the case and managed to get it published, but his editor asked him to retract it, which he refused to. The policeman threatened to sue him. However, he was suspended from the police force and sacked two years later. Wen Gang felt his refusal to retract the story was "vindicated" by the sacking.

Yi Ying

Yi Ying is a Chinese female with 9 years of experience. She observed that skills taught in journalism school are being readily practiced in the profession but not the ethics of journalism. She said,

> I remember they [journalism school] said anything that involves conflict of
>
> interest, you don't cover it. If you are from the school you don't cover anything
>
> that is from the school. But I do see people here practicing it. And they have no
>
> qualms about doing it which I don't feel comfortable doing it myself. I don't do it.

She said many people had been coming to see her to give her "freebies" so that she would do a free write-up for them. However, she said she put a stop to such practice and had not given in so far. She said she found that "there is room to change all these [practice of ethics in journalism], there's room not to follow [what is taught in journalism school]." She asserted that she had been taught that she had the choice not to follow what others are practicing.

Yi Ying's first critical incident was somewhat related to ethics of journalism albeit in a different manner. In this incident, she insisted on writing the truth and not "just to fit in the situation" or "just to make so and so look good." It involved writing about a development project that had to be stopped because of some archeological findings on the site. The matter developed into a more complicated economical dispute between the company that carried out the development project and the government. The matter then became a three-party dispute when the museum came into the picture. Yi Ying was caught in between when she was accused by the company for writing news that painted a negative picture of their business and it resulted in some problems with their clients. Her reporting of the statements that she had obtained from both the parties, the government and the company, were being disputed. She later discovered that the

government actually had a stake in the development project too. The museum authority, obviously, was trying to find ways to preserve the archeological findings while all these disputes were going on. Yi Ying said,

> The developer called me up… making some huge complaint and all these things, and… my facts are not accurate and all those things. They demanded an apology and a correction. But, when I dig out further, I found it's not exactly entirely wrong. It could be inaccurate but it's not wrong to say that. So, there were a lot of background stories that I didn't know and so…

At the point of interviewing for this research, Yi Ying was still writing on the matter although the intensity of the dispute had somewhat toned down.

However, she said what she had learned from the incident was that there was no absolute truth as far as writing claims were concerned. She explained,

> It's against the other person's point of view. It's never absolutely right. Then, in that case, where is my stand? Where do I write the story? Or, it, it really depends on whom I get the story from. Whether [I] get if from the government source, or get it from the developer's source, or get it from the museum. It's all different.

She learned not to be judgmental in her work too. Yi Ying also learned about preservation work through the process of writing the stories. She said it was a new subject to her and she made an effort to learn it from the local non-governmental organizations, people who live in old buildings and the museum. She learned about setting a balance between development and preserving heritage, and the cases involving dispute of vague law concerning preservation between the public and the government.

Yi Ying's second critical incident involved a more high-handed case during her early days in the profession. She was reporting a court case involving a former politician from a political party that owned her company. She said she approached the story in a "very aggressive manner" and did very detailed research on the case and knew the whole case like the back of her hand before she went to cover it in the court. However, after she had written the story, she realized the severity of the case when her editor told her about some telephone calls to one of the editors. She said,

> My editor told me [name of the person with the highest position in her company,
>
> A] called up [name of the person with the second highest position in her company,
>
> B] and [B] was actually on the phone with [A] and briefing him on this and then I
>
> realized I have gone too far and [name of the politician] could have recognized
>
> me [when I was at the court] and called up A to tell them don't play up the story
>
> da, da, da…and all those things.

She said she realized that her company did not want to have too many details about the case in the story. The story was very much toned down after her second highest boss "demanded to have a look at the story and actually instructed my editor to take out this and that." She reflected on the incident that,

> I was behind my editor to see how they redo the story and [to make sure that]
>
> there's nothing wrong with the story. That was when I was young-*lah*. But I was
>
> very, I thought it was a very good story, and I was doing it in a very aggressive
>
> manner. But you learn also, certain things you might be very keen to get it but
>
> your organization might not be as keen as you are.

Yi Ying said such telephone intervention on stories to be published is not rare. It could involve not only persons from political party that owned her company, but also those who have close relationship with the people of higher authority in her company. But in this case, it was both. Looking back, Yi Ying realized that her company had been trying to "shape" and "condition" her. She explained,

Especially when you were younger, you were a budding reporter. They do [influence your practice], by shaping you. If they don't feel comfortable, they don't feel…they don't trust you until they, they, they consider you as one of them, or they consider you as one of their products. Here…. There's [a] certain kind of approach, certain kind of approach for certain kind of stories. Um… at the end of the day, the bottom line is they don't want troublemaker reporters. Meaning, uh, they don't want you have story where you cause them into trouble.

She was more aware of the kind of story angle that her company looked for. She said,

When I do certain political story and this is what, this kind of angle they are looking [for], I'll give them that kind of story. I don't think it's a, it's, it's, it's life and death situation…. There are certain stories you can't play, like court story. That's a court decision of the day. This is how we have to write the story. You can't put in your perspective. You just have to put in the judge's perspective… so that kind of story you don't say anything. You just report. It's straight reporting…. Sometimes they want a positive story. Let's say if I know they want a positive story, you write in a positive angle. Then I just write in a positive angle.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented the study participants and their critical incidents. The 15 Malaysian journalists who were interviewed for this study shared 32 incidents that were self-identified as significant in their learning experience. All the incidents described in this chapter formed the understanding of the journalists learning. They were being used to address the research questions which shall now be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: WHAT JOURNALISTS LEARN

This study attempted to understand how Malaysian journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities. Three research questions were examined. They were:

1) What do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities?

2) How do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities?

3) What contextual factors affect journalists' learning on the job?

This chapter presents findings concerning the above-mentioned first research question and discusses the findings in sequence. Table 3 displays the findings for the first research question – what do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities? It is found that journalists learned two major aspects of their practice: substantive journalism skills, and negotiating skills. The former includes essentially the journalism and human communication skills that journalists need in order to carry out their professional responsibilities. Three sub-areas of the substantive journalism skills have also been identified. They are basic journalism skills, which involves the basic journalistic skills of gathering information and writing news articles, communication skills, and skill at managing content and publication space. On the other hand, negotiating skills that the journalists learned is related to how they go about bargaining for more power that would increase the probability of their articles being published.

Table 3

Findings for Research Question 1

What do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities?

▪ Substantive Journalism Skills
      ▪ Basic journalism skills
      ▪ Communication skills
      ▪ Skill at managing content and publication space
 ▪ Negotiating Skills
      ▪ Gaining Trust
      ▪ Maintaining relationships
      ▪ Strategic withdrawal and intervention

Substantive Journalism Skills

The substantive journalism skills that journalists learned are about the various rudiments of journalism ranging from acquiring basic journalism news gathering and writing skills, human communication skills, particularly with their informants, and skill at managing technical, legal and political constraints at organizational level. These substantive journalism skills are essentially important skills that are required in order for journalists to gather information needed to write their news articles and to get them published. The first two sub-skills: basic journalism skills and communication skills, are generally the skills journalists used to gather information for their news articles. The third sub-skill, managing content and publication space is used by journalists to increase the possibility of their articles being published.

Basic Journalism Skills

Most journalists mentioned that they learned basic journalism skills when they were asked how they prepared themselves or were prepared by anyone before joining the profession. The 5Ws and IH of journalistic writing is one of the basic journalism skills that they have learned besides learning to be objective in writing, and having accurate facts in their articles. 5Ws and IH is a basic journalistic term that refers to the acronyms for what, where, when, who,

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why, and how – the basic information that any news article should contain. It is found that most of their experiences was significant in helping them to learn the basics of journalism. Although their experiences might be about some lawsuits or dealing with other actors in the profession, they were instrumental in helping the respondents learned some of the basic skills of journalism. However, this study also discovered that the manner in which these skills were learned was quite costly, especially among those without any prior exposure to journalism education or practice. Some of the basic journalism skills could have been learned through some short period of training courses or exposures where they could be taught the basics of journalism for them to start off more smoothly. Of the total 15 respondents interviewed, six had some form of journalism training or exposure prior to joining the profession. They either majored in journalism while in college, or had attended courses on journalism or received some formal in-house training immediately upon joining their respective companies. None of the six struggled to learn the basics of journalism required to carry out their professional responsibilities during their early career days. Of the six, only one shared how she learned writing skills from attending an in-house training course after joining her company.

Three of the study participants had absolutely no formal journalism training or exposure prior to joining the profession. On top of that, they received no immediate formal guidance upon joining the profession. These three shared the most about their struggles in learning the basic journalism skills in the initial stage of their career. Their experiences also showed their plain ignorance about the profession. They also learned the basics of journalism mainly on the job, and in a somewhat hard and expensive way. However, the time needed for them to learn such basics of journalism was rather short. They took from about a month to three months to learn the basics

and to familiarize themselves with the profession. I will now describe what kind of basic journalism skills that my study participants learned.

Siti Zulaida's experience of learning the basics of writing news article was probably of the worst kind and rather of a suffering one too. She started her career absolutely without any formal training in journalism. She said, "I even cried in front of the computer because it's too difficult to get [write] the intro [introduction] for me." She continued,

> Well, the seniors were, they pitied me. And they said, well, it's not difficult, you know…. You just have to know what's the gist of the assignment. What's the main, the important thing. You have to know that thing first. Then the intro [introduction], then the other thing, the second, third para [paragraph], you just describe…so…well…it's OK. But, yeah, to be really comfortable and OK, here I come, I took about one month (laugh).

Although Siti Zulaida received some form of informal guidance from her editors and senior co-workers on the job, she had not heard of the journalistic term, 5Ws and 1H, until I mentioned it in my interview with her. When asked how she picked up the basic 5Ws and 1H since she has not heard of it, she said, "I read a lot of our news. So, I just look at how and I think it's a basic thing when you want to tell something, you have to have that, that fundamental thing, 5W…." She added that, "We learn it from school, right? When you want to write an article, a good essay, you have to have that [5Ws 1H]."

Shukran shared many of his learning experiences in the initial stage of his career which were essentially about learning the basics of journalism. He shared at great length about the times when he groped in the dark upon joining his company. He said his first few months were a "huge learning curve to me." He was not sent for any in-house training immediately upon joining

his company. He said his groping in the dark was also partly caused by not having been trained in journalism at all nor exposed to journalism. He said:

> Easily the first month was a struggle. And in fact, I was writing more of a feature story than writing a news story. That I found quite difficult, and, uh... for instance when the first week, when somebody asked me, when one senior asked me, what's your lead? I don't have a clue what you are asking me. Things like that. That was like, I suppose, like, terms that you used then, you know. I don't know, it's just like, what do you mean? It's just like, you asked me what lead, what's your paragraph. I said, well, this is my first paragraph, and then someone told me that's not the lead. It's just like, you know, I said, OK, what is a lead? Then I asked. Then only like, I was, I asked somebody, OK, just like what you, what you, the first, um, if someone just wants to read, first paragraph of your story and that will encompass everything of what you want to write. So, then OK, I know, what lead is, things like that, you know. Which you'll be exposed to if you were in journalism, I suppose, you know, which I don't, you know.

Shukran's ignorance of the meaning of basic journalism term "lead" shows an example of having to learn through incidents the basics of journalism.

Ramanesh's critical incident of covering news at the mortuary is a good example of learning the basics of journalism in a somewhat costly manner. He was asked to go to the mortuary alone on his second or third day at work. He collected some information for human-interest stories, "interesting" stories about people who have died. However, he came back to the office only to find out from his editor that he did not have the vital information needed to write a news story – the 5Ws and 1H of basic of journalism. He did not ask where and when the person

had the accident. It was after being scolded by his editor for not asking the important questions that he learned the 5Ws and 1H principle. He said he did not think about asking those questions because "nobody told me to ask me those questions. You are ignorant about the job." He said his editor spared him and did not make him go back to the mortuary to get the details. Instead, his editor asked another journalist who was to work in the next shift, night shift, to get the information. About him missing the details, Ramanesh said,

I felt a bit annoyed-*lah*, you know. Why couldn't that nut [editor] tell me, you know?… But then, when I asked him, he said isn't this is common sense? News is about questions. Who, when, where, what, why, how, you know. It's about, it's about questions, you know. You, you hear somebody died, the first thing you want to know how. You know he's perfectly healthy, you know, suddenly, hey, how did he die? Oh, heart attack. Shot dead. Who shot him? What's his story? Was he [an] *Along* [loan shark]*?* Or was it a love triangle? This is what people want to know at the end of the day.

When asked if it would be helpful if he was taught the 5Ws and 1H before covering news at the mortuary, he said, "Of course. I would be definitely much better prepared. I don't think I would make the mistake I made at the mortuary. That much I agreed. You know, formal training prepares you to a certain degree on the job." Ramanesh's story was an obvious case of learning the basics of journalism in a somewhat rough and expensive manner. It was rough because he was verbally abused by his editor for not asking questions that would lead to him obtaining information for his news article, which could have been otherwise avoided if he knew the basics. It was an expensive manner of learning because his editor ended up having to waste manpower, getting a more senior journalist, to return to the mortuary to get the information that he missed.

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Gunasegaran, for example, learned through a costly way by being sued. He was facing a lawsuit over his article on a crime incident and was fortunate because the plaintiff did not pursue the matter and he had a police report to back up the facts in his story. He was not trained in journalism but had been exposed to it before becoming a journalist. In the incident he described, a couple who were victims of a crime incident tried to get compensation by suing his company. While preparing for the legal case, his company found that they had ample grounds to win the legal tussle and in the course, also realized that they had another strength because Gunasegaran's article was based on a police report. Gunasegaran learned from the incident that every article on crime matters must be substantiated with a police report and no names of the victims are to be mentioned. What Gunasegaran and his company have learned was the basic practice of journalism, especially when writing on crime matters. In this case they were fortunate that Gunasegaran happened to base his article on a police report on the crime incident and he also had strong evidences to fight the defamation suit because he was merely reporting from facts obtained from the police report.

Wen Gang's experience is also of a similar fortunate case where he learned the second basic journalism skill – having substantiated and accurate facts in articles. The lawsuit that Wen Gang faced taught him specifically the need to double-check facts obtained for an article. This is particularly so for writing news about police nabbing someone for investigation and who could be released without being charged in the court at all.

Jian Sheng's first description of his critical incident where he had to deal with the local community over a news story he wrote is a case of learning another basics of journalism – being objective in writing. In the incident, a woman had complained to the local community leader about his article that she believed had described her as a talkative housewife who had indirectly

caused the death of the fruit seller because she had quarreled with him a day earlier. Jian Sheng

learned to be objective and not to be judgmental in his writing. This is another incident of

learning the basics of reporting skill, where journalists must be objective in their writing;

describe the incident and not judge.

Communication Skills

Communication skills are one of the most common skills that journalists learn. There are

several types of communications skills that my study participants learned. Among them are

public relations (PR), networking, and intelligent and purposeful conversation with their

informants, or people they come in contact with on the job. PR skill is closely related to

networking skill and there is a rather fine line differentiating the two. PR skill involves making

conscious efforts to maintain and enhance rapport building with people who could provide

information. PR is also the most recognized way for journalists to access information needed for

their articles. For example, they established close relationships with staff at the hospital where

they had to be at almost daily so that the staff would provide them information for human-

interest stories about people involved in accidents or disasters.

Networking skill is about making conscious efforts to develop, expand and maintain

professional contact with people who have the potential to provide information. Journalists

establish networking with new people or people they often meet at the places they frequent to

obtain information. This enabled them to have access to or provided with information. PR skill is

interwoven in networking because networking often needs some PR skill for access in

developing new relationships.

Journalists learn the skill of striking an intelligent and purposeful conversation with

informants when they are at situations or places where they have access to people who have

knowledge about certain fields or areas. At the same time, journalists learn to educate themselves about the topic(s) they are writing about by having such conversations.

Ramanesh explained the importance of communication skills in his job. He pointed out that,

It's called PR [public relations]. You know, you go to the hospital, you give the hospital attendant your [name of his newspaper] copy. It's free-*what*? So, you are building a relationship with that guy already. Tell me the guy who died just now, what's his name? Take (hands gesture of opening up a book and handed it to the interviewer). Name there, age there, address there, occupation there. Who claimed the body. All because you gave them [name of his newspaper]…. They are basically gods, you know. They just want love. They want respect. You ordinarily look at them as hospital attendants, just, you know, [as a] record keeper, they are going to treat you [as any other people]… You must treat them as king. Occasionally buy them, here's a *teh tarik* [local bubbled milk tea] for you, you know. So you bond. This is something that these books [textbooks] can't teach you. They can write about it, but when you go down to the ground, if you do it properly, you will learn.

Through his PR endeavor, Ramanesh learned to network as well. He explained,

When you are there [at the hospital]… you don't have to sit there for your life. After a while, you'll have these insurance *si tao* [bosses], you have all these toll truck operators, you know. So you network with them. Unsavory characters. But they are synergy. You…it serves their agenda if there is an accident somewhere and people have died there and they are going to tow the car there [and they told

you about it]…. There's an unholy alliance there and then they will become your source.

Amreen learned his communications skills from his earlier experience of attending a wake for non-Muslims – something that he was ignorant because of his religion and culture. Having to deal with mourning family members to obtain some information about the deceased person made him aware of the importance of separating emotion from professionalism. He also learned that it was important to make the deceased person's family members at ease so that he could solicit information more easily. This led him to learn the importance of having empathy with the people he tried to solicit information from, and in any situation. He said,

> Until today, if I talk to a woman, to a lady, from Japan, who is a Japanese, I'll say,
> uh, after getting down the name and occupation, where she's from…I will say,
> can you tell me your age? I'm so sorry you might not like it, but I have to know
> and you can lie to me. That made them more comfortable. Ah, you know, they'll
> tell you their age, a bit of, of uh, foreign language, of course [will be helpful]
> when you are dealing with the French, the Japanese, Italians, you know, they are
> so proud of their languages. The simple, simple word, is like, hola, gracias,
> uh…what else, you know…merci, just makes people more [relax and comfortable
> to talk].

When Amreen started writing about automobiles, he applied PR skills that he had learned earlier. Giving a simple example, he said, if he were to go to a Toyota's new car model launch, he would not wear a T-shirt with a Honda word. He also learned to exercise his PR skill in his experience dealing with car manufacturers when writing about automobiles. He explained the way he carried out his PR with car manufacturers,

I've always maintained a, a … some sort of diplomacy and you know, courtesy.

I'll say I'm sorry if you don't like it. I was merely writing what I experienced, and

some of the opinions are personal, not on behalf of everybody, and if you are still

not happy, then I'm, too bad! Too bad, you know.

Shukran's attendance at CEO briefings is actually a form of establishing PR although the briefings were not initiated by him. In fact, in analyzing CEO briefings, it is found that companies utilize it as a PR strategy to get favorable write-ups. It is a strategically and professionally organized PR event which is almost equivalent to propaganda. It creates a strategic alliance between business corporations and the press. It is also a censored exclusive press conference that, as Shukran put it, "talking a lot of things off the cuff." Therefore, despite knowing how business corporations use CEO briefings, Shukran continues attending such briefings because they give him a platform for networking. He learned to use the opportunities that he gained from the briefings to gain access to people in the industries. He shared how he gained access,

Basically you have access to everyone in the company. The one I attended for

[name of the corporation], I have the [name of industry] guy, [name of another

industry] guy, basically the whole range of business done by the company. I know

the company in just one day.

He explained how he used his networking: "Sometimes you heard so many things in the market…because you know these people, it's very easy for you to get a story and to get it confirmed and things like that."

Shaesta, who is the only study participant who seemed to have a high regard for her editor and considered him her mentor, also learned public relations skill and networking skill

when she was thrown into the field. Her editor made her go to national sportsmen's and sportswomen's training sessions for three consecutive months. She obviously became bored and frustrated with them because despite being at the training sessions so faithfully, she was scooped by more senior journalists who did not seem to have the need to be there to get the stories. She soon found out that she needed to establish relationship with people associated with the sportsmen and sportswomen in order for her to gain access to information for her news article. For Shaesta, networking and PR seemed to go hand in hand. Although her style of PR was less aggressive than that of Ramanesh's, she launched her PR endeavors by doing personality interviews. She featured important personalities in the sports fraternity. This opened up opportunity for her to access information for her news story. She also dropped by occasionally at the office of the sports association for a "chat."

Two out of three critical incidents that Jin Ping shared was about learning networking. The incidents were her tracking down a politician overseas and covering the 1995 and 1999 general elections. She got to know the politician better through the overseas assignment. She also got acquainted with the politician's personal aides and those who were close to him. But most importantly, her approach in tracking down the politician was seen as a bold move and made her somewhat famous. She said, "The leaders know you, know who you are." This had given her good exposure and strong networking later where she could access them directly whenever she needed to verify some information. By covering the general election, she had the first contact with budding politicians and followed their political career developments closely to enable her to network with them later on. She said, "I keep in touch with them [the politicians]…then, it becomes easier for me to have some exclusive news from him [sic]."

Wen Gang shared about his learning experience of looking for new informants through PR. He explained:

> You mix with them [the police], maybe sometimes you, you go out with them for
> lunch, you know, you treat them tea [and] all that. You just sit around with them,
> uh…like some, some sources [informants] may become really [my] good friends,
> you know.

Besides treating his informants to lunch, he also sometimes took them out for a drink or movies. All his PR efforts paid off when his informants "accidentally talk about" some cases that were of newsworthy for him to write. Or, they might tip him off about murder, accident and some other on-the-scene cases for him to obtain information for his news articles.

Ke Mei also shared some pointers about communications skills. She shared about the importance of networking and striking purposeful and intelligent conversation with people. About networking she said, "Once you have this good, uh…interpersonal relationship, people will let you know what's happening and all these things [that] are going around." Regarding striking a purposeful and intelligent conversation, she said, "When a topic crops up… you must be able to strike an intelligent conversation with people, you know, and ask questions, ask questions that will help to gather information and all these." She pointed out that it is important for journalists to be "very well versed" with the subject being written and this is done by having "some intelligent conversation with experts who know your subject."

On the other hand, there were cases where journalists learned about the work of PR but refused to be manipulated by it. For example, Azzaddin, who has done different types of reporting in his career refused to sail along with those who tried to establish good PR with him. He shared his experience of writing a review article about a famous artist's concert where he

refused to give in to the artist who tried to gain favorable write-ups. The artist was not happy with his review of her concert and tried to see his editor with the hope of getting a more favorable write-up. Although aware of the artist's action, Azzaddin did not take any effort to improve his relationship with the artist.

On the other hand, he said when he was writing news article on crime, he had to have good PR. He explained,

> [Writing on] Entertainment is easy. Crime, you have to, you have to, how do you say it? You have to be smart, to have a good PR with everybody – this *Bomba* [Fire Brigade], everything – because you want the information. Sometimes when a few of us are not working, we just drop by the *balai* [Police Station] to say, *Datuk,* [a bestowed title] *apa khabar?* [How are you?]. Give [them] something or, or newspaper or magazine. Make friend-*lah.* Or with the *Bomba*, I use to drop by to see them when I am not working. Hey, *minum teh ke apa?* [Shall we go for a tea or something?]. Make friends. [For] entertainment, you don't need to do that. Because all the companies, recording company or film company will contact you. Uh…I've got a promotion [event], come and attend my function. Easy, you got the story. But as a crime reporter, you want the story, you have to have diplomacy.

In Azzaddin's experience of writing for entertainment, he could afford not to make an effort to establish a good PR because he is in a position where the artists and those in the entertainment industry generally are dependent on him for favorable write-ups. However, when writing on crime matters, he is in a less bargainable position. This point will be elaborated further under discussion of negotiating skills in the next part of this chapter.

Yi Ying is another journalist who learned about the importance of PR in journalism but refused to be manipulated by companies that tried to use PR to establish good relationships with her. Efforts by many companies that approached her with freebies with the hope of obtaining a favorable write-up was a form of PR initiated by the companies. However, in this case, it was obvious that Yi Ying did not allow them to utilize this form of PR on her work although she was aware of the existence of PR. She said of such PR, "I have so many people coming after me. They want to give me all the freebies just to have their write-up, but I will put it to a stop." Yi Ying does not seem to initiate much PR when carrying out her professional responsibilities. Like Azzaddin, she is also in a position where she is sought after for write-ups, hence there is not much of a need for her to initiate any PR.

Skills at Managing Content and Publication Space

Managing content and publication space is a skill that many journalists learned in their work. The skill that they use the most is trying to secure publication space for their articles. This is also primarily a technical constraint that journalists learned, and is in fact related to one of the constraints of the practice that they have learned – legal and political constraints. This is because the reasons for not being given the space for their articles to be published is, at many times, due to some political interference that many press organizations receive regarding what issue should not be set as a public agenda. Therefore, this constraint usually serves as the boundaries they could work around.

The constraint of publication space is the most debatable and yet obscure form of constraint because journalists could be told that their article is not published because of space limitation but there is no way of telling how true it is. Yi Ying described the obscurity of publication space best when she said that,

There's never a guideline in the office to tell you we should do this, we should

approach the story this way. They don't tell you. But the most you know, you,

you learn from them by knowing whether your story is used or not. It's, it's, they

don't use your stories sometimes, it could be due to shortage of space or it could

be they don't agree with the story or they don't trust your story.

En Lin explained how she learned the importance of publication space constraints. She

wrote a lengthy 25-paragraph news article concerning a complicated legal case only to see that it

was slashed down to a mere five-paragraph – filler news. This led her to learning that publication

space is almost non-negotiateable in journalism "unless you shake the entire world and they open

up [publication] spaces for you." She reiterated, "That was when I learned to appreciate, to

respect [publication] space because they mean-*lah*, what they say." En Lin is very much aware of

the constraint of publication space that she is working under when she said,

So I've learned that in [name of her newspaper]-*ah*, space is king, you get dictated

by space. So you have to work within the system, within that space. There's no,

when they say 10 paragraphs, they mean it. There's no 12, there's no 13, it's 10.

Along the way what I have learned…you know, space is very important and you

are edging out your, your own colleagues because it's your story [articles] against

theirs.

The second skill that journalists learned is managing the content of the articles they write.

This is related to the legal and political interferences in Malaysian journalism practice. I shall

now elaborate in detail about how journalists manage the content of the articles they write in

relation to the two most common forms of legal and political interferences in their practice.

The infamous Printing Presses and Publications Act introduced in 1984 is the main legal constraint that several of my study participants learned to manage as part of their content management skills. The act is also commonly known as the KDN, *Kementerian Dalam Negeri*, permit or license. *Kementerian Dalam Negeri* is the Malay word for Home Ministry. This is the permit issued by the Home Ministry to anyone wishing to publish any material for public circulation and sale. The last time the government conducted a mass invocation of the act in banning several publications was in 1987. It was also known as *Operasi Lalang*, which stands for *Lalang* Operation. *Lalang* is the Malay name of a particular stubborn weed that is commonly found in Malaysia. Rubber tappers identify with such weed the most because it is destructive to rubber trees and they have to spray pesticide periodically. It is also known as the lower income group's poison to commit suicide. The 1987 *Operasi Lalang* was a period when the government revoked a few KDN permits which caused the temporary ban of a few English, Malay and Chinese newspapers (Mohd. Safar, 1996; Wang, 1998). The period also saw several politicians and social activists being detained under the infamous Internal Security Act where the police, under the order of the Home Minister, could detain and jail anyone "who threatens national security" without having to charge the person in court.

Jin Ping, in explaining the takeover of her newspaper by a political party, talked about the power of such permits and how it is important to be constantly on guard by managing the content of news article written. She said the Home Ministry is always monitoring her company and it has been her company's practice not to publish certain sensitive issues and avoid using some sensitive words. Jin Ping also mentioned learning about political interference. However, she does not see it as an interference per se; instead, she sees it as a way the political party that owns her company preserves her company's KDN by giving advice over certain issues published.

On the other hand, Shan Jie sees political interference as an impediment to freedom of the press and affects journalists in carrying out their responsibilities. She is the only respondent who kept lamenting on the state of journalism practice that she has learned and has to accept if she wants to stay in the profession. The sharing of the takeover of her company by a political party and the sacking and jailing of former Deputy Prime Minister are two incidents that taught her about legal and political constraints in practice. During the political saga she observed that the Malay press journalists had to learn not to write much about the issue. Her observation on the political interference and constraint concurs with that of Ramanesh. He pointed out that not a single editor was courageous enough to go against the political directive by questioning the fact that the former Deputy Premier, Anwar Ibrahim, was pronounced guilty before the court did so.

When Wen Gang shared his unpleasant experience of a lawsuit that was settled out of court and his disappointment with his company for being over cautious on certain articles that he wrote, he eventually agreed to what his company did. He learned to manage the content of his articles by being consciously aware of the legal constraint when he said,

> Well, if it affects the company, if it's better not to print… I wouldn't want the
>
> company to get into trouble. So if it's for the good of the company, OK. Huh, you
>
> know, if it's for the good of the company.

The legal constraint seemed to almost haunt him as he continued talking about the *Operasi Lalang* and how he heard stories that it was a "terrible moment" for those journalists affected. He said,

> When they were closed down, they did not know what to do. How they are going
>
> to pay for their house [loan], how they are going to support the family and all that.

It was terrible. They didn't know when their company was going to reopen and all

that.

Ke Mei also talked about KDN as one of the main legal and political constraints in her

profession that requires skills in managing the content of her articles. But she was quick to point

out that the constraints actually affect non-journalists, those in the management and in higher

positions the most. She said pointedly,

Now it's not because they [those in higher positions] are worried about their

counterparts, you know, or their subordinates losing their jobs [because of the

invocation of KDN]. It's more because they loose their cushion jobs. Their own

well-paid jobs. Like the *koochi rat* [lower ranked and powerless staff], nothing

much to loose-*what*, actually. Only the big bosses-*what*.

She sees the KDN as a legal constraint that is narrowing her boundary of what issues she could

touch on. It's also a constraint that requires skills on how she could present certain issues.

Ke Mei also learned about the existence of political interference as one of the constraints

that requires prudent interventions. However, she understood it as, "You are working within the

system, you know. You, you already know what are the controls all over you. It's between, you

know, wanting to write or not wanting to write." She chose to work within the constraint and not

escape from it.

Shahzam elaborated quite succinctly about his way of learning to handle the content of

his articles based on his understanding of the existence of legal and political constraints. He said,

"I do understand the sensitivities of the nation…multiracial, er, co-existence, multi-religion

coexistence, and the sensitivity that the government is a little paranoid of so many things, you

know. Of course I take into consideration all that." He also said the system where Malaysian

journalists work has been decided upon by the government which is to be pro-establishment. Here, Shahzam learns to work and write within those constraints so as not to step across into the forbidden zone.

> Shukran mentioned the legal constraint in a somewhat passing remark. He said,
> I suppose being a journalist you should push, it's a very fine line between uh,
> what's acceptable, and what's not. And what's acceptable to you is different from
> what's acceptable to the government. Because the government holds the KDN and
> all that, right?

Shukran who has worked for another newspaper organization noticed that his current organization sets more constraints in the sense that "they don't like to offend people and sometimes you have to soften the story…"

Ramanesh opined that the legal constraint and political interference as something that cause the present state of an unhealthy and stagnant journalism practice. He said with the takeover of certain newspapers by political parties recently, it has made the situation even worse. Relating to his understanding of agenda setting theory and the power play involved in journalism, he said, "That it comes down to uh…preserving the person in power. That's how I see it-*lah*. For example, Dr Mahathir [the Prime Minister until October 31, 2003] has lasted 22 years, because of his ability to control the press." Elaborating on the legal constraint, he related what he had heard about the change of premiership would mean to Dr Mahathir's political party, UMNO (United Malay National Organization), which controls one of the major English newspapers, The New Straits Times, NST. He said,

> The new guy [Prime Minister] is going to change the NST, the story is he's going
> to replace the bosses and install a [new Group Editor-in-Chief]…So the argument

is, you are now, (sigh) as long as the top guy is satisfied, you are OK. We've been

run to please the person in charge. If he's uncomfortable with you, you have to go.

You know.

What Ramanesh had heard about the removal of the NST's Group Editor-in-Chief, Abdullah

Ahmad, was proven to be true later when the top management head was sacked on December 21,

2003 ("Abdullah Ahmad's term as NSTP GEIC ends," November 22, 2003). Ramanesh shared

about the removal of the GEIC in my follow-up interview with him a few days before the new

Prime Minister took office. The new Premier, Abdullah Badawi, was reported to have said on the

following day after the sacking that the reason for the "termination" was not personal but the

government's response to a diplomatic protest by the Saudi Arabia government over an article he

wrote ("Nothing personal in NSTP editor's dismissal, says PM," 2003). However, it was

everyone's guess and knowledge that the sacking was due to political reason.

<p align="center">Negotiating Skills</p>

The other important skill that journalists had learned was to negotiate in their job. This

study found that, often, negotiation is done with external parties in exchange for information

journalists need to write their news articles. However, there are also negotiations done internally,

in the organizations they work in, to enable their articles get published. Negotiating skills for

information are often conducted under the guises of gaining trust and maintaining relationships

with the parties involved. Negotiating skills for articles to be published involve using strategies

such as strategic withdrawal and intervention. I shall now describe the three ways negotiating

skills are generally conducted. They are gaining trust, maintaining relationships and, strategic

withdrawal and intervention.

Gaining Trust

Shaesta had described how she learned the importance of gaining trust from people in the sports fraternity after she was scooped by more senior journalists. It happened after she discovered that some journalists did not have to be at the sports training sessions that she had been attending faithfully for the past three months to obtain information for stories that she did not manage to get. She said,

> Trust is important. You have to have the, the officers and the sportsmen and sportswomen trust you because, like now, after so long of doing it, I got the trust from the officers, like the president [of the sports association], or the secretary. Until today, I understand that, there are particular things that he don't give to other people [journalists] but he will just give it to me.

She explained what she learned about gaining trust that: "The sportsmen and sportswomen, they won't trust you just like that, you see, to give you information, especially on anything that's critical, whatever, they don't simply give you if you're new." Shaesta's experience was a case that showed her that learning to gain trust was a form of negotiation skill in exchange for information that she could use to write news articles. She did it unconsciously, at least she did not describe it as a negotiation skill, but more as a human communication skill.

Wen Gang also shared about his experience of instilling trust in his informants to enable him to obtain information. He explained the importance of gaining trust and maintaining the trust:

> If he [informant] said don't write, you don't write it. If you write it, next time he sees you he might not want to tip you off anymore. He might not want to give you stories. Because you have already betrayed his trust.

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He explained further that gaining trust is about cooperating with his informants. Wen Gang's sharing is another form of gaining trust in exchange for information from his informants.

Ke Mei talked about gaining trust as one of the ingredients that is expected of a journalist. She said,

> You know, it's like uh, it needs many ingredients to make up a journalist, you
> know. And also, the way you interact with people? And how people trust you?
> Whether people [would be] willing to talk to you…things like that, maybe [even
> about things that] eventually cannot be reported? You know, but as a background
> for your understanding [of the subject or issue]?

She said gaining trust from "people on the ground" is important because once her informants trust her, they might inform her of issues that she could research for her articles. She also pointed out that gaining trust is a two-way relationship that is about "how much you trust your source [informants] and how much they trust you." Ke Mei's sharing is a case in point of how important trust is for her to exchange for access to information for her articles. In this case, her negotiation skill is in the form of two-way trust-gaining.

Ke Mei's two-way trust-gaining as the name of the game in journalism is shared by Shahzam too. He said,

> I would believe there's a certain degree, er, the organization seems to be known to
> be crafted, how I have the ability to handle issues. And I do gain confidence that I
> could handle issue, that I could handle any assignment, so…it's a two-way, er…
> crafted zone basically… being comfortable about me doing the main
> assignment…. Because you sent me to a few [overseas assignments], and I was
> able to, to, so-called produce and perform, so to speak. And I have been able to

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produce and perform, I would believe that it gives me the, the, the… I wouldn't

say the right, but certainly, the, the room to come and put forward to them, hey,

I've done this, I've done that and I think this could be interesting, and I think I

would have the ability to produce good reports, which should be a good selling

point to the company. So, it's a two way thing-*lah*.

Here, in Shahzam's case, gaining trust from his editor paves way for negotiating with his editor the assignments that he proposes to do.

While gaining trust from editors is important, it is also important for journalists to trust editors in order to learn from them. En Lin shared about the training program that she went through as a rookie journalist. She said she learned a lot through the training program because she trusted the trainer, who was also her editor, and had faith in him. She said, "I have a lot of faith in him because I had in mind that he's a practicing journalist and, you know, he is a boss, but at the end of the day, he's a good writer." The editor had some credibility because En Lin trusted him as a practicing journalist.

Siti Zulaida's experience with her junior showed that gaining trust is important in the very organization they work in. She is a more established journalist and trusted by her editors who do not often verify with her on her articles that she did not quote any names but sources. She said, "Maybe they trust me, maybe I've been writing on [the name of her writing topic] for so long, so they don't really bother to ask." She shared an experience she had with her junior journalist,

One of my juniors, when he wrote [name of her writing topic], always they, they

didn't publish his story. And he asked me, can I put your name in my article? I

said, why? If I put your name, the story will come out. (laugh) You know, these

bosses? [If] I put your name my story will come out. I said, no-*lah*, just put your

name [only]. No, no, no, I've been sending so many [name of her writing topic]

and they didn't come out or they will use just a small, just short ones. So I said,

OK, just put, and then the next day it came out with bylines some more! These

people, even my bosses said, uh…well, it depends on the writers, not actually on

the story. Sometimes it depends on who writes the story, then only they'll publish

it.

She actually helped rewrite the introduction of her junior's article. Although this experience did

not affect Siti Zulaida directly but she certainly learned that trust is the name of the game in her

company. She explained why her editors reacted that way,

Especially this kind of story, where you accuse something, an investigative report.

They [editors] said that they don't really trust the new reporters, whether the

accusation is true or not. So they have to be really careful…. So I said, you've to

trust your reporters even though they are juniors…. If you don't give chances to

the new reporters, they won't become good [name of her writing topic] reporters.

Siti Zulaida also learned about negotiation when it comes to publication space for feature

articles on her topic of writing. She realized that her company prioritizes political articles and she

had to fight to get her articles, which were not related to political matters, published. She shared,

So we fight for it but it depends on the bosses too, whether they like [name of her

topic] issue or not. But we keep on influencing, tell them that we have so many

issues. So I think it's quite difficult because we have to educate the editors first,

the bosses first, then only the public. But it never sopped me and my other

colleague to write on [name of her topic] stories. We just tried our luck even

though we don't have any page, any specific page to write on [name of her topic].

We just sent, sent, sent the articles…eventually it came out…they used it. Then

they noticed that we should have this one [name of her topic] page….

Here, Siti Zulaida learned about the importance of gaining trust by convincing, educating and influencing her editors on issues that could possibly be written under her topic. This in turn made her company see the importance of giving publication space to articles on her topic. Her way of gaining trust involves some form of negotiation as when she convinced her editors that she could deliver if given the publication space.

Maintaining Relationships

Maintaining relationships is akin to achieving a win-win situation in negotiation. It involves efforts the journalists take, which also includes element of negotiations that will result in cordial and positive working relationships. It could be maintaining relationships with actors outside their own organizations or even within their own organizations or both at the same time. Several journalists explained how they were unconsciously trying to maintain relationships.

Ke Mei shared at length about learning to maintain relationships with both actors inside and outside the organization. Her maintaining of relationships with, what she named, the sub-system and system. She referred to her organization as the sub-system where she is bound by some ways of practice stipulated or imposed by higher authorities in her organization. The system, on the other hand, referred to a larger macro system outside the organization, particularly the legal constraints and political interference from the outside including the owner of her company. Maintaining relationships, to Ke Mei, is about maneuvering within the constraints set by the sub-system and/or system so that she could write her articles that touch on sensitive issues and have them published. She explained about the intricate process of maintaining relationships,

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We are within a system, you know. You know we cannot change the system

directly, so you, then you must know how to present an intelligent piece, which is,

you know, uh intelligent, and useful and make sense? If you really, like, want to

be so…like uh, sensation-less and all these things, [you might as well] end up not

staying there-*lah*. So you, actually it's a balancing job-*lah*.

Using the issue of Vision School (a controversial plan to integrate all the three types of schools)

she explained about the balancing job act as,

It's just common sense… use your own judgment, you know, and continue, you

know, with your commentaries. And you know, so that, you know, you can see

daylight [article gets published]. (short pause) But there's really actually

no…er…people cannot teach you how to go about doing it. So [it] depends also

on the boss, on your bosses, you know, that you all work with, you know, how

you all come [to a solution], you know, to like, [work on] important issues-*ah*,

how you all get the commentaries, er…I mean to be printed fast. And then [to

ensure that they are still] contemporary [issues]? Because the things [development

of the issues] change so fast. And then that time [when the Vision School issue

was on] I think also with all sorts of, you know, advisories [warnings from the

government] coming in and all these.

Shukran's experience with the CEO briefing, which is also a public relations (PR) event,

was an exercise of maintaining a "win-win" relationships with business corporations, particularly

with the decision-makers. Business corporations use CEO briefing to send out exclusive

invitations to journalists or newspapers that are known to have been writing favorable news

about them to publicize certain information they want to release to the public. Or, according to

Shukran, they send invitations to journalists whom they know are well versed with the topic of information they want to release. Therefore, business corporations use CEO briefings as a subtle pre-negotiated avenue for a more favorable coverage and image enhancement of their corporations. Shukran said most journalists choose to attend such briefing because it is a convenient platform to establish good relationships with the often-hard-to-reach CEO and important figures in the business corporations. Shukran said,

> The [his] company gets a good reel-*lah*. Until now I still contact with them [the
> business corporations that organized the CEO briefings] and then they still give
> me the information that I wanted. The CEO was there, the whole team was there,
> so it was very handy. Next time [if] I have problem, I just contact them, even until
> now.

Therefore, attending CEO briefing is a win-win relationship situation because the business corporations achieve their PR objectives and the journalists could obtain information and most importantly, could build and maintain good relationships. However, at the same time, the journalists are fully aware of the implications of attending such business corporations' strategic PR event. One of the main implications of CEO briefing that Shukran felt has on him is learning to be objective when attending such briefing. He said,

> It's hard to be objective sometimes, when you get this kind of thing. You can-*lah*,
> but you have to be really tactful, and, because you're too careful, you end up like,
> you know, um, doing all those self-censorship, things like that-*lah*.

Nevertheless, Shukran choose to attend most of the CEO briefings because of the benefits that he could reap from such briefing, and most importantly, he needs to maintain relationships with his informants and CEO briefing provides just the avenue for him to do so. Likewise, to the

newspaper organization, sending its journalists to attend such briefing does not only enable them to maintain relationships with business corporations, but its readership and circulation increase by publishing the firsthand information.

Journalists learn the importance of maintaining relationships between the political-party owner of their organizations, and the government that holds the power of KDN permits. One such example is Jin Ping's view of political interference from the political party that owns her company following feedback from the government. She opines that such interference is an advisory because she sees it as vital in maintaining good relationships with the government to secure the yearly KDN. In other words, maintaining relationships is a three-party endeavor – her company, the government and the political party that owns her company. Here, there is a blurred line separating her company and the political-party owner. The political party intervenes and is on the side of her company when it is done with the aim of securing KDN. At the same time, her political-party owner is on the side of the entire political system that works to maintain the political power. Therefore, to Jin Ping, journalists are part of this endeavor to maintain relationships.

Ramanesh' experience when covering a water shortage crisis was a case about learning to maintain relationships. In the incident, he was well received by one of the directors of a local authority but not after he was more objective and wrote a critical piece about the water management fiasco. Ramanesh reflected that, "So when I became objective, the director became my enemy. You know, he was, not my enemy-*lah*, he had no choice, he had to deal with me, you know." Therefore, in this case, Ramanesh learned that his critical piece has put the director in an unfavorable position and projected a negative image of him and the local authority. The power has shifted to the advantage of Ramanesh. However, despite knowing this fact, Ramanesh did

not take any effort to maintain the relationship because he chose to uphold his principle of practice by being critical and objective in his writing.

The topic a journalist writes about makes one learn the need to maintain relationships. Azzaddin's case which was mentioned earlier in this chapter is a good example. Comparing writing on crime matters and entertainment, he said he has to establish good public relations with the Police and Fire Brigade because he needs information from them. The power of relationship is skewed toward the Police and Fire Brigade. Therefore, Azzaddin found the need to establish good public relations with them. On the other hand, when he writes on entertainment, the companies in the industry need his co-operation for coverage and good write-ups for their promotional events. Therefore, Azzaddin has more power in this case and does not need to make an effort to maintain relationships. It also gives him more leverage for negotiation.

Ramanesh summed up the meaning of maintaining relationships best when he brought up the "understood common practice" of appointing and replacing a new Group Editor-in-Chief in one of the most powerful media, the *New Straits Times* (NST). He analyzed that,

> So there's a certain degree of Yin and Yang-*lah*…. I mean the new guy [president
> of UMNO, the owner of NST] will, uh, yeah, the new guy wants his own man. I
> don't care how good you are-*lah*, you know. But the reality is I will be more
> comfortable if I had, you know, my own person sitting there [as Group Editor-in-
> Chief] and I know he'll do what I ask him to do. When Anwar [the former Deputy
> Prime Minister] was sacked not one single newspaper editor in this country
> thought it was wrong. Not a single newspaper editor wrote and said that how can
> you proclaim him guilty before the court proclaim him guilty? You know, every
> single rule of regulation, that's how Dr Mahathir [former Prime Minister] stayed

in power. The press is the most important tool, you know. More powerful medium

is the TV.

Ramanesh's analysis and prediction of the elements of Yin and Yang in maintaining

relationships was absolutely correct. After my interview with him that was held before the new

Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi took office on November 1, 2003, the Group Editor-in-Chief of

the NST was sacked exactly three weeks later - on November 21 (Abdullah Ahmad's Term,

November 22, 2003).

Strategic Withdrawal and Intervention

Several journalists use strategic withdrawal and intervention skills when negotiating in

their learning process. Strategic withdrawal is a skill where journalists cease to temporarily fight

for the pursuance of certain issues. Intervention skill is about taking part in the process of

decision-making over choice of assignments and for articles to be published. However, these two

skills are not commonly used by all the journalists and they are the two main limitations that

journalists have as they exercise their negotiation skill. This point would be elaborated at the

later part of this chapter.

Ke Mei's quick action when dealing with issues which might be deemed sensitive by the

government is a form of using intervention skill at an opportune time. In the example she gave

about the sensitive Vision School issue, Ke Mei learned that intervention in the form of her swift

action to write on the issue was critical especially before any "advisory" surfaced. An advisory is

essentially an intervention to suppress certain issues deemed sensitive or negative by the

government or political-party owner from being published. Regarding advisory, she explained

that,

Sometimes they say there is a directive from the above? Well, if they are your
uh…uh, sort of your bosses, you have to take orders. I suppose you don't have
much say, right? Because anything that goes into print, especially during critical
events [sensitive and controversial issue] they'll have the last say.

Explaining further the workings of advisory, she said, "Nobody can tell you what to do. You just,
you know, you look at the situation, look at the circumstances, you know, within the system."
In the Vision School issue example that Ke Mei gave, she learned to negotiate to have the
articles on the issue published by intervening. The negotiation was carried out directly with her
editors and decision-makers in her organization.

Ke Mei's view of intervention is shared by Shahzam. His sharing of "strategic
withdrawal" is his awareness of the need to intervene and to negotiate at an opportune time for
his articles to be published. He referred to strategic withdrawal as retreating when his effort to
get his article published goes through a downhill battle. He then would make a comeback to the
battlefield when the situation is more promising for him to get the articles published. In his
reflection of his profession, he talked about strategic withdrawal and intervention as,

We'll know we have to fight over certain thing, we can go and, and, and, get your
way to do things. There are frustrations. At times you'll wonder [if] certain stories
will see daylight [get published], because the editors are not comfortable, or
because the establishment have already insinuated or sent some, some uh, signal,
hey, if you dare to touch the subject! And people get cold feet, not daring, of
course there are frustrations. But all in all, despite all that, I do believe that it's a
very fulfilling job, it's very wholesome because, as I've said, we learn everyday.

How can it be not wholesome when your mind is being challenged everyday with new things, new inputs, you know….

Another journalist who learned to intervene is Ramanesh. After his unpleasant experience of being instructed by his editor to pursue a story that resulted in the death of a politician's wife, Ramanesh learned to be more assertive and intervened when the situation warrants. Years after the incident, he was confronted with the issue of a picture implicating a politician that could not be authenticated. He managed to intervene by advising his editor not to publish the picture, to which his editor agreed to.

Although journalists have learned intervention and strategic withdrawal skills, they are limited by several factors. The first is the seniority of the journalists. Ramanesh found that power to exercise negotiating and intervention skills comes with seniority. One good example is from his experience of following the order of his editor to pursue a story on a politician's personal family life that resulted in the politician's wife committed suicide because she could not bear the shame. He said that he would have been able to say no to the assignment if he were more senior then. He said,

I was not decisive. I did the job, I didn't look at my boss and say, why are we doing this story? I didn't argue my case although I knew it was a silly, you know, boss is right, principle played its part. (Sigh) You know, I didn't look at him and [ask] what's the logic in this? You know, why are we doing this, you know? I suppose I was a junior reporter then-*lah*, you know. So, I also had the tendency, like I said is to be obedient, you know. You don't want to jeopardize your career prospect. That sort of thing.

Reflecting on the case and the power that he has attained with seniority, he said,

I have already reached the peak of my career in terms of bargainable stuff. I have

got the seniority, I can argue, I can bargain, I can haggle. Or if I want to, if they

still insist I do the story, I can say we speak to a—ll the parties involved. Then

only we write the story. There's more room for maneuver, you know. I can insist,

I want to speak to the wife, I want to speak to the husband. I want to speak to his

party, I want to speak to maybe er, somebody out there, you know, who may

know a thing or two about this kind of matter. I don't want to speak or write the

story without [verifying with those people], you know.

He proved his statement of seniority many years later when he was able to stop an unverified

picture that implicated a politician from being published. His company published the picture only

after seeking his advise and checked with him the credibility of the source that verified the

picture.

Shahzam, with 15 years of experience, has the power to talk about strategic withdrawal

and get his article published when the political situation allows. He shared how he would fight to

get certain issues put on the discourse table but withdrew or relented when the situation would

not take him any further although he might try to do so again later. However, Jian Sheng with the

most number of years of experience among the sample, 25, did not command such strong power

of negotiation. This is because his seniority level at his present company is very much lower

compared to his career experience and his topic of writing is not related to politics.

On the other hand, Ke Mei who has over 20 years of experience and could intervene

faced a limitation in negotiating. This happens when the government issues a gag order, which is

usually informal, through the political interference by the owner of her company. She pointed out

that in such obvious case where there is an advisory for a total "blackout," intervention or

negotiation was not an option at all. She explained further that, "sometimes you may not escape. Sometimes there is a total blackout." In the event of such gag order, writing skill seems to play an important part in keeping this relationship. She said "there are many ways to put across a message" to increase the chance of publication for her articles. She added,

> Who you are going to weigh out the usage of words. You see, as I said, your
> writing skill comes into play, how you bring across the message subtly, or maybe
> in a very like a, uh, uh, what-*ah?* Sarcastically? Without being very direct? Uh,
> also how you try to tone it down, to increase the chances of being, uh, printed.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has reviewed what do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities. It has outlined the two main skills that journalists learn. The first was substantive journalism skills and the second was negotiating skills. For substantive journalism skills, three sub-skills were identified. They were basic journalism skills, communications skills, and skills at managing constraints. This chapter has also explained that negotiating skills involve gaining trust, maintaining relationships, and strategic withdrawal and intervention. However, the use of the strategic withdrawal and interference skills is limited to a certain degree. The first limitation is the seniority of journalists. Only those who have seniority in their present company are able to interfere in the day-to-day running of the press organization. The other limitation is subject to the situation at the point of negotiation, especially the issuance of gag orders to prevent certain issues from being published. The last limitation is the topic of writing, where journalists who write on political matters have more room for negotiation. This is because most news organizations prioritize topic of writing related to politics.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: HOW JOURNALISTS LEARN

This chapter discusses the findings for the second research question that guided this

study. The question asked, "How do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their

professional responsibilities?" Three ways of learning by journalists have been identified through

this study as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Findings for Research Question 2

How do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities?
1) Guidance from the community of practice - Guidance from senior co-workers and counterparts - One-to-one coaching from superior - Mentoring relationships 2) Informal Learning - Observational learning - Incidental learning - Trial-and-error learning 3) Formal Learning - In-house training - Learning from textbooks

The most common way of learning mentioned by almost every study participant is

guidance from the community of practice. The second most common way journalists learn is

through informal learning, and this is followed by formal learning.

Guidance from the Community of Practice

Wenger (1998) and Wenger and Snyder (2000) have espoused that learning takes place

among practitioners in the same community of practice. All the study participants shared their

experiences of learning from someone who is in the community of journalism practice. There are

generally three ways how journalists learn through guidance from their journalist community. The first involves guidance from senior co-workers and counterparts. The second is one-to-one coaching from superiors, who in most cases are the editors and others who edit their articles. The third way journalists learn is by developing mentoring relationships. I shall now elaborate each of the three ways of learning through guidance from the community of practice.

Guidance From Seniors and Counterparts

This method of learning is common to almost all the journalists interviewed. It took place mainly during the journalists' early days in the career. It generally involves following seniors at work to assignments. Azzaddin's principle in learning when he first became a journalist was to ask. He said,

> When I don't know anything, I always ask my senior colleagues, I don't know this, I don't know that. It doesn't matter, sometimes people are shy to ask, but I am not. I always, if I don't understand, I will ask my senior colleagues.
> He added that "people around me played an important role in developing me to what I am now, especially my colleagues."

Amreen also shared that he learned from his senior co-workers when he was asked by his editors to follow them to their assignments. He said he followed his seniors to many different places and learned to ask basic questions and write an objective news article. He depended on his senior co-workers for advice on what to wear and how to behave when attending a wake, which was alien to his culture.

En Lin also shared about how she learned from her experienced co-workers. She explained,

Even now, I'll ask a co-worker a lot, how, how, how do I put it and all that. And

she'll give me her experience because she has been around as long as I have. And

um, she'll tell me how she would have done it-*lah*. That way I learn it also.

Gunasegaran's learning was essentially from his senior co-workers. He said he was asked

to follow them for about a month to familiarize with covering different assignments from court

reporting to politics. For about a week his editors also gave him some pointers on news reporting

such as how to write news and sense story with news value.

Ke Mei learned not just from her fellow journalists but also photographers. She said,

People around you, your colleagues, they are more experienced, even the

photographers you know. Because normally sometimes we go out together with

the photographer, when you are new…you know you are not so familiar with

people, surroundings and all these things. In journalism it means a lot, you know.

You cannot afford to always get lost or go to the wrong place and all these

things…. It's not like uh…they consciously sit down and teach you, you know.

There's no such thing, you know. It's, you know, when, you know, they talk to

you…all these very subtle guidance, you know, it helps.

Shukran who joined the profession without any exposure to journalism is another

journalist who had learned tremendously the tricks of the trade through his senior co-workers. He

asked them for the meaning of some journalistic terms. He also learned from his counterparts at

press conferences by observing how they carried out their work.

Siti Zulaida who struggled with writing when she first joined the profession learned to

write through the help of her seniors. They gave her some pointers about writing while she was

agonizing in front of her computer trying to construct the first sentence of her news article. She

also learned from her senior co-workers by asking for their permission to follow them to night assignments, after her official working hours.

Jian Sheng, a "victim of marginalization" by many of the government authorities, shared his critical incident of learning from counterparts from his bigger sister company. He learned the mechanisms of the government through his daily interaction with them. He said, "I've learned a lot, with them, [through] interaction with them, my language skill, my knowledge, my scope."

Ramanesh, when asked how did he learn when he was put in an "on-the-job training" upon joining the company said,

> The editors er, they give you some basic instruction-*lah*. OK, you follow the
>
> senior reporter, you go to the site, and you see-*lah*. You take down what that
>
> fellow said and then come back and you write…. It's purely practical. You follow
>
> the senior, the senior ask [sic] the questions, the senior will ask you to take notes,
>
> you write-*lah*. You write to your best ability.

Wen Gang shared about how his counterparts and senior co-workers gave him some tips on how to carry out his work. He said,

> When I started on my first day of work, I was briefed by the other reporters on
>
> where to go, which policeman to see. So they said you build contacts by giving
>
> out newspapers. You know, when you give out newspapers, uh, you see and you
>
> talk to that fellow, and things will start coming out, like stories they'll tell you
>
> [and] all that. Uh, so it's from there that you get your stories.

He shared how one particular counterpart guided him,

> He took me to wherever he went. All his contacts… he introduced them to me-*lah*.
>
> So, so he was not scared of me knowing [them]. Uh, so from that particular

reporter, I learned quite a lot. Uh…he was telling me, what to see, who to see,

what to ask, [and] all that.

Jin Ping learned selectively from her senior co-workers. She said her criterion of

choosing seniors was based on who she believed were good journalists. She learned from them

who to contact for the topic she was writing on. She also learned from them how to use the

telephone directory in order to contact people who could give her information for her news

article.

One-to-one Coaching from Superior

This method of learning is the second most common form of guidance that journalists

receive from their community of practice. Like guidance from seniors at work, one-to-one

coaching from superiors also took place mainly during the journalists' early days in their careers.

Unlike guidance from the community of practice which is more informal and impromptu, one-to-

one coaching involves a more personal touch and some form of precise teaching from superiors.

The superiors are their editor or someone who edits their articles. They shared about how their

editor usually would sit with them throughout the time their articles were being edited. For

example, En Lin shared about how she "learn a lot while my stories are being cleared." She

added with a laugh that,

> We learn our mistake and learn how to avoid it-*lah*…. Grammatical, because I'm
>
> not used to newspaper language at that point in time, and um…um… they the
>
> editor just will sort of tell us, a lot of it is house style also-*lah*, as I said-*lah*. So, I,
>
> I, learn a lot of these when my stories are being cleared. They will give us the
>
> benefit of their experience.

She explained further that,

We also know that the questions that we forgot to ask. (giggling away) It's only

when they clear [the story] that they ask and we realize that…that we forgot to

ask certain questions and we have to get back to that person, you know.

Wen Gang also shared how he learned from his mistakes through his editor who would

ask him to sit through the whole editing process. He said,

It was on-the-job training, rather than sitting in a classroom and whatever. You

learn from your mistake, when you come back from an assignment, they ask you

to send whatever stories [that] you have, and like, the editor will ask you to sit

beside him, to have a look. He will explain to you what's your mistake and all that.

So maybe you learn from there.

Shukran also shared the same experience where his editor "really sitting down and tell

you about what happened to your story." He added that he was fortunate to be given such kind

and gentle coaching because he had heard of stories where "editors were not so gifted in

managing people" and "they can be a bit brash and sometimes can be a bit loud." Ramanesh was

not as fortunate as Shukran and was under what Shukran described as editors who were not "so

gifted in managing people" and who were "brash" and "loud." Nevertheless, Ramanesh received

guidance but not before witnessing some unpleasant scenes where his editors were "sniggering"

at his original unedited copy. He recalled,

Then after that, the learning process came when one of the editors told me – you,

you write your story, that is not the end of the story. Then you read your story the

next day and see where you went wrong. And, and try to understand WHY (raised

his voice to emphasize the word) the story was written like that. Why was the

story wasn't written the way you said, you know. So, from there you learn. And after a while, I got the idea what's news.

Ke Mei remembered that during her early days in journalism her superior would coach her informally and made her process press releases although they might not be used eventually. She recalled her 21-years-ago learning experience,

But I think the early days is [sic] good in the sense that-*ah*, last time-*ah*, my superior, that fellow said, you know, remember your readers are not there. So he's asking you to tell the story clearly, you know. Describe it properly, you know, so people [will] understand. Like another of my superior, [he would] always throw [to us] press releases, you know, and then we just process, you know. That one is actually polishing your writing skill, you know.

Gunasegaran also shared how his editors coached him during the early days of his career. He said, "They teach me how to write news…. From basic, this is, let's say, from news, how to create news story."

Shaesta is the only study participant, when asked how did she prepare herself or was prepared by others to become a journalist, spoke fondly of her editor's coaching when she first joined the profession. She said, "I think my editor gave me a lot of chance, a lot and he helped me a lot." She explained,

Uh, he don't really pamper me, uh…but he gives me a lot of chance to explore, you see. He asked me to go to a lot of assignments, uh, some, some of the assignments you don't really get stories there. But then, at the end, he told me it's good for me to get to know people. Sometimes he keeps on asking me to go for dinners, and all these, where you know there is no story there. But then, when I

asked why, he said that's a good way to communicate and get contact with other people. So, it has really benefited me a lot.

Siti Zulaida who has shared how she cried in front of the computer because she did not know how to write the first sentence of her article when she first started, attributed her perseverance to continue staying in the profession to her editors. Besides teaching her how to write news articles and taught her some basics of journalism, her editors also encouraged and gave her the moral support.

However, not all guidance from superiors are sincere efforts to help journalists to learn, at least that is what Yi Ying has shared. She said she realized much later in her career that the guidance and coaching from her editors were actually meant as means of "shaping" and "conditioning" her. When describing her experience where one of the editors received an instruction through telephone to edit her article about a former politician's legal case, she said it was part of the coaching process to shape her. The editor was someone with a higher position in and received a verbal instruction from the highest authority in her company. Reflecting on the "guidance" that she received in her early days, she said,

> Well… I thought that was just a guidance. (pause) Um, that time we were fresh,
>
> we were still fresh, we thought it was the ABC of doing things, it's the formula.
>
> Then, they, now as I go by then I know it's a form of condition [conditioning].
>
> That time when I went through it I didn't know.

When asked when she realized that coaching was a form of conditioning, she said after a pause, "I think, at, [when] I am old enough in this line, to form my opinion." When asked if she could roughly remember when, she said in an initially slowly worded tone after a pause that,

Of course it's getting clearer and clearer actually especially now when I have to actually make a decision whether I should go for this assignment or not, when I have to exercise my decision, judgment, day and day. When I…tell myself this is not important, I don't go, that one is important, I go, then I realized, uh, by making this decision daily, then I realize what I've learned, when they sent me out for assignment, or they expect this kind of story. It's different. That one I only decide at the end of the day when I come back with the story. Whereas now, I decide before I go for a story.

Mentoring Relationships

Some journalists developed a mentoring relationship in their learning endeavors. The mentoring relationship refers primarily to the development of a close learning and working relationship with a senior journalist or editor over a long or certain period of time. The journalists also admire or speak highly of their senior journalist or editor whom they regard as competent and take extra interest and responsibility in guiding and coaching them. The journalists do not refer to such person as a mentor per se, but they certainly have high regard and show their respect for their mentors.

Of all the journalists interviewed, Shaesta's sharing of her learning experience portrays the strongest trait of a mentoring relationship with her editor. Throughout the interview, she mentioned repeatedly her gratefulness to her editor and referred to many instances of how her editor walked the extra miles to teach her especially during her early career days. He gave her many opportunities to explore and learn to find her own stories from experience. He also sent her to less demanding assignments, such as dinners, to expose her to the profession and constantly coached her personally. She said,

… My boss [editor] keeps on asking me to go out, you know, like go and find

your story, go and find your story, you know. Go out and find story, you know.

He keeps on asking me, go out and get story, that's how you learn, you see, you

learn by experience, you know.

En Lin's attitude toward her editor who was also responsible for conducting training

sessions with some new journalists is also a portrayal of developing a mentoring relationship.

She learned from him because she has a high respect for him as a competent journalist and

editor. She admitted, "I have a lot of faith in him because I had in mind that he's a practicing

journalist. … he is [also] a boss, but at the end of the day, he's a very good writer." En Lin also

has high regard for her editor-mentor because she saw that he was very zealous in conducting the

training course. She observed that, "Um, what he did was he gave us real scenario…he did a lot

of homework. He'll do paper cutting and all that." She benefited tremendously from the training

sessions because the mentor-mentee relationship continued even after the training sessions have

ended. She noted that he would personally edit the work of journalists who had attended his

training sessions and continued coaching them on the job.

Gunasegaran's manner of working with and learning from his editor, whom he regards

highly even until now, is also of a mentoring relationship. He spoke highly of his editor

throughout the interview. He said the reason he chose to work with his present company was

because of his editor who is not only an experienced journalist, but has also studied journalism in

a good university. The mentoring relationship between Gunasegaran and his editor seems to be

of a very cordial one too. He said "my editor never instruct [sic] me, you must do this and that-

lah, you know…. Anything you [can] discuss with your editor, [you] can do anything." Their

mentoring relationship is also strong because they have often acted in accord. This happened

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especially when they handled the unethical politician who tried to bribe Gunasegaran into writing a favorable article about his purported service to the community. His editor, like Gunasegaran, told the politician that "normally [name of the political party the politician represents] story we don't cover, since because [sic] you also try to give money to him [Gunasegaran], that's why we don't want to cover it [the politician's assignment]."

Wen Gang is another journalist who has developed a mentoring relationship, albeit a very brief one, with a counterpart when he was a rookie journalist. His was with a senior journalist from another news organization who took the extra miles to introduce him the government officers whom he could possibly get information from. Wen Gang's mentoring relationship was more of a coincidence because he was "thrown into the sea without any life jacket" and he was asked to follow the senior journalists from other news organizations. It was during the stint of following them that a particular journalist among them took note of him and guided him around. He said the journalist probably mentored him because of their age difference and regarded him like "a small brother." Wen Gang learned most of the ropes of the trade through this particular journalist.

The mentoring relationship of Jin Ping, on the other hand, was not developed out of a coincidence .She purposefully chose one or two most outstanding journalists among the 15 or 16 seniors when she first joined her company. She developed a mentoring relationship particularly with one of them. She said, "She is quite helpful. I must thank her, the [for her] guidance."

<center>Informal Learning</center>

The journalists interviewed have attributed informal learning as a common form of learning. In fact, many used words such as "learn on the job" to describe their informal learning process, especially about how they learned to carry out their professional duties through the daily

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performance of their duties. Informal learning involves a lot of self-initiated types of learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991), such as learning to observe and learning through trial and error. It is also noted that most journalists were not able to explain succinctly how they go about learning informally. This finding corresponds with what Schon (1983) said about professionals are often not able to articulate what they know and what they do involves artistry. Three methods of informal learning that journalists used to learn have been identified: observational learning, incidental learning, and trial-and-error learning.

Observational Learning

Observational learning usually involves newer journalists making a conscious effort to observe and emulate what their more senior co-workers or counterparts do or how they carry out their responsibilities. It also involves looking at past articles written by other senior journalists and emulating how they wrote. The observations could take place in the office or while outside performing their professional duties. Most related that they did observational learning when answering the interview guide question of how they prepared themselves or were prepared to become a journalist. In most cases too, they were not specifically taught to observe.

Amreen shared most succinctly about his experience and the importance of learning through observation. He said,

> And you just watch what he [senior co-worker] does. And you do what he tells
> you to do. And you observe how he works, and [he said] when you come back,
> why don't you try writing your own news report, and then you make a print out
> and then you show it to me? Then we work together from there. That's how we
> learn. Even if you are a degree holder, in journalism, even if you have a doctorate
> in, in journalism, mass communication or whatever, you will still be tagging

along with a senior reporter who joined the company simply [by] using his *SPM*

[*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*, equivalent to American high school] qualification.

Because he has done the job, you haven't. You simply graduated. Maybe you

went for a practical training during your studies but that's just not enough. So I

learned... I learned a lot from that guy.

Amreen also said that he observed not because he was told or taught to do it. He said,

I start to observe things more, to be more analytical. In other words, I start to pay

attention to things, to my surroundings rather than being ignorant. That's just

what, I wasn't told to do these things but I felt, compelled to, you know, better

than not doing anything.

He said he observed one particular senior co-worker at work by following him to places that he

went to and "just watch what he does."

Wen Gang explained how he learned to write by emulating other journalists' works. He said,

Whatever writing you want to do, you just look through the old files. More or less

follow their style of writing, you know. The articles which have been printed, uh,

so from there, from there you learn-*lah*. You see the style of writing, more or less

you try to emulate.

Wen Gang's way of learning was more of analyzing articles written by other more senior

journalists. He then emulated their way of writing.

En Lin also shared how she observed senior journalists at work and learned "survival

skills" from them. She said she observed how both her senior co-workers and counterparts asked

questions and went about doing their work. She explained how she observed and learned,

Learning about how they ask the questions…. What you learn from, um, other

reporters is like how they ask the question. I mean this is when I was a cub

reporter-*lah*. Um, what kind of, you know you have to read the newspaper that

day and the few days before because, er, you have to look for the issue and all that.

And, and, how these people ask the questions-*lah*.

She added that as a young journalist she used to learn by looking at old articles written by past

journalists in her field. She learned how they wrote and what were the facts that should be

included in different types of articles. Observational learning did not only occur when she was a

new journalist. She said,

As…a cub reporter, you have to listen to a lot of, you observe, how more senior

journalists at work. Get by working like um, when you are covering an

[Parliament] assembly say, there are so many journalists around. And of course

the senior ones, the seasoned journalists will be there. You may be at the job for

11 or 15 years, you know, but you're still not the best, you know. You have to

observe how more senior journalist and more and more seasoned journalists

work-*lah*.

Jian Sheng also shared how he learned through observation. In his case, he started

observational learning before he joined the profession because he was already in a media related

industry. Therefore, switching careers was not a big transition for him except that he had to learn

how to write in journalistic style.

Siti Zulaida, who was thrown into the field without any training or exposure in

journalism shared how she learned by observing and emulating. She related how she put a

newspaper beside her as she tried to emulate how other journalists wrote their articles while she

tried to write hers when she first started. She shared how she "took the newspaper, read the intro [introduction], open the library online, look how the people, how they write the story." She also read a lot of newspapers to understand and learned the way articles were being written. She even took her own initiative to follow senior journalists to night assignments, after her own working hours, so that she could observe them and to experience "the feeling" of being a journalist." She then observed by looking at how they wrote their articles based on the night assignments that she had attended earlier with them.

Ramanesh shared about how he learned by observing senior journalists asked questions. He said,

> You learn when you listen to the questions they [senior journalists] asked. The fellow would be talking, you know. So for example the minister will be talking about… we've got this new policy. So he'll ask question. So you learn, oh…this is the question you must ask, you know. Like he talked, tomorrow, we launch this new policy so he'll be asking questions about the policy. You said yesterday that this policy is for people with so much of income to buy low cost housing. Uh, how do you go about, you know, establishing this, that he replies. Then he asked the follow-up question, you know. So from there you learn that the first question is one, question, then the next question is follow-up question. Uh, there's no hard and fast rules [sic]. Your job is to ask questions based on what the guy is replying. So you have to think.

Besides observing his seniors at work, Ramanesh emulates other journalists' way of writing. He said, "But I'll say that the best way to learn is read your colleagues' stories. You may think you know it all, but there's always something new, you know." Here, Ramanesh learned

through two types of observation – other journalists at work and other journalists' work. He

learned to ask questions at assignments by observing how other journalists did it. He also found

that "the best way to learn is to read your colleagues' stories."

Shukran related quite lengthily how most of what he learned at work was on the job and

by "watching people how they do it," besides learning from the course that he attended on

interviewing techniques. Sometimes, he said, when attending a press conference, "being a young

journalist…[I] just sit back and listen and see how the seniors did their work." He continued

learning by observing even after he is no longer a junior journalist, especially when he is not

familiar with a subject being discussed at a press conference. When at such a press conference,

he said, "Just listen to all the questions that people have asked and maybe later on you, you do

your own research and then, and then try to understand the subject matter, you know…. That's

why when I am not familiar with something, I just shut up and listen rather than try to [be a] fool

[by asking]…" In Shukran's case, he did not only observe to learn the skills of journalism, but

also to gain a deeper understanding of the topic he has to write. He also did observational

learning by looking at how senior journalists are at work in the office. He also took the

opportunity through an incidental happening at office to listen and to observe how a senior

journalist tried to solicit for information over the telephone. This point will be elaborated further

under the next method of learning below. Shukran shared the finer points of observational

learning:

> I suppose I picked up things, little, little things from other people. Or sometimes I
>
> do pick things up from my peers, especially when you attended a function, you
>
> know. Um…because sometimes there's quite a few senior journalists you know,
>
> sometimes, uh, as a junior at that time, it's also helpful just like, sit back and

listen and in a press conference, not being too arrogant about it that you know

everything, being a young journalist, and you just sit back and listen and see how

the seniors did their work.

Incidental Learning

Another way journalists learn is through incidental learning (Watkins & Marsick, 1993).

Often, the opportunity for this type of learning is unexpected and is created through events they

cover as assignments on their job. Or, it is through some incident or coincidence that happened at

the office. One of Shukran's greatest learning experiences was through an incidental happening

at his office. He shared that he happened to be talking to one of his senior journalists when a

telephone call came through. He "eavesdropped" on his senior journalist's telephone

conversation and realized that he learned a lot on how to approach someone for information for

his article. He said, "I was just observing him. It was just like, observing him, OK, this is

interesting, I could use him [his way of doing things]."

Other journalists shared the other form of incidental learning – learning through covering

assignments. Ramanesh shared how his coverage of the collapse of a luxury high-rise

condominium building, Highland Towers, in Kuala Lumpur in the early 1990s served as a

learning experience to him. He said,

Highland Towers was a learning experience because you [would] never think that

a house, building occupied by people will collapse. You know, you never thought

that this kind of thing would happen…. So when it happened it was a new idea

because you…you come to realize that you cannot take thing like environment for

granted. You know, you can't. You don't, you don't just talk about new buildings

being built. You ask questions like where is it located, if it's on a slope, how safe

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is the slope, is it big? It's a new dimension in reporting. Until that point, I think

people didn't look at condos being built on a hill slope seriously. They didn't ask

questions like, hey, is this following the by-laws of the local authority? You know,

that was a learning thing, you know. It became, you learn a new, a new, er…new

aspect of your job. Then number two, coverage of the incident itself, you know.

What do you write, you know? This is new. Nothing like this has happened in this

country [before]. So it was a learning curve. It was a learning curve.

Ke Mei also opined how events that she covered as assignments served as one of the

ways she learned. She said,

I think in journalism-*ah*, events actually mould you quite fast-*ah*. You know,

when something happened then you learn more. And then you, I think-*ah*, you

learn faster. Like-*ah*…for instance-*ah*, SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory

Symptom epidemic] came, suddenly-*ah*, we didn't have experience reporting

SARS and all these things…. All these crises don't come so often, you know. It

comes once in 10 or 15 years, you know. So some journalists may miss this part,

you know.

She explained further that events made journalists learn because they opened up opportunities for

communication with people such as politicians and experts in a particular field. This allowed

journalists to have access to information and the opportunities to learn to sieve information.

Jian Sheng, who was somewhat marginalized during his early career days when he did

not get the invitation to cover assignments related to government offices, knew better the

meaning of incidental learning through events. Although he did not specifically refer to disasters

or events that happened unexpectedly, he related the importance of learning from events, in this case, assignments. He said,

> If you go in [covering government assignments], you can understand. If you don't have a pass [press pass] to go in, then you might be looking from the outside. It's not, might not so…so, what, what should I say? Might not be so…thorough, thorough, you know. Because as a journalist we must know thoroughly, what we are trying to do. Even if we cannot do it, we cannot write it out…. As a journalist, responsible journalist, you must understand, you must be able to tell yourself (hitting his chest with his right palm a few times), even if you cannot tell the readers [because it is a sensitive issue].

Another study participant who experienced incidental learning is Gunasegaran. He related his story where a couple sued him for writing a criminal incident that took place in their house. He learned that police report must always be present in any criminal reporting, and that no name of the persons implicated should be mentioned. It was through covering the assignment that he had the opportunity to learn, albeit not one with a positive repercussion.

In a similar vein, Wen Gang shared how he became more cautious with his writing and double-checked facts after he was sued by the person implicated in one of his articles. Like Gunasegaran, the lawsuit was an incidental learning experience for him which was a result from covering an assignment.

Trial-and-error Learning

Most journalists talked about how they learned through trial-and-error. In fact, most of the respondents used the word "trial and error" at one point or other in the interviews. It is also

part of their continuous learning process that spans across their entire career life. Amreen, for example, when asked about what he has learned, concluded it by saying,

> You learn as you go along. In my case. In any reporter's case, that is the only way to learn. Because you make mistakes in the process. And from mistakes you learn. You know, you cannot, it cannot be fine and dandy all the way. There's no way that will happen. Only in your dreams. There's no lawsuit, no scoldings, no, you know, no verbal abuse or physical abuse. Nobody sending bullets through, to the mail, to your office, death threats, scratching your car and things like that. No way, come on!

Wen Gang shared how he learned from trial and error through his editor. He said,

> You learn from your mistake, when you come back from an assignment, they ask you to send whatever stories you have, and like the editors will ask you to sit beside him, to have a look. He will explain to you what's your mistake and all that. So, maybe you learn from there.

As he compared his learning during his early career days and now, he said when he first started as a journalist, he learned through trial and error. He reflected after a short pause,

> Like when I first started, I had to just blindly go, you know. Blindly…blindly go about my work. But now after a while, since I have been a journalist for so long, I know where to go exactly, I don't need to blindly, huh, blindly go. Now I just, can just, I know who to call, I know what to do and all that. So, it's much easier.

> Shukran, when recalling his career experience especially during his critical early days, said pointedly about trial-and-error learning. He said,

I realized then, well, nobody will teach me anything. So it's like for me to, to, to

basically learn on my own. Try a few things, trial and error. And see whether,

which are the things work for me and things like that. That's how I learn, I

suppose. And so, like you meet people, you learn new people skill, and then you

learn how to interview people.

Trial-and-error learning also includes a method of learning that several journalists refer to

as using their "instinct." They refer to this form of trial-and-error learning as a way of learning

that they thought on their own. It also stems mainly from their common sense about how to carry

out their work. For example, En Lin, when asked how she prepared herself to become a

journalist, answered after a long pause,

It's more of instinct-*lah*, I think. More like, I think I can speak for most journalists

as well. You, you learn from years on the job, more like. You'll be guided from

your training and all that. At the end of the day you chart your own way, you see.

When asked specifically how she learned to write concisely after the embarrassing experience

where her 25-paragraph article was reduced to a 5-paragraph filler, she said,

Basically we learn on our own. I guess so-*lah* because…. They'll [editors] just tell

you, they won't tell you how to do it. They'll just tell you, you have to do it.

When you have done, it's the how to do it is from me. So, and, when I send over

my story then they'll tell me how to cut it shorter. Like you can do it this way too,

you know, like a lot of it you learn, you create your own style-*lah*, I suppose, as

you go along you know…

Ke Mei is another study participant who said that journalists have to depend on their

instinct to learn. She said a lot of the learning that journalists go through is about having "to use

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your own judgment, your own common sense, your own assessment." Further, she said that "certain things need not be taught" because "it comes naturally." A firm believer that some things cannot be taught by books, she said,

> You've to figure out how you go about doing it. Because, you see, most important you must get the story, right? How you go about doing it actually nobody can actually teach you, you know. But of course you know, you know, your ultimate goal is to get the news. You know, get it and come out on time. And then, you know, as accurate as possible and then within your knowledge. So all these you have to be very alert and you know, use your judgment, your own assessment. There's no such…like uh, I must do this step you know. Like uh…also it depends on your topic. Let's say you are covering politics uh, you must know, you know, who, which source is reliable, which source you really need to check, and check and check again? Who can you check to verify? So, that you know, it, you know, whatever you know, that thing told to you is actually what's happening. There's no like uh, an exact book you know, that you can learn all these.

Jian Sheng used the word "instinct" several times throughout my interview session with him to describe the trial-and-error learning process that he goes through. He said he developed a self-learning that is based on instinct and that he has "an instinct of a journalist." He explained,

> Maybe I have an instinct of a journalist, of a very curious, getting to know, at the, even any particular matter or thing which arouse my interest and I will go to the end to find out, to find out the actual story, what it is all about. Maybe it's that thing that has moved me, provoked me to learning from one thing to another. And anything which is news-*ah*, will strike my interest-*lah*.

Jian Sheng's notion of trial-and-error learning seems to be based on a combination use of instinct, interest, self-motivation and common sense that spurred his learning endeavor.

Siti Zulaida's way of learning is also one that is based on trial-and-error. Although she said she had never heard the journalistic term of 5Ws 1H, she found it to be some basic things that she had learned and was perfecting it along the way. When asked how she picked up the 5Ws and 1H, she said, "I read a lot of our news. So, I, I, just look at how and I think it's a basic thing when you want to tell something, you have to have that, that fundamental thing, 5W…" When asked further if she learned it unconsciously, she explained, "No, it's more on the uh…how to say? Uh…common sense, when you want to, to me, when you want to tell something, you have to have details when, how, what." Nevertheless, she guessed that she might have also learned it from essay writing during her school days.

The other common way that many journalists undergo trial-and-error learning is by conducting post-mortems on their published works. Many study participants shared how they learned by comparing their original unedited article with the published copy. A senior journalist, Ke Mei, attested to conducting post-mortems as one of the best ways to learn during her early career days. She recalled that,

> That time we were still using typewriters, you know. So we made a few carbon
>
> copies, you know. So we used to keep one uh, if the story comes out-*ah*, then we
>
> compare. See the way we write and, you know, how the actual one that came out
>
> is like. (short pause) So I think that is very good [way of] learning, especially
>
> when you learn how to write news, you know.

En Lin also shared how she used to do post-mortems on her own published works. She reflected on her learning experience of her early career days:

Most of the time I think the learning experience comes from the…the finished

product. Because the finished product is, um...a testament of how your story

should be, you know. As a cub journalist I had so many of my stories turned

upside down, you know, because I got the intro [introduction] wrong, and I got

the intro buried somewhere. But I think, one, one great way of learning is reading

the finished product and comparing it with the, your original [copy]-*lah*.

Shukran found that doing post-mortems on his own published works was the best way to

learn. He explained how his editor would edit his article and,

When the story came out in the newspaper, you compare with your original story

and the story, published story. And I think that's the best way to learn, really, just

like, you know. In fact there is no way to learn, like no amount of training will

help unless you, you check whatever come out against what you've written, you

know. And that's where I learn.

Ramanesh learned to do post-mortems on his own published articles after an editor gave

him some tips about writing. This happened following his experience with obtaining information

at a mortuary that he related in his critical incident. He remembered that his editor told him to

"read your story the next day and see where you went wrong," and "to understand WHY the

story was written like that, why was the story wasn't written the way you said."

<div align="center">Formal Learning</div>

Formal learning essentially involves a structured learning process that journalists undergo

at workplace. It is mainly done through attending in-house training program or courses organized

by external corporations or agencies. Such formal training courses have benefited some

journalists to a certain extent, particularly in the early days of their career. Those who said they

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benefited from such formal on-the-job training were primarily those who were not trained in journalism prior to joining the profession, except En Lin. They found that this method was useful to lay some basic foundations for them to carry out their work, if they had the chance to attend it immediately upon joining the profession. Six of the 15 study participants have received some form of formal journalism training prior to joining the profession. The rest, nine, have either received them immediately upon joining their respective companies or months to a year after working, either through attending short courses organized by their companies or outside agencies. It is these nine members of the sample who did not receive much formal journalism training shared how the formal in-house training have benefited them greatly in the early stage of their career.

There are essentially two ways that journalists undertake formal learning. The first is in-house training which involves a structured training program. The second manner that journalists learned formally is through a self-initiated process of seeking knowledge from journalism textbooks.

In-house Training

Shukran shared how he saw a leap in his job performance after attending a course organized by an agency outside his company He related how the more structured course had helped him to improve his interviewing technique and enabled him to obtain stories more easily. Earlier for a year or two, he was learning to become a journalist on the job without attending any structured course on journalism. He basically learned by observing, following and emulating what other journalists did.

Amreen also shared the training course organized by his company that he attended immediately after joining his company was helpful to acclimatize him to the profession.

However, he added with a little ironic laughter that "the real preparation is actually while you are working, to prepare you for a much worse to come." He observed that, "there's not so much difference…. Later in life, you don't see much difference between a trained-bred journalists and the non-trained journalists."

Ramanesh is another journalist who has benefited from formal training that he received through his company many months after joining the profession. Relating his first critical incident where he had to go to the mortuary but returned to the office without the vital information needed to write his article, he said he would have done a better job had he attended some form of training program by then. He said he did not carry out his work responsibility well then because no one taught him the basics of journalism.

However, despite realizing all the benefits that he had gained from training course after the incident, he opined that, "You know, formal training prepares you to a certain degree on the job. But [it] doesn't give you the intangible skills, the social skills, you know, networking…." He added that,

> A degree, or any formal training, whether it's diploma, degree, will help you on
> the job. But this is not the solution, but [sic] not the absolute. And I will attribute,
> like 90% of it is on the job learning skills. You know.

He evaluated the value of a journalism degree in this manner:

> After all these years, I can tell you, you don't need a degree in journalism. It
> won't really help much because you can learn it all on the job. Maybe, you know,
> uh, the theory is such, maybe, no-*lah*, you can't expound on it. You, it will help
> you to have a degree in economics, if you have a degree in business
> administration, you have a degree in say, engineering, you have a degree in

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marine biology or forestry, you could come out there, you know, you could use your knowledge. If you are [a] civil engineer if [sic] [and] you are a journalist, if they tell you this is the specification for the road [construction]. You could ask a question, a technical question, you know. But journalism doesn't teach you that. You know, journalism just teaches you how to report. So, if you came with an added qualification, like management, or economics, you know, it will help you if you go for, not that you won't learn, but it's a real plus there.

Having had the opportunities to attend more journalism courses organized by other agencies later in his career, he learned more journalism theories which formalized his understanding of what he had been practicing. However, he said, they did not change the way he learns because "now I'm set in my ways, you know…you don't teach an old dog new tricks. Quite frankly, you know."

En Lin is the only journalism-trained journalist who shared how she benefited from a training course organized by her company despite having had been trained in journalism prior to joining the profession. She benefited particularly on learning the basics of court reporting, an area that she and most journalists were commonly asked to do during the early days as a journalist. She benefited from the course because journalism school did not specifically teach her to do court reporting. However, despite the course being beneficial, she concluded that she learned more while on the job.

Learning Through Journalism Textbooks

Although this form of learning was mentioned by only two of the study participants, it is a powerful tool of learning for them. The two had no background in journalism and did not have the chance to undergo some form of immediate training upon becoming a journalist. Shukran shared how he bought a few books on writing. He said,

I bought a few writing books, you know. Um, I think first year in [name of his

company] I bought a textbook for first year writing student or something like that.

So, it teaches you, because I've never been to a school where they teach writing.

He made it a point to go for book sales to look for books on journalism writing.

Ramanesh is the other study participant who learned a lot about journalism from

textbooks. He said,

I suppose, huh, the biggest single way I've ever prepared myself, well, I must

admit-*lah*…I went on to buy, you know, textbooks, books on journalism by

people like James Wreston, journalists who write autobiographies, I'll buy and

read them. And I suppose it's the window to the career also-*lah*. Their

experiences you know, tells you what, how to do the job, you know, when they

relay experiences, you also know you could apply it to your day-to-day functions.

However, although Ramanesh benefited greatly from textbooks he pointed out

that there is a limitation to what he could learn from journalism textbooks. He

said textbooks were helpful in teaching him how to write news article but they

"can't teach you how to go gathering news skills" especially about "public

relations." This point has been raised in the earlier chapter under the discussion

for findings for research question one.

Ramanesh's view of the limitation of textbook as a source of learning concurs with that

of Ke Mei and Shahzam. Ke Mei opined that no book could teach her how to carry out her

professional responsibilities, especially about how to obtain information for her articles.

Shahzam noted that sometimes he had to depart from textbook when carrying out his

professional responsibility. This happened, he said, especially when he had to handle intangible

matters such as the culture and custom when covering assignments, especially when abroad. Nevertheless, both Ke Mei and Shahzam have benefited from what textbooks have taught them about the basics of journalism.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has reviewed how journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities. It has identified and discussed three ways that journalists adopt to learn. They are: guidance from the community of practice, informal learning, and formal learning. The data revealed that journalists receive guidance from senior co-workers and counterparts, are being coached by superiors on a one-to-one basis, and they also develop mentoring relationship with senior journalist or superior at one point of their career. They also learn informally by conducting observational learning, incidental learning, and trial-and-error learning. As for formal learning, they learn through two ways. They learn by going through on-the-job training, which is a structured form of learning. They also take a self-initiated approach of learning by using journalism textbooks.

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNING

The third question developed to guide this study asked, "What contextual factors affect journalists' learning on the job?" The contextual factors included social or organizational factors. This chapter outlines the three main contextual factors that affect journalists' learning on the job, which are listed in Table 5. They are structural power relationships, editor's political survival, and topic of writing (known as beat in journalistic term). For the structural power relationships factor, three sub-factors have been identified. They are legal control, political interference and control, and ethnicity and language of writing.

Table 5

Findings for Research Question 3

What contextual factors affect journalists' learning on the job?

1) Structural power relationships
    - Legal control
    - Political interference and control
    - Ethnicity and language of writing
2) Editor's political survival
3) Topic of writing (beat)

Structural Power Relationships

Power is omnipresent in Malaysian press. Media organizations are the mirrors of the Malaysian political system. It is an open secret that politics is not separate from the press. As several Malaysian media researchers (Cheong, 1993; Mohd. Safar, 1996; Wang, 1998; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998) have pointed out, the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) parties own the mainstream media in Malaysia. The most recent change of political tide observed during the writing of this dissertation further reaffirms the reality of politics and press. The announcement

of the termination of the *New Straits Times'* Group Editor-in-Chief (GEIC) Abdullah Ahmad's appointment term ("Abdullah Ahmad's term as NSTP GEIC ends," November 22, 2003) is a blatant evidence of such political liaison. This is particularly so because it was the newly appointed Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, who explained the "official reason" for the removal ("Nothing personal in NSTP editor's dismissal, says PM," 2003) and not the management of the news organization. The management only issued an official statement that the top management head's term had ended with immediate effect on November 21, 2003 ("Abdullah Ahmad's term as NSTP GEIC ends," November 22, 2003). It was reported that Abdullah Ahmad was sacked because he had written an article, which appeared in the newspaper on November 12, 2003, in which he said "Saudi Arabia had long been suspected of complicity, conscious or otherwise, in the September 11 attacks in the US" ("Nothing personal in NSTP editor's dismissal, says PM," 2003). The Prime Minister said that the decision was nothing personal and was due to a protest the Malaysian foreign ministry received from the Saudi Arabia government over the article.

The presence of politics and power is probably almost taken for granted that it needs no further deliberation and, perhaps, not all the journalists interviewed saw the need to mention political power plays in their practice. However, numerous of the sample spoke openly and critically about the political interference in the running of their news organizations. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain from the data if the omission of such topic by some of them is due to the fact that I am an insider, a former journalist, who is expected to know the reality of Malaysian journalism practice. Or, it is probably because they do not see the need for such a discussion because it is an understandable journalism practice environment that has been decided by the government. As Shahzam has pointed out, journalism practice is about working "within that system which has already decided for you" which is the pro-establishment stance. Another

study participant, Ramanesh, sees journalism practice as "stagnant" where "there is nothing more you can do with it-*lah*, in terms of freedom, testing the boundaries of freedom, we know already-*lah*." Ke Mei attributes to the level of seniority of journalist in order for journalists to understand the journalism practice. She said,

[It] could be they are junior, maybe uh, they don't have access to certain information, maybe they just said, uh, [the] article [was] not used, that's it. (pause) I suppose if you have the privilege of working long enough, you'll see the changes.

Another factor that she named was the attitude of the journalist. She said,

Some people take it as a job, they won't sit back and think about it. Don't use [my articles] uh, never mind, it's like this [that's the way things work], expected-*lah*. They don't sit back, you know, and think about the things. You know, some bosses will say, some (slight sigh), so-called [they] really like journalism, if you really take journalism as a job-*ah*, then it's not very good, you know. You must really take it as a profession, you know, then you'll really look at it differently. Sad to say, you know, many people take it as a job. There's a difference, you know, actually. Job is [to] get it done-*lah*. If you really think of it as a profession, you'll think about ethics, the impact on readers, the impact on society, the long term impact and you know, if really, some people really hope [that] with their, writing, they can help to make the society a better place, or maybe influence the policy, you know, for the betterment of people.

Nevertheless, there seems to be an unconscious and almost unanimous understanding of the legal control on the industry among the sample even among some who appeared to be

"oblivious." And they probably take it as a fact that the practice cannot be changed. Jian Sheng said the newspaper industry is generally politically inclined. Yi Ying feels articles about political matters get more scrutiny because a certain way of angling the articles is expected of her. En Lin knows she has to cover assignments related to political matters of the political party that owns her company "because I know they'll, that's what they [her company] want." When asked if in any way her conscious knowledge that she has to cover any assignment by the political party that owns her company would have any impact on her learning, she said,

> Not so much impact-*lah*. In that I'll have to go *one-lah* [for sure] for this function,
> whatever it is, a dinner function or whatever. I know if it's [name of the political
> party that owns her company] one I will have to go-*lah*. That's all I've learned-
> *lah*, you know.

However, she added that they were the assignments given to her by her editors and not of her choice. Besides, she does not really write on politics per se, hence "it has no influence in me at all."

Ramanesh's opinion is the strongest of all in affirming that ownership of press organizations by political parties affects journalists' learning. He said although journalists' learning of journalism skills per se is not affected, their learning of the way news articles are being written is affected. He articulated the effects of ownership on learning succinctly by saying that,

> I think in the long run subconsciously, …it affects the reporters also-*lah*. The
> newer ones have been, keep on asking why we must [sic] write like this, why-*lah*,
> why…so the older ones, after a while, they know this is the proper thing to do.
> Unless told so, they'll just do the minimum necessary. If [the government]

announce[s] a policy, I come back I write. [If the editors] Say, hey, get the consumer association, you know, get whatever vested party's opinion, OK, we call [and ask for their opinions]. If not, we just go and write and sit down quietly. Nobody really goes out to be critical, [just] ask some routine questions and they come back [return to the office]. Like the National Service (an ala-military style training program to instill patriotism), the much-talked-about National Service. People don't say how unfair it is for someone who is a hawker who is feeding his family. The age is from 18 to 35. You are 35 years old, hey, you run a hawker stall, you are asked to go and sit for six weeks. Who is going to feed your family? You know, so these are [the] issues-*lah*, you know. The government wants it [National Service], so you oblige-*lah*.

He explained further how journalists' learning of writing is shaped. He said,

Although you question [the policy or an issue], but you come [return to the office] and you write-*lah*. You know that some of it is going to get edited out, whatever, after a while it's a… pretty routine. You said *eh* [hey], you accept the way it is-*lah*. You come back [return to the office] and you write it. You don't want to be critical….

Ramanesh's opinion confirms what Shan Jie said about her experience of the ownership change of her organization. She said her articles are being edited to suit the standing political instruction although she believed her way of writing has not changed. Ramanesh said although he knows his published articles are "not going to be what you wrote" he still puts in the parts that would get edited out. This is because,

You don't want to be asked the next day why wasn't the story inside there. You don't know what other people [journalists] are going to write, do you? What you deem as critical, what you deem as not necessarily suitable, other papers may carry, and when your boss ask you, you said I wrote it down! You are the one who removed it, not me! So you are quite safe. Play safe-*lah*. You don't want to be scolded.

Therefore, in Ramanesh's case, although writing can be affected where he might subconsciously write in the way expected of him, he consciously protects himself by putting in all the information in his articles.

As seen from the data presented above, the question is not about what contextual factors affect journalists' learning on the job per se; instead, it is about what contextual factors affect "how" journalists learn on the job. I will now discuss three of the sub-factors under structural power relationships that shows their effects on how journalists go about learning on the job. The three sub-factors are legal control, political interference and control, and ethnicity and language of writing.

<center>*Legal Control*</center>

The most cited form of legal control by the participants is the publication permit issued under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 or infamously known as KDN (acronym of *Kementerian Dalam Negeri* or Home Ministry in Malay Language). It is a law that regulates the media industry by granting the Home Minister the power to issue or withdraw a printing or publishing permit. Most of the participants mentioned the legal control at some points in a somewhat passing remark and oblique reference when relating their critical incidents during the interviews, except for Wen Gang. Legal control includes the legal implication that could be

caused by their articles and the enacted acts that govern the journalism fraternity. Wen Gang's encounter with a lawsuit from a civil servant who was implicated in his article about a fraud case made him constantly aware of the legal constraint in his writing. He took extra effort to check for details to avoid being sued again. He said,

Avoid as little suits as possible-*lah*. Don't, don't be sued, you know, it's very

stressful, you know, when you get sued and all that. Like, you are always thinking

about it, you know, like, when the lawyer comes to see and ask you things, huh.

It's very stressful-*lah*.

His editors are also on the cautious side and are "meticulous." He said, "They are always teaching you to be wary, to check your facts, to get official confirmation to your story." Wen Gang said he learned to "work smart" to avoid legalistic matters. He works smart by not encroaching on topics or areas that he is not directly in-charge of although they might help him boost his career prospects. Although he is sometimes upset that his editors refuse to publish some of his articles because he could not obtain any official confirmation to the facts although they are true, Wen Gang accepted it. He resigned to the fact that "there might be repercussions if we didn't get a confirmation." What Wen Gang has experienced is that legal constraint is a factor he has to take into consideration in learning to do his work because they could implicate him. He is an example of "once bitten twice shy" case so much so that it has constantly kept him on his toes when he goes about finding facts for his articles and writing them.

Shukran made an oblique reference to laws concerning journalism. When explaining about business corporations' interference that his organization receives to soften certain articles, he said his organization seems to adopt an attitude where "they don't like to offend people." He opined that journalist should push to have certain issues highlighted in an indirect way if

aggressiveness is not encouraged or to be avoided. He said there is a "fine line between what's acceptable and what's not." He continued rationalizing that "what's acceptable to you is different from what's acceptable to the government. Because the government holds the KDN and all that." Here, Shukran is definitely aware and on guard unconsciously of the legal control that the government has over Malaysian press through the KDN permit.

Of the entire sample, Shan Jie is the one who showed the most concern about the legal control and how she has to learn within the restricted notion of freedom of press in Malaysia. She specifically named the legal control as the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, the Official Secrets Act 1972 and the Internal Security Act 1960.

<center>Political Interference and Control</center>

The legal control that Wen Gang experienced in a lawsuit is a factor that affects journalists' learning on the job to a lesser degree. It is also related more to the issue of indemnity in a profession. After all, it is not often that journalists get sued. The more macro power of control that affects journalists' learning is political interference and control, as related by more study participants. Political interference and control is closely related to legal control and press ownership and there seems to be a hairline difference between the two. This is because, often, before legal control is enforced, political interference by the political-party owners of the press organizations seeps in in the form of "advisories." Ke Mei described a few situations of how these advisories were given to her organization. She had to learn to act fast by writing to address certain issues that she foresaw would be deemed sensitive before her company was given political advise. She said,

> [You have to] be very fast, you know, only like after a few [articles] they [the
>
> political party that owns her company] feel the feedback and all… and then

they'll start to tell the big boss, you know. Better slow down…then you know

what you are into already. Let's say if you are fast-*ah*, they haven't come out

[with the advisories] yet-*ah*, of course the paper also, (slight sigh) sometimes, you

know, they still run the story-*lah*. You know, once there is an advisory already-*ah*,

then you, (slight sigh), [the bosses and she are] a bit cautious already.

She also explained how she has to learn to practice within the often delicate and shifting

political boundary. This is because sensitive issues develop rather rapidly with the presence of

different political actors in the scene. Ke Mei, the most outspoken of all the study participants,

shared in great details about the need to look at learning within the scope of power play in and

outside of the press organizations. She said,

You have to [work within the constraints of the system]! This is the system. You

cannot, you cannot er...make a change to it as and when you want, you know, but

you work within that. With the best of your ability.

She also mentioned the different advisories from the government on certain issues. She said as a

matter of fact,

You know you have to work within it [the existence of advisory]. You do your

best. Of course you will be ready for trouble-*lah*. You can loose your job. You

loose your job, [or] they may transfer you to the feature desk or whatever…But of

course you must not let this bother you-*lah*.

When asked how she handled the advisories, she said, "sometimes the article gets toned down"

and that "the bosses will know how to do it." When asked further if this toning down and re-

angling of her story by her editor gives an impact to her learning, she said,

Not impact-*lah*. It's like, I said, you are working within the system, you know. You, you already know what are the controls all over you. It's between, you know, wanting to write or not wanting to write. You know, the bosses don't care if you don't want to write. If you still want to write, you know, you will know how to move about so that the thing gets printed. As I said the value and principle [of journalism] is still the same, of course the thing [article], when it comes out, it may be a toned down or washed down thing, you know, but it's still, you know, it's not something off tangent, you know. Of course, you know, you learn to be more street-wise or more sarcastic, you know, but you…I suppose you, to survive anywhere you have to survive within a system. And in this case, you don't hope to change it. Don't hope to change it. You take it or you leave it. As simple as that, the bosses will tell you. That's why some people go into cold storage, if you really want to go head on with them.

When asked why she did not see the impact of her learning as negative, she said,

Uh, hm, like I said, it's not negative you know. You know the situation, you know. You know you are working within so many constraints. And you still want to write. That's how you move about. You've got no choice. I think in life also, sometimes we are left in situations where we don't have much choice, you know, but to get around to stay afloat. It's quite similar-*lah*, in our working life as a journalist.

She insisted that the impact is not negative because journalists are not stopped from learning the skills needed to carry out their professional responsibilities. She reasoned that, "I can know a thousand things but write a hundred, you know. [It] doesn't mean that, you know,

[if] I don't write [the other 900 things]-*ah*, I don't know [about them], you know." When asked if writing only hundred out of the one thousand facts that she knew would in any way limit her learning endeavor to educate the masses as what she saw her role as a journalist is, she said,

> If let's say, I know a thousand things but I write a hundred, it doesn't mean it will affect my learning. It's not that what I know I don't write. Learning means to bring forward a, a topic, or [to] highlight something. So, once you are aware, you are well versed with the system uh, you [will] know how to move around.

However, the question of how the skills are being learned is another story altogether. She said she has to learn how to "maneuver" within the system.

> Although Ke Mei does not see the impact as negative nor her learning as being hindered, she agrees her learning is being constrained to a certain extent. She said,

> Organization doesn't stop your learning, you know. It's just that, I think, of course…it's also… because it's a system within a system, you know. It's more, you know, like uh, when it comes to sensitive topics-*ah*…there are some constraints, that's all. Other than that, you know, nobody can stop you from learning.

> Therefore, to Ke Mei, she does learn to a certain extent. But her learning revolves around how she could best maneuver around the political and legal constraints. In other words, her learning is somewhat restricted and directed to a path that is sanctioned by her company. The question is how much she could "deviate" from the sanctioned path. However, as Ke Mei has shared, room for working outside the sanctioned boundary is sometimes not an option at all because of the issuance of advisories on certain matters from the political party that owns her company.

Ramanesh also gave a similar opinion on the effects of political control and interference on learning like Ke Mei did. He opined that learning the skills of journalism would not be affected by the political control and interference because journalists would still get the opportunities to learn the needed skills. However, he admitted that learning is subconsciously affected because,

> It sorts of shapes your thinking. You know already, after a while, even if you, you, you can learn all these [journalism] skills that I have mentioned-*lah*, uh…after a certain point I think you don't…(slight sigh), uh…you learn, you know, you apply, but you do but… Doesn't really make much of a difference, you know. It's purely academic already-*lah*, you know. Maybe like a hypothetical situation, if you have a tea, you discuss, your friend said this, this, this, then it will give you an input-*lah*, you should have done it this way, you should have asked him this way, or you should have asked that fellow this way or, you know…. In journalism there is only so much you can do, job skill, you know. Er…that sort of thing. I can't see it's affecting your learning skill. You continue to learn, you know, maybe you continue to apply. Maybe (raised his voice to emphasize the word) your writing skill will be affected by it, you know. (slight sigh). Your, you know you will ask the question [at assignment], but sometimes you won't be motivated to ask-*lah*, you know. You know it's not going to see print. But you'll still ask. If you don't feel like it you won't ask. Your learning skill will, will not be affected really, but your writing may be affected. I think that's the most logical thing you could say from it-*lah*.

He explained further how writing could be affected and learning could be shaped. He said,

You know you have to ask the question. We are launching this project. How many

million is it worth? Definitely you'll ask the question, you know. Then maybe

[you will ask] how does it affect the others, you know. How much it will affect

those down there. This question will be asked, no matter what happens, the

question will be asked. But whether you're going to write it down or not, it's left

to you, left to be seen. How much of it you're willing to work into your story.

Another experience that Ramanesh had regarding his learning of "agenda setting theory"

in a course that he took outside of his organization is an evidence of political interference in

journalism practice. He had earlier shared his remorseful act where he believed his article had

somewhat caused the wife of a politician to commit suicide. Relating the critical incident and his

learning of the theory, he said it has formalized his understanding on the use of such theory in

actual practice. Although Ramanesh has benefited greatly from the in-house training course that

he attended during the early days of his career, he might not have realized that the course was

one with a hidden curriculum. He said the in-house course did not teach agenda setting theory

and had merely perceived that it was a "new theory" that he learned outside of his organization.

The in-house course was one that was obviously tailor-made to suit his company's agenda. He

said,

You know it [agenda setting theory] exists but you don't know there is a formal

theory to this kind of ideas, you know…. Even without attending the course, you

still know-*lah*, there's an agenda here, that's why we are writing like this, you

know. You are writing bad things about this minister because the bosses have said

we want to get rid of him, that's agenda setting already.

Therefore, political interference is an open-secret factor in learning among journalists. At least, journalists learn about the use of agenda setting theory and are part of those who translated the theory into practice because of the political interference that "mandated" them to do so.

Shahzam is another journalist who agreed that the practice of journalism is somewhat choreographed by the system when he said that the system has already decided for the journalists to be pro-establishment. The expectation for journalists to learn to carry out their work within the boundary set by the establishment is a factor that guide journalists' learning on the job. Throughout my interview with him, Shahzam has repeatedly mentioned and stressed that an understanding of the government's machinery is vital for a journalist in order to carry out his or her professional responsibilities. His view is similar to that of Ke Mei, in the sense that both emphasize a thorough understanding of the system. Jian Sheng also shared similar view. Although he is not dealing much with political articles now, he knew the importance of it during his early days in career when he made conscious efforts to learn from other mainstream journalists who had access to government assignments.

Shan Jie's description of her critical incident learning where her organization was taken over by a political party presented a sharp contrast of journalism practice before and after the takeover. It is also an evidence of how political interference and control affects her practice. She said her working environment has changed and she has to learn to work within it. She said after the takeover, she could see that the intensity of interference by the new owner of her organization in the form of advisories has heightened.

However, Jin Ping who has also experienced her company being taken over by a political party is more optimistic about the change of ownership. Although she is aware that the takeover is an indication of her shifting of alliance to one of a politically tuned one, she sees it as a form

of maintaining power to ensure that her company's KDN permit is secured yearly. She has

learned to survive within the constraints that political interference and control brings about.

Jian Sheng's sharing of his second critical incident where his articles are being sidelined

is another case of political interference. He is aware that often his articles are rejected because

they are not about political matters, which his company prioritizes. He reasoned that,

> Malaysian Chinese papers is still very much political uh…tuned, you know,
>
> political attributed-*lah*. That means they are more focused on government stories.
>
> You can see that uh…whatever they focus on, there's a certain element of
>
> political in, political color, component-*lah*. So…it's generally related to the
>
> Malaysian [political] interest.

Yi Ying is the journalist who has shared probably the highest form of political

interference in her learning endeavor. Her critical incident of reporting a legal court case

involving a former politician saw some of the highest authorities in her company edited her

article, which is not the norm of how articles are being edited. She saw a direct political

interference on her article. Although she had earlier applied all the journalistic skills needed to

write the article, such as doing an intensive research and asking the necessary questions to solicit

the information needed for her article, her skills were not translated into the final product – her

article. Further, she has not been too concerned that she is required to angle her articles to that

expected by her organization, especially if they are political stories because she does not see it as

a "life and death situation." She would only put up a defense if they were articles that are dear to

her heart – in this case, fortunately, they happen to be of non-political matters.

Ethnicity and Language of Writing

Like the society of Malaysia that is very much stratified and polarized by ethnicity, ethnicity is also a factor that affects journalists' learning on the job. In a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, ethnicity is also closely linked to language. Each ethnic group still holds on to its own language. Even the education system is polarized where the types of schools are identifiable through ethnicity. This has been found to creep into journalists' learning as well.

Wen Gang experienced how the Chinese press journalists were more willing to help him learn the ropes of the profession when he first started. He would tag along with them to police stations and even a senior Chinese press journalist introduced him to important officers without any fear of him knowing his informants. Wen Gang realized that he was not able to learn from the non-Chinese press journalists as there was a factor of rivalry compared to his counterparts from the Chinese press. He also realized that the Chinese press journalists were more cohesive in the sense that they flocked together most of the time. There seemed to be some kind of cooperation among them too because they would converge at a fixed place everyday. The Chinese press has traditionally been known to be rather aggressive in pursuing stories related to crime. Wen Gang's case is related more to the language he writes in. However, at the same time, it cannot be ascertained if the Chinese press journalists would have rendered him the same help if he were a non-Chinese.

On the other hand, Jian Sheng did not gain access to covering assignments by government offices because his company was not one of those giant mainstream media in the 1970s which were usually invited. Realizing the limited opportunity for learning in his own organization, he learned through his counterparts from such mainstream media about the machinery of the government. He believed this was essential if he wanted to be a good journalist.

He learned to mingle with them and learned informally from them. At the same time, it is also more of a language issue because some Chinese press organizations were not regarded as the mainstream press during the 1970s. However, the notion of mainstream media has somewhat changed over the years and most are included for invitations to assignments presently. Jian Sheng's experience was also related to issue of ethnicity because no non-Chinese was and still is not known to be writing for a Chinese press. The main reason he was marginalized was because his company was a Chinese press, which was usually not invited to government assignments then.

Editor's Political Survival

Editor's political survival is another sub-factor that affects journalists' learning in carrying out their professional responsibilities. Often, this is manifested in a relationship that involves the editor, the party(ies) or person(s) mentioned in the article, and the journalist who handles the said article or assignment. Journalists' manner of carrying out their professional responsibilities are somewhat dictated by such relationships. Most of the sample, except Ramanesh, did not cite critical incidents that portray the existence of such interpersonal power relationships. Instead, they mentioned this factor when they discussed in general the learning process a journalist goes through and the practice of journalism.

Ramanesh's description of his article, which he believed has caused the death of an opposition politician's wife, is the strongest evidence of the editor's political survival factor. In the case, Ramanesh realized later that his editor who asked him to pursue the article was doing it for a personal reason. He said, "He of course-*lah*, he was going to, you know, the political agenda, you know…. He's trying to suck up to the bigger bosses-*lah*, you know." His editor was hoping to please his higher bosses, obviously someone who has managed to retain his position

because of his alignment to the government. He tried to do so by asking Ramanesh to expose

negative issues of the politician that would affect the political mileage of the opposition party.

His editor, however, according to Ramanesh, is not a member of one of the ruling political

parties. Ramanesh reflected, "The lessons that I have learned as a result of this [is], when you are

being objective, you look at the bigger picture, who does it benefit when you write the story?"

Therefore, Ramanesh's learning through assignment, particularly in his early career days, was

charted by his editor's personal political survival factor. His editor had hoped that he would be in

the good book of the company and was cruising on the right road to promotion by getting him to

pursue the story to run down an opposition party.

Ke Mei, when describing the political survival of the editor pointed out that it is an effect

of the fact that news organizations essentially function as a sub-system of the larger country's

political system. She said,

> The sub-system, you have bosses control the sub-system. The bosses are friends
>
> to them [the politicians] and all these things….Of course, like NST [New Straits
>
> Times] by UMNO [United Malay National Organization] and Star [The Star
>
> newspaper] by MCA [Malaysian Chinese Association]. Even UMNO controls it
>
> because they have all this bridge, you know. It's very obvious-*what*?

When asked if she was referring to ownership of the newspaper organizations, she said, "Yeah,

some are ownership. Even without ownership also, the paper, the bosses will know how to

kowtow to the politicians. You are talking about Malaysian system." She added that in some

cases editors control the sub-system because an issue pursued could be linked to someone who is

their personal friend. When asked how this could affect her learning, she said, "Of course like I

said, it will be a very toned down piece-*lah*. If you really want to, you know, say it very direct,

and say it very hard, oh, you can, just write it for your own reading!" However, she added that the facts in the article would not be sacrificed. Here, in Ke Mei's case, the factor of the editor's political survival and personal interest affects learning to the extent that even though she would still learn to carry out her professional responsibilities, she has to learn to do so more cautiously by consciously reducing the tone of her article. She opined that this is a better option than not seeing her article published at all. Even if she did not consciously tone down her article, her editor might, after all.

Therefore, to both Ke Mei and Ramanesh, there is a certain element of self-censorship in their learning process because of the need to maneuver within the system as a result of editors having to survive politically. Even if they may not have to learn to impose self-censorship on their own articles, they go through a process of censorship through their editors. This happens when editors insinuate or there is a silent common understanding of what assignments journalists ought to cover or what kind of issue they should pursue. En Lin shared how her learning is affected by the political survival of the editors as a result of their awareness of who owns the company. She said,

> Well, it has influenced in that I know [name of the political party that owns her
>
> company, A] story we have to cover-*lah*, you know. Like when I was in
>
> parliament and all that, you know, um, if there's something about [name of
>
> political party A] I'll have to cover because that's what the bosses [editors] would
>
> want. And I'll, and they would want that story from me and I can't miss it, you
>
> know. So, even like court, you know, if it's a… a [name of another political party,
>
> B], a [political party B] would be less important to me than [political party A] one.
>
> So we cannot run away from the fact that we are owned by [political party A]

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right? So um…[political party A] stories would be given prominence-*lah*, but that doesn't mean that we don't cover [political party B]. We have, we did…. Um…we, we give both sides [of] their say and, uh, the only emphasis is if it's, if it's a [name of the political party that owns her company] thing we write it-lah. We try to give it as detail as possible.

Shukran is another study participant who shared how editor's poltical interest overrules some situations. He said his company often tries not to offend people by softening the tone of headlines. Further, knowing the existence of such factor made him more conscious of what he writes. He said,

It makes you more aware of what you write. Sometimes, I said OK, if I write this way, and…it will mean, it will look as if that that company is right. But they are not. But, you, you have to give that person a chance as well. If they were right, so what? You have to write it that way, you know. You cannot say because uh, um just like, sometimes a company would write, would have a certain issue. I said OK, um, it gives the company a fair chance. It gives them, what you call it, some words in the paper. Because like they have something to say, you know. So you cannot say because uh…be [because]...at the same time because you are aware of what you write, and, only because a company says it doesn't mean that they want to write, to give you a PR [public relations] story. But they probably have something good to say. That's the reason why things are, the way they are. But, at the same time, you also have to be cautious, like, OK, when they mention this, this is what the impact on, on, the company, you know, that's what it impacts on the say like, the, the end user for instance, you know.

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Siti Zulaida's understanding of her company's stance as a "political newspaper" is reflected in her editors' endeavor to survive politically when handling her articles. She is aware that her company prioritizes political news and her articles do not fall under that category directly. However, she noted that as long as a prominent politician mentioned something about her topic of writing, even when it is not of political nature, it would be front-paged. Her editors have to act in accordance to her company's policy. She said,

Hmm…well, I always [have to] fight with the editors. I said, well, [topic of her writing] is important, you know, uh…but then we have to understand the stand of the company as well…their agenda or something like that. They are like political newspaper. They can have, uh, other articles as well, but they have to give priority to their agenda, their politic and social uh, tools or something like that.

Shahzam also agreed that journalists have to deal with the existence of political survival of the editor. He likens the running of a newspaper to that of a "micro version of probably a nation" and debate is continuously made about what is considered a good newspaper. He described the political survival that an editor could possibly take:

If the shareholder is interested in golf, for example, so I [the editor] make sure I [the editor] send my reporter, hey, you cover that golf tournament! He's playing, you know, to please the attention. You know, there's so many ways of sucking up to people without being seen to be sucking up, you know. I mean, it's a skill.

Since journalists do learn through assignments, as discussed earlier under research question two, editor's instruction to journalists could chart the direction a learning process takes.

Topic of Writing

Topic of writing, or known as "beat" in journalistic term, is another factor that affects journalists' learning on the job. A close scrutiny on the beats of the sample revealed that those who write on political issues or are exposed to covering assignments related to politics approach learning in a different manner. They are more aware and conscious of what they write and the circumstances surrounding their learning and practice. However, most look at the effect from a practice perspective, in the sense that they feel the effect is on the probability of their articles being published. On the other hand, those writing on matters not related to politics seem to have to fight for publication space with their companies that prioritize political news.

Ke Mei, who talked at great length about the need for journalists to understand that their practice is within systems of power, pointed out rather succinctly about how the topic one writes makes a difference. Ke Mei, whose topic of writing is related to political matters, said,

> Journalism is an interplay of many things, you know…. The system is an
>
> interplay of many things even though maybe politics are more affected, you know,
>
> maybe others are not so. Just like you interview a pretty girl, it doesn't really
>
> matter much-*lah.*

She also believes that the beat journalists cover determines how aware they are of the fact that they are working within a system. This will eventually affect the way they learn.

Several study participants who did not write on political issues per se shared that their learning experiences were the indirect implications of politics. For example, Jian Sheng is among the two study participants who lamented the fact that his company often prioritizes articles on politics over his. His editors complained that his articles are too deep for readers' understanding.

He has to learn to rewrite his articles by simplifying it to layperson's language to meet the requirements of his editors. On the effect on his learning he said,

> No, it doesn't affect my learning. Because, I'm, I'm, I am a journalist, I know what uh…your learning…when you learn something, you don't think [about] political interest, you just learn-*lah*. And then, after you, after you have learned something which is worth sharing with the readers, you have to put it in a way which is acceptable…"

He accepted the reason for his company's reason not to publish certain news or censor certain parts of his articles. He said, "That's a practical aspect-*lah*, that they do it due to the paper's policy-*lah*. I can understand that-*lah*. Because paper has to survive…." However, he admitted later that although there is no impact on his learning, the output of the learning is affected. He acknowledged that,

> So, [on] learning, [there is] no impact. It's the carrying out of, sometimes you say, your writing-*lah*, you know. When you write and your story is not published, or published in the way that is not supposed to be, then you might have the (pause) the output [affected]. Output aspect-*lah*. Output aspect, it might have impact-*lah*, on that-*lah*, you know. Constrained-*lah*, constrained a little bit.

> Siti Zulaida is the other study participant who lamented that her company prioritizes

news related to political issues and she has been constantly fighting for more space for articles on her beat. She said, "We have to compete because like [name of her newspaper] they like to play up political articles. So we really have to compete with that." Nevertheless, she resigned to the fact that,

But we have to understand the stand of the company as well…their agenda or

things like that. They are like political newspaper. They can have uh, other

articles as well, but they have to give priority to their agenda, their politic and

social uh, tools or something like that.

When asked what is her understanding of her company's agenda, she explained,

Well, they are up to, they are really into this political uh…uh, well, you can say

that the introduction, the, the, the lead must be Prime Minister's story or Deputy

Prime Minister. If they talk about [name of her topic], their stories will come out

on front page. It's more on the leaders and the government thing, you know. But

we do have, we do use the other articles but [they are] not the main priority.

However, Siti Zulaida's company stance to publish more articles on political matters is

somewhat a boon to her. This is because she learns more about her subject as she writes more

articles to increase the chance of her articles to be published. She also admitted that the quality of

writing among her fellow co-workers on the subject was not up to the standard initially and they

made an effort to write more in-depth articles.

Yi Ying's remark that political articles get more scrutiny by her company is an evidence

that her company pays more attention to matters on politics. Aware of her company's slant, she

said she learned to write her news articles to the angle that she knows her company would want

them to be. She added, "Sometimes they want a positive story. Let's say if I know they want a

positive story, you write in a positive angle. Then I just write in a positive angle." Yi Ying who

does not write much on news related to politics and has interest in writing other non-political

subjects, has no qualms doing so because "it's not a life and death situation." She, however, said

she would not write it if she were asked to turn a lie into a truth. She also would not compromise if her editors interfered in her writing of articles of her interest.

Another study participant who writes on matters related to politics is Shahzam. He is also very much aware of the fact that he works within a system that has been decided for him. His approach to learning is one with a rather strong trend of negotiation. He knows when to negotiate and when to use "strategic withdrawal" in getting his articles published. He is constantly aware of the sensitive issues surrounding him and learns to write in a manner that would escape the scrutiny of his company.

<div align="center">Summary of the Chapter</div>

This chapter has identified the three main contextual factors that affect journalists' learning on the job. Table 5 listed the three contextual factors with the first factor, structural power relationships, being the most dominant of all. There are three areas in structural power relationships that affect journalists' learning. They are legal control, political interference and control, and finally, ethnicity and language of writing. The second contextual factor that affects journalists' learning is editor's political survival. The third contextual factor is journalists' topic of writing or known as beat in journalistic term.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The mainstream media in Malaysia are controlled by the government through the ruling

political parties' business investment arms (Cheong, 1993; Mohd. Safar, 1996; Mustafa, 2003a,

2003b; Zaharom, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). They have been acting as the mouthpieces

of the government, especially public broadcast organizations (Curran & Park, 2000; Zaharom,

2002). There are also various laws enacted by the Parliament that directly control the running of

the media (Zaharom, 2002). The most powerful law of all is the Printing Presses and

Publications Acts introduced in 1984 that grants the Home Minister the right to issue or

withdraw a printing license or a publishing permit. Therefore, the purposes of this study is to

understand how journalists in Malaysia learn in practice in order to carry out their professional

responsibilities.

The two controlling factors in Malaysian mainstream press – government ownership

through proxies, and legal control – have been the basis for a careful examination of journalists'

learning. There have been assumptions and rationale made that media ownership that is under the

control of the government and acting as the mouthpieces of government affect the freedom of

press (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 2000; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). Some have questioned the

political democracy and business effects of such pattern of ownership (Gomez, 1990). However,

it is not known if such concentrated press ownership affects journalists' learning and if they do,

how. In order to answer these questions, I used a qualitative research design to explore the

learning experiences of journalists working in Malaysian mainstream print media organizations

that are controlled by the government. I have also used the critical incident method developed by

Flanagan (1954) in constructing a semi-structured interview guide for this study. Fifteen

journalists were interviewed for this study. This sample included eight males and seven females.

Six were of Malay descents, seven were Chinese, and two were Indians. They were journalists

working in different cities in Malaysia with majority of them in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of

Malaysia.

Three research questions guided this study:

1)   What do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional
        responsibilities?

2)   How do journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional
        responsibilities?

3)   What contextual factors affect journalists' learning on the job?

Before I met each of my study participants for a face-to-face interview, I sent them

information about my research via e-mail. I particularly explained to them that I would be using

the critical incident method and gave a brief explanation about the method. I defined the critical

incidents as ones that were significant in their learning experience, regardless of them giving

negative or positive impact. They were also encouraged to make either mental or written notes

on at least two critical incidents that they would be sharing with me during the interview.

I analyzed the verbatim-transcribed interview data manually by looking for emerging and

similar trends or categories across the data. Analysis was aided with the limited "Find" function

of Microsoft Word software. The study resulted in a number of findings in response to the three

research questions. The findings for the first research question, "What do journalists learn in

practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities?" resulted in two main categories

of findings. They are substantive journalism skills and negotiation skills. Substantive journalism skills includes basic journalism skills, communication skills, and skill at managing content and publication space. Learning negotiation skills includes three sub-skills that journalists acquire. They are gaining trust, maintaining relationships, and strategic withdrawal and intervention.

The second set of findings is in response to the research question that examined how journalists learn in practice in order to carry out their professional responsibilities. I found that journalists learn in three ways which are guidance from the community of practice, informal learning, and formal learning. Under the category of receiving guidance from the community of practice, journalists are guided by their senior co-workers and counterparts. They also receive one-to-one coaching from their superiors and lastly, they learn through mentoring relationships. There are three types of informal learning: observational, incidental, and trial-and-error. Lastly, the formal learning that journalists undergo are in-house training and learning from textbooks.

The third research question which explored what contextual factors affect journalists' learning on the job, found three categories of findings: Structural power relationships, editor's political survival, and topic of writing. There are three sub-categories to structural power relationships: legal control, political interference and control, and ethnicity and language of writing.

<center>Conclusions and Discussion</center>

In this section I discuss three conclusions on the themes of what the journalists learn, how they learn, and learning within the constraints of power and ownership. The conclusions are:

1.   The socio-political structure of press ownership influences what journalists need to learn in order to carry out their professional responsibilities;

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2.   Journalists learn how to carry out their professional responsibilities through

        informal means in interaction with others in their practice environment; and,

3.   Journalists can negotiate what they have learned and its application in practice

        within the structure of press ownership.

The Socio-political Structure of Press Ownership and Journalists' Learning

Malaysian journalists' learning environment is set very much within the socio-political

structure of press ownership. This environment influences their learning by inducing journalists

to gain an understanding of what they need to learn in order to carry out their professional

responsibilities. In other words, their learning journey starts with looking at the first "trail

signboard" on their learning path that leads them to first understand the "whats" of learning on

the job. Journalists learn to read such signboards on the job, through their interactions with their

co-workers, when their articles are edited, and by merely being in the practice itself to feel the

cues for learning. As the data of this study have shown, recognizing and discovering what the

practice entails forms the foundation and crux of understanding journalists' learning. As many

study participants have shared and realized, Malaysian journalism is about practicing within the

context of political interference and legal constraints that regulate the media industry. This

conclusion of the domino effect of media practice on journalists' learning is a reflection of a

study by an academic and a senior official in Malaysian government's official broadcast station,

Radio Televisyen Malaysia or known as RTM (Lowe & Jaafar, 1982). They concluded that,

        Most of the decisions on local media content come from sources outside of the

        professional structure of the department. The main influence on these decisions

        are [sic] therefore external and they emanate from the delicate political position of

        the country resulting in delicate racial balances as shown by compromises and

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different emphasis on question of religion, language, and culture… News items

which are likely to be controversial and which do not provide enough time to be

ruled on by people "upstairs" are underplayed. (p. 31)

Therefore, recognizing these constraints and interference is about learning the whats in practice,

which are crucial in leading to the next step of their learning process – how to learn. This point

will be discussed in the second conclusion. Suffice to say here that learning the whats of

Malaysian journalism practice is closely linked to how journalists learn.

The conclusion of this study that the socio-political structure of press ownership

influences what journalists need to learn in order to carry out their professional responsibilities

confirmed what Foley (2001) articulated about learning at workplaces. He asserted that the

question or issue about learning at workplaces now is not about whether one is able to learn at

workplace. After all, in the present so-called learning society (Billett, 2001; Boud & Garrick,

1999; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Senge, 1990), learning is an almost inevitable process that goes

on the job. Instead, the question now hinges on what one learns at workplace and what this

learning means to learners at workplaces especially when carrying out their responsibilities.

Further, how the learning is translated into their final products – in this case, the journalists'

articles – which supposedly serve as the agenda for the masses. From the data of this study and

from the discussions above, learning the whats of journalism practice subconsciously shapes the

way they learn and eventually the final output of their learning experiences, or their articles

which are their final products. In a nutshell, Foley's (2001) articulation of learning questions the

structural dimension of learning that has not been addressed by many of the adult learning

theories.

The first conclusion of this study also reflects the discussion of context of learning as espoused in situated learning theory (Lave, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This theory stresses the importance of the contextualization of learning where learning essentially takes place in the context, situation or in the realistic practice itself. It is about the application of prior knowledge into the context of practice and an enculturation process. Further, according to this theory, people learn through experiencing the realistic context and setting of their practice.

Therefore, what many participants in this study have shared and experienced, they learn what are the important things they ought to acquire by experiencing and being in the context of their practice, which, unfortunately is far from neutral but is controlled by the government through press ownership (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 1991, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). In fact, most of the journalists' learning falls under this situated learning theory (Lave, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991) because their learning takes place mainly on the job and, learning and practice occur simultaneously. By learning on the job, journalists' learning actually goes through an enculturation process or a web of socialization. They learn how to cultivate the way of working, writing and carrying out their professional responsibilities in accordance to the context and realistic setting of Malaysian journalism practice that is a government-controlled one (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 1991, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). Therefore, while the first conclusion of this study supports the situated learning theory in that it does acknowledge that the context where the learning takes place is important, it also challenges the theory by pointing out that it does not address the possible negative impact the context of the learning may bring about.

Indeed, the learning process does not take place in a neutral context but within one that is entangled in a continuous struggle for knowledge and power in society (Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Wilson & Cervero, 2001). Cervero and Wilson (2001) reiterated that adult education

"happens in a social location that is defined by a particular social vision in relation to the wider systems of social, economic, and cultural relations of power" (p. 6). In the context of this study, it is the very social location that is defined by the Malaysian press organizations that Malaysian journalists' learning and process take place.

In fact, the wider system of economics is not separable from learning and is one of the integral aspects of media operation. The theory of media economics has lined up media owners as one of the four distinct groups that media serve (Picard, 1989). Notwithstanding if there is any significant meaning to the order that Picard has decided, audiences are the second group that media serve, followed by advertisers, and media employees. Therefore, the theory of media economics has, foremost, pointed out the importance of acknowledging media owners as the stakeholders in media production. The theory also deliberates on the inter-influence of economic activities on the production of media goods and services (Albarran, 2002; Alexander et al., 1998; Compaine, 1982; Picard, 1989). Therefore, since economic factors are present and of concern to media owners, media organizations will ensure that the learning process that media employees (journalists) go through will benefit media owners. This is particularly so since the shift of economic ownership of media organizations moved from the hands of the state to that of the private sector as a result of capitalism, particularly from the 1920s (Curran, 1977, 2000b). As a conclusion, journalists' learning is not only a struggle for knowledge, but embedded in a wider system of economic relations of power besides political power as seen in the context of Malaysia.

Analyzed from the perspective of media economics theory, the conclusion for this study also mirrors what this theory espouses as a way of controlling and regulating the allocation of resources. According to Picard (1989), allocation of resources in the media industry involves

"determining what is produced, how it is produced, and who consumes the products made" (p. 10). The data for this study showed that media organizations do explicitly indicate what kind of journalists they want to produce to work for them. One of the critical tools and ways this is achieved is by structuring in-house journalism training programs which in turn will ascertain what kind of media products are to be produced. This is also done through informal coaching between editors and journalists.

The conclusion of this study that the socio-political structure of press ownership influences what journalists need to learn in order to carry out their professional responsibilities also resonates with several studies related to the research of mass media and adult learning. This study affirms the concerns and accusations that several Malaysian media researchers (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 1998, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998) have voiced about the inevitability of Malaysian journalism practice to be orchestrated by the structure of press ownership. They have essentially raised the question of how the government-controlled media organizations in Malaysia would inevitably influence how journalists are to practice; in other words, how Malaysian journalists learn to practice under the power of press ownership. The findings for this study provide empirical evidence that affirms the Malaysian media researchers' concerns.

The work of Illich (1971) would be examined in relation to the first conclusion of this research. Illich (1971), a proponent of a non-institutionalized learning and "school-less" society, suggested that "a deschooled society implies a new approach to incidental or informal education" (p. 33). This seems to be the way some of the journalists interviewed learned how to work around the political, legislative interferences and legal constraints. It is when they have subconsciously "deschooled" themselves, after being put to learn on the job and in practice, that

they learned some other journalism skills and the theories-in-use – Malaysian journalism practice. They then learned what were the political and legal controls and how they affected how they were to learn.

What these journalists were learning is that they acquired an understanding of the real substance needed to carry out their professional responsibilities in a subconscious manner. They learned when they subconsciously detached themselves from the institutionalized form of learning – the in-house training program. It is through informal and incidental learning that they learned some of the important aspects of the effects of media ownership when they experienced political and legal interferences.

<center>Learning and Informal Interaction</center>

The second conclusion of this study is that journalists learn how to carry out their professional responsibilities through informal means in interaction with others in their practice environment. It is found that journalists' learning generally takes place within the community of journalism practitioners. The journalists of this study unanimously agreed that they learn almost directly from the journalism fraternity or community of journalism practitioners. This finding confirmed what Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and Wenger and Synder (2000) have espoused about learning through and from the community of practice. Practitioners learn through active participation, often through initial peripheral participation at the early stage of their practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is a process where novice professionals acquire the knowledge and skills, and build their repertoire of experience by participating and learning in actual setting, and doing the things that experts do.

However, at the same time, it is interesting to connect Wenger's (1998) listing of four components for participation in a community of practice and learning to the findings of this

research, and see the "danger" of learning in a community of practice. Wenger has listed four components of how one learns in a community of practice. They are: professionals learn to claim a sense of belonging (community), learning as a process of becoming (identity), learning as a process of doing (practice); and finally, learning as experience (meaning making). His last three points are of particular interest to the findings of this study.

Firstly, this study has found that some journalists did indeed go through a socialization process initiated by their organizations in their learning, especially during their early career days when they learn the whats of the journalism practice. This is because their organizations want them to act or practice in certain ways, in line with the owners' aspiration. Therefore, learning is being shaped in such a manner that it is a way of making the journalists to become who the owners desire them to be. In other words, it is a way of "building an identity" of the employees. The shaping process takes place through in-house training programs but primarily from the community of practice especially when the journalists' articles are being edited by their editors. Journalists also learn from their community of practice through informal guidance and coaching from their editors, senior co-workers, counterparts and experts in the topic they write. It is important to be reminded here that this study has also found that the editors are one of the crucial factors or agents that shape the learning process of the journalists.

Secondly, learning as a process of doing is what all journalists go through. As many have shared, they learn from their counterparts, senior co-workers and their editors especially by observing how they carry out their work. Events or incidents such as occurrences at workplaces and assignments also provide them the unexpected opportunities to learn about a particular subject. In other words, they learn to emulate by doing and are being socialized into doing and carrying out the norms of the practice.

Finally, this socialization of learning and carrying out the norms of practice is actually a process of understanding the practice and a process of meaning making. The meaning making process involves understanding what the practice entails and how their learning is to be premised within the understanding of the practice. Therefore, Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory, particularly his fourth component of learning as experience and meaning making, is very much about a socialization process.

Wenger's (1998) exposition of community of practice is a useful theory of learning, if not because of the structural system where the learning takes place, as in the case of the respondents of this study. It is also because his theory of learning is deeply embedded within the notion of identity making, something that is not quite permissible under the Malaysian journalists' learning and practice context. The structural system of journalism practice in Malaysia is very much under the claws of the government and the political system (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 1991, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998); hence, journalists' learning is inescapably confined within and under the shadow and grip of such structure. This provides a strong base of socialization process to take place and therefore, Wenger's (1998) theory of community of practice will actually benefit the owners of the Malaysian media organizations more than the journalists. It also proves how the structural system is important in directing the course of any learning process. To use a famous Malay proverbs, *Seperti ketam mengajar anaknya berjalan* (like a crab trying to teach its child to walk), the learning process that journalists go through is precisely what the proverbs mean: Since the crabs (the media organizations owners) know only how to walk sideways (or corrupted), will they or how can they possibly teach their babies (the journalists) to walk straight? In other words, one cannot simply teach someone something that one does not practice and believe in.

This research's finding of learning socialization and meaning making of learning through the community of practice captures other researchers on workplace learning (Billett, 2001; Fenwick, 2001a, 2001b). Learning is shaped by the work practices in which individuals participate and by the kinds of activities and interactions individuals engage in, and the guidance they can access to (Billett, 2001). Fenwick (2001b) reiterated that learning is a continuous intervention and exploration that is embedded in the conduct and relationship among systems and sub-systems. Therefore, to her, learning is not just a plain form of participation by learners, but how the participation constructs meaning to the learning process and the learners. Thus, the findings of this research supports Billet's (2001) and Fenwick's (2001b) notion of learning. This is particularly so because Malaysian journalists' learning is shaped by the work practices that is under a constant surveillance and with ownership controlled by the government (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 1991, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). Therefore, the journalists' participation in the practice under such control constructs a meaning of adherence or loyalty to the organization they belong to in the learning process they undergo.

The construction of meaning in learning process, albeit displaying a form of adherence or loyalty, affirms Schon's (1983; 1987; 1995) exposition of reflective practice. Schon opined that professionals do not merely solve a problem, instead they try to make sense of uncertain situations. This act of reflective practice is seen in several journalists who have pointed out the importance of understanding the entire system where they work in and how they are to act according to the situations, which are often volatile and precarious. Journalists also conduct two main methods of reflection as espoused by Schon (1983) – reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

By conducting reflection-in-action, journalists essentially learn the whats of their practice and subsequently learn to act with full awareness and considerations of the implications. Knowing the unpredictability of situations at the respective points of their writing on different issues, being reflective practitioners become all the more pertinent and necessary. However, at the same time, by being reflective practitioners can be perilous, especially since Malaysian journalists work and learn in a practice that is under various legal constraints with political interference seep in often too. They are being subconsciously socialized in their learning when reflections open up more possibilities for journalists to attach meanings to a situation at a particular point of practice, to the means of problem solution. After all, being a reflective practitioner means one's professional actions have to be in accordance to the various uncertain situations. In other words, their reflections indirectly bring them to reflect on what their practice entails and the implications on the means to solve a particular professional problem. This eventually socializes them to act in accordance to the environment of practice and the political climate at the particular point of time.

Learning in a community of practice as a form of socialization affirms viewpoints made by some media researchers too (Bagdikian, 1992; Goldsmiths Media Group, 2000; Lafky, 1993; Picard, 1989) and adult educators (Schied et al., 2001). Lafky (1993) has accused the media organization of producing "ideologically reliable" behavior among journalists who are subservient and who toe the line of the company's way of working, thinking, and making a profit (p. 17). The hidden curriculum of the in-house training program and learning in a community of practice are some of the ways journalists subconsciously learn to become ideologically reliable journalists. Teaching journalists only the basic technical skills without an understanding of what the media organization does is a way of giving only "safe knowledge" and does not encourage

critical thinking. It is a process of knowledge management, where journalists are given only the knowledge that the media organizations want to and deem safe. In Schied, Carter and Howell's (Schied et al., 2001) words, such knowledge management is a form of "silent power" that uses "organizational forms of ideological, hegemonic, and discursive power… to shape self-disciplined workers who control not only their minds and bodies but also their hearts and souls" (p. 43). After being equipped with the safe knowledge and released into practice, journalists were further socialized into learning the permissible boundaries they could work within. This happened when they learned through socialization in their community of practice. It also happened when they began to write on matters where they learned by being told what details ought not be included, and what angle they should write from to fit the "culture" of the organization.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the aspects of the theory of media economics is to ensure that allocation of resources involves determining what is produced and how it is produced (Picard, 1989). It is important to ensure that this particular "product," i.e., the journalists, is shaped first before the products for audience' consumption could be produced according to the requirement set by the media owners. Further, another media economics theorist, Bagdikian (1992) has also observed that media owners are not silent and passive owners because they do use their power to decide what kind of information are to be served as public agenda. As this study has shown, the decision to publish certain news determines the type of agenda to be served to the public or audience. Journalists' learning are directed to a path where they learn to write in certain angles that would promote the agenda of the media owners.

As a conclusion, this study found that the expectation of the journalism practice correlates with how the professionals - journalists in practice - take cue on how they are expected

to learn. This resonates with the concerns about the negative effects of controlled media on journalists' practice as voiced by the many research related to mass media studies reviewed for this research project (Curran, 2000a, 2000b; Golding & Murdock, 2000; Goldsmiths Media Group, 2000; Murdock, 1982). Goldsmith Media Group (2000) have pointed out that the news media is a site of social conflict that relay "'dominant ideology' of the ruling class" (p. 22). Further, they asserted that journalists who might believe that they act autonomously are in fact being socialized and guided by the ruling class. Therefore, likewise, the journalists interviewed for this research project might have believed that their learning is autonomous, but, in fact their learning process is being socialized by their organization.

Finally, the second conclusion for this research echoes the classical theory of curriculum designing or development of educational programs for adults (Tyler, 1949), and theory of program planning (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). Tyler's theory of curriculum designing asserts that the curriculum of an educational program is designed based on four questions: What educational purposes should be attained, what educational experiences are to be provided in order to achieve the educational purposes, how they are to be effectively organized to attain them, and, finally, how to assess if the purposes have been attained. Further, program planning theory (Cervero & Wilson, 1994) added with an assertion to this classical foundation of curriculum planning an element of power relations and structural constraints in planning and designing educational programs. According to them, education program planning is not being designed within a void of power relations and structural constraint that are in existence in the very everyday settings it takes place. In fact, it "integrates planners' discretion and structural constraint" (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, p. 28). The first conclusion for this research has shown the importance of learning the whats of journalism, which is essentially the aim of the learning process or design for

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education. Subsequently, the second conclusion for this research reveals that the understanding

of learning what the practice entails leads journalists to adopting ways of learning to suit the aim

of the learning process. In the case of the findings for this research, learning from the community

of journalism practice provides the educational experiences in order for the journalists to attain

and fit their understood purposes of learning in their organizations. This is based precisely on

what Tyler's (1949) second question of designing educational programs is about. However, at

the same time, this understanding is embedded within the understanding of the structural power

and constraints in the very organization the journalists work in, and the power relations between

journalists and their organizations have with the larger political system of the country. Therefore,

this research supports Cervero and Wilson's (1994) theory of program planning that reiterates

the importance of taking into consideration the structural constraints in an institutional and social

context when planning educational programs. As seen in the findings of this research, the

structural constraints and context of journalism practice undergird and guide how Malaysian

journalists learn through their community of practice, particular from their editors.

To sum up, the learning process the journalists go through in practice and at workplace is

premised within the classical curriculum planning theory (Tyler, 1949), but more so within the

program planning theory that asserts the role power relations and structural constraints have in

designing learning programs (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). Further, as discussed under the section

of the first conclusion for the findings of this research, what they learn matters (Foley, 2001)

because it guides how they are to learn.

The theory of organizational learning by Argyris and Schon (1978), particularly the

theory of double-loop learning and single-loop learning, would be examined for this study's

second conclusion. Learning through formal in-house training programs will not result in double-

loop learning but only single-loop learning, the organizational learning theories as espoused by Argyris and Schon. This is because, according to them, double-loop learning occurs when errors detected and corrected resulted in a macro change of the organization's overall approach and policy to learning. Single-loop learning happens where errors detected and corrected does not result in any change to the macro system. In other words, it results in merely local corrective actions. Double-loop learning is often perceived as a more desirable way of organizational learning because it will prevent the reoccurrence of error. The findings of this study shows that in-house journalism training program, in particular, will not result in double-loop learning because it is packaged with a hidden curriculum. Single-loop learning among journalists is more welcomed by Malaysian media organizations because it will merely involve the detection and correction of error; and this results in improving basic technical journalism skills. On the other hand, double-loop learning will see improvement of basic technical journalism skills that leads to an improvement of journalism practice in general. In this case, it is about learning to promote greater freedom of press and being able to apply journalism skills learnt into practice. However, this is understandably what the Malaysian media organizations would not allow it to happen because they are serving as political education institutions to the masses and for the political parties through the journalists. Therefore, this affirms Argyris and Schon's (1978) organizational learning theory's assertion that, "organizations tend to create learning systems that *inhibit* double-loop learning that calls into questions their norms, objectives, and basic policies" (p. 4, italic added).

Argyris and Schon (1978) opined that the inhibition of double-loop learning can be changed by altering theories of action. However, the findings for this research project do not fully support the possibility of their suggestion to unfreeze and alter theories of action. They

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defined theory of action as the actions that people take "to design and carry out their behavior in any situation in which they were embedded" (Argyris & Schon, 1978, p. 4). They also suggested that individuals could act as agents of organization who would be able to unfreeze the organizational learning systems that are also inhibiting double-loop learning. As some of the study participants in this research project have pointed out, they are sometimes bound by some strong "advisory" and gag order that prohibits some sensitive issues from being served as the news organization's agenda. Or, in some cases, although the journalists might try to be an agent to unfreeze the organizational learning systems by not doing self-censorship, they have to bow down to the ultimate instruction to tone down what they have written or to write in a certain manner.

This study revealed that journalists practice theories of action where they carry out their behavior in the very situation they are embedded in, and in a manner very much expected by their organizations. Nevertheless, there is limited room for some journalists to act as an agent, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Therefore, the findings of this research project show that Argyis and Schon's (1978) exposition of altering the theories-in-use to effect double-loop learning may sound rather idealistic. This is because it does not take into consideration the myriad of contextual social factors that affects learning at workplace.

Structural Power, Negotiation, and Learning

The third conclusion of this research is that journalists can negotiate what they have learned and its application in practice within the structure of press ownership. As discussed in the sections above, when journalists have experienced the real journalism practice, they learn the whats of practice; among them are the legal and technical constraints. These constraints are related to the structural power of the organization they work in because, often, they are being

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exercised within the interpretation of the owners of the media organizations. The press

organizations are essentially operating within the same radius of political system of the country.

In other words, the press organizations and the political system operate within a bigger political

system. Therefore, the occurrence of schism within this larger political system - within the

political parties that control the news organizations and the political parties themselves – is

unthinkable and will be suppressed. This understanding leads journalists to tread with care when

carrying out their responsibilities. It results in unconscious and subconscious act of self-

censorship in order to increase the chance of their articles being published. This is often

perceived as a better option than seeing articles on issues they believe are important to the

masses from being killed or not seeing daylight, the words used by some respondents. Therefore,

this understanding of the constraints and structural power leads them to learning the "other what"

of journalism – negotiation skill.

  This finding confirms what Cervero and Wilson (2001) and Wilson and Cervero (2001)

have pointed out that negotiation is a central theme in the learning and practice of adult

education. This research shows that negotiation is a core thrust of learning for some journalists.

The existence of negotiation and the important role that negotiation plays in journalists' learning

also resonates with Cervero and Wilson's (1994; 2001) and Wilson and Cervero's (2001)

examination of power relations in adult education. However, as the discussions of findings of

this research has shown, this is limited to several factors, such as the seniority of the journalists

involved, the topic of writing and the exercise of legal constraints. It also is partially consistent

with the findings by Burns (2001) on the role of negotiation in pastoral ministry because

negotiation in journalists' learning experience is not a daily experience like that of the pastoral

ministry's life. It confirmed Burns' study in that negotiation is an integral part of learning process.

This research project's finding that journalists do not have absolute freedom of negotiation because of several constraining factors as mentioned above echoes what some authors say about power. Hendrickson and Tankard (1997) have theorized that the mass media operate in a total social system which is interdependent of each other. Therefore, like some of the journalists interviewed for this study, their power to negotiate is dependent on some of the constraints in the system. Clegg (1979) made an even stronger observation that employees in an organization have power that is limited within the boundary of the "hegemonic domination" (p. 148). Likewise, some of the journalists are only allowed to negotiate if their power of negotiation does not threaten the hegemony and falls safely within the permissible boundary of hegemony.

The prolific and famous British media researcher, Curran's (2000b) assertion that political elite uses state power to form a patronage system is mirrored through the findings of this study. The political elite of Malaysia, i.e., the leaders of the political party, uses the media through ownership to exert its control (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 1991, 1994, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). This is evident when some journalists said that they were not able to negotiate in some situations when there was a total blackout or gag order for writing certain issues. From the perspective of media economics, particularly in reference to the media in the U.S., managers run media that are owned by individuals or even investment institutions (Compaine & Gomery, 2000). The same is happening in Malaysia where owners do not directly run their media organizations, instead, managers do, through proxies close to the ruling parties and "fund managers" – the political parties' investment arms (Cheong, 1993; Zaharom, 2000; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). As Compaine and Gomery (2000) have pointed out, "although senior

management generally has considerable latitude in day-to-day operations, they are often more constrained in strategic direction by the interests of their major stockholders" (p. 481). Therefore, the finding of this study that there are some limitations in exercising negotiating skills for Malaysian journalists confirmed Compaine and Gomery's (Compaine & Gomery, 2000) observation that the operation of media organizations are navigated by certain strategic direction. And as this study has shown, this strategic direction is taken to serve the interests of the media owners.

In conclusion, negotiation process as a form of learning for Malaysian journalists involves three parties – the entire political system through legal means, the political party that own the particular press organization, and journalists' learning. There is a rather fine demarcation line between the political system and political party because political party is part of the entire political system. At the same time, there is also a fine line separating journalists' learning and the political party that owns the very organization the journalists work with. This is because being an employee of the press organization, a journalist sometimes has to take instruction from the owner or "corroborate" with the political party to maintain equilibrium of power. As mentioned earlier, the Malaysian political system is essentially ethnic-based including the political party that owns a media organization. This results in the political party having to take care of its ethnic group's interest. Reverting my discussion to the three actors in journalists' learning, the three parties work in such a way that it resulted in journalists' learning going through a negotiation process. Further, between the three parties, continuous acts of negotiation, mediation and interference take place. However, as discussed above regarding gag order, seniority of the journalists, and the topic they write; negotiation is not always possible in all cases. Nevertheless, negotiation plays an important role in journalists' learning on the job.

In regards to negotiation, it is important to point out the co-relationships between contextual social factors have on the learning at workplace, and the very basic question of bread and butter. Perhaps, the word "rice bowl" is a more contextualized choice of word for Malaysian society where rice is the staple food. Learning to work against the order of the structural system, particularly owners of the media organizations, is akin to courting journalists' occupational hazards. The question therefore lies on how many journalists could afford to put aside their rice bowls in pursuit of double-loop learning. This is precisely the question that one Malaysian media researcher posed (Zaharom, 1998) and who lamented the Malaysian press as being pathetic and challenged journalists to uphold journalism principles.

Calls for Malaysian press to act "less pathetic" and for journalists to uphold journalism principles and ethics need to be made with an urgent call to change the structural system. As one Malaysian media researcher put it, "laws that give an enormous amount of power to the dominant ruling elite would have to be amended or in some cases removed altogether" for information that is not adulterated by the ruling government to exist (Wang, 1998, p. 80), so does journalists' learning. A later work by Zaharom (2003) echoed a similar view that the "wider policies and structures" ought to be given a serious rethinking in order to produce more creative and critical journalism students. He said, "It is easy to blame students for being uncreative and uncritical, but how can they be otherwise if the wider policies and structure impinge on their potential to be creative and critical? (Zaharom, 2003, p. 164) He opined that the media education in Malaysia is dominated by a functionalist and utilitarian approach that "conveniently ignores structures and is reluctant to critically evaluate policy" (Zaharom, 2003, p. 160). Likewise, as this research has shown, it is easy to blame journalists for learning to the tune of the wider structures because many of them are the products of such functionalist and utilitarian based

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media education, and they continue to be put in a similar environment of practice after graduation. Even if they are not one of the Malaysian media education products, they now practice in a media environment that is controlled by the government (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 2000; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). Therefore, journalists' learning can only be made less orchestrated by the structural power and practice setting; not neutral because learning cannot be a neutral process (Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Cunningham, 2000; Wilson & Cervero, 2001), when the laws that govern and control journalists' practice are eliminated and thus would be able to give more autonomy for learning process to take place.

Implications for Practice and Research

Several practice and research implications can be derived from the findings of this research project. When the subject of learning as a journalist was brought up through the critical incidents method with the study participants, most related incidents that had enabled them to learn about the technical aspects of carrying out their professional responsibilities. However, some study participants, dragged in the topic of legal constraints and political interventions in relating their critical incidents. A few, particularly the senior journalists, pointed out the importance of learning to work within the existing system of journalism practice in Malaysia where politics and legal control is the master and name of the game. Although a few senior journalists mentioned their concern and the importance of being aware of the political control and legal constraints in journalists' practice, some younger journalists and those who do not write on matters related to politics do not seem perturbed at all. Nevertheless, the reality of journalism practice is that ownership, which often comes in the form of political interference and legal control, is a factor that affects how journalists are to learn in practice. A conclusion from

this is that persons joining the Malaysian journalism industry need to understand the relational and political dynamics of media ownership in order to learn to become a professional journalist.

Another implication for practice is about the academic preparation. Journalism schools need to address this reality of practice in an upfront manner in order to enable trained graduates to identify specific areas of learning that are under the power of these constraints. Teaching about the power of concentrated media ownership alone is not enough if this is not linked to learning to work and to the learning process that takes place in media organizations. As Cervero and Wilson (2001) have pointed out, "adult educators become facilitators of learning, who often have to 'get around' social and organizational structures to 'help' serve these adult learners." (p. 5) Therefore, adult educators in journalism schools have to be constantly aware of the factors and power relations at work when designing journalism education.

This research project also supports Picard's (1985) reiteration that journalism schools need to get an accurate portrayal of the democratic philosophy and development. It was the hope that this study would provide more empirical research for reference in Malaysian journalism schools. This is important because, as discussed earlier, only institutions outside the media organizations can provide a more neutral learning environment. Training programs organized by media organizations are skewed to the media owners' interest. Journalists would not be made aware of, for example, the utilization of agenda setting theory in publication of news and the meaning of media ownership. It would be too simplistic to assume that media organizations can be neutral in training journalists when the media organizations themselves are acting as the political machineries for the political parties that own them and are the tentacles of the government bureaucracy. While it is never denied that journalists do learn journalistic skills through training programs organized by media organizations, learning in the context and under

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the power of media organizations is aimed to serve the media organizations' agenda. Cunningham (2000) has pointed out that adult education has long been focusing on the adult learners and assume "as if learners are disembodied creatures and as if the social context, the social structures, the social class in which we all exist do not affect the process of education" (p. 573). In other words, adult education has to shift its attention on the individual learners to a larger social context and social organizations. Journalists are trained to learn to produce in a desired manner and, rarely are journalists aware or critical about the learning agenda of in-house training programs. It is not too far-fetched an inference to say that the Malaysian journalism practice literacy level is generally not high, especially among the younger journalists.

The third implication for practice is the manner in-house training programs are being conducted. While this research has found that persons not trained in journalism were able to learn on the job and do not seem to have problem to achieve a mastery level on par with those trained before joining the profession, they have not quite learned much from in-house training programs. The in-house training programs are not well designed nor do they meet the immediate needs of new people joining the profession. Every new journalist should be made to undergo a short training program at the entry level where they are taught the basics of reporting and writing skills to avoid making costly mistakes. There should also be more structured in-house training programs for non-journalism trained journalists so that media organizations can reap the advantage of their non-journalism subject knowledge. There should be a more cohesive and structured training programs to combine journalistic skills with their subject knowledge. Better training programs could be designed and facilitated by having training personnel with journalism experience. This is because it would be difficult for trainers without journalism experience to command credibility and respect from journalists, particularly those with some experience. En

Lin's opinion and experience showed that trainers with journalism background are more readily accepted by journalists. Again, this is due to the journalists' general belief that hands-on experience in the field is still an important and irreplaceable learning venue and it would be extremely difficult for journalists to accept "theoretical learning."

In-house training programs where new journalists were paid stipends in their first few months of entry were a trend in many big mainstream media organizations in the late 1980s to early 1990s. However, they were abolished because of an unofficial protest by the National Union of Journalist (NUJ) Malaysia. NUJ saw it as a form of discrimination because the new journalists were made to work like any fully employed journalist and not quite under an internship, as what the training program was meant to be. Further, there are no set regulations of licensure in the profession, such as the accountants through the Malaysia Institute of Accountants, or lawyers through the Malaysian Bar Council. Although there are some valid grounds to the protest, concerted effort to reform the training programs should have been made by both the media organizations and the NUJ. This might not be equal to forming a licensure body, but at least it would help to restructure journalism training for the benefit of the journalists and NUJ, and management of the media organizations. NUJ's role of taking care of the welfare of unionized journalists should be expanded to developing their learning environment. NUJ could serve as a co-partner of provider of continuing journalism education alongside with media organizations. This would provide both internal and external training programs to offset the bias of in-house training program.

There are two main reasons why an entry-level in-house training program is critical. Firstly, it has become increasingly important for media organizations to employ professionals in other fields due to the media organizations themselves creating pullouts that address specific

fields. For example, compared to a decade or two ago, newspapers now have more weekly and periodical pullouts on topics such as information technology and computer, property, education, women, automobile, professional football games and so forth. There are two reasons for the proliferation of such pullouts; to create a niche in advertising, particularly to increase advertising revenue, and meeting the needs of more sophisticated readers. This has resulted in an increasingly important need for media organizations to employ professionals with specific subject knowledge to write for such pullouts.

The other reason why an entry-level in-house training program is important is because of the professionalization of the journalism profession. Although linked to the reason mentioned earlier, professionalization is not just about having experts writing for the different pullouts which usually consist of feature articles, but journalists who write hard news too. Thorough and professional understanding of certain subjects is extremely important in writing news article. There are more of such subjects in news reporting compared to pullouts because pullouts are usually limited to one or two, the most, per day. On the other hand, subjects for news reporting are countless and unpredictable. For example, the epidemic of potentially deadly SARS virus recently created the need for journalists with biomedical, bio-microbiology, public health, or even medical knowledge. The emergence of a water crisis would create the need for a journalist with water management knowledge and so forth. Therefore, media organizations need to have a pool of experts in various fields.

Whatever type of journalist is needed, often, many of them did not receive any journalism training nor were exposed to journalism prior to joining the profession. Hence, the need to immediately train such persons after they have joined the profession is critical. The time needed to teach such persons the basic journalistic skills do not take too long a time because they usually

could be covered within days or a week at the most. This is also because media organizations cannot afford to put any fully employed journalists too long in any training program. The basic skills would be sufficient to prepare the new journalists to carry out their responsibilities without the high risk of making costly mistakes like some of the study participants had. They can later be made to attend more courses after gaining some hands-on experience. This would be a more cost effective way to train the journalists and a more practical method because experiential learning is an important aspect of journalism.

The third implication for practice is the need to train editors and senior journalists who are responsible for editing work. This research revealed that editors have played a very important role in teaching journalists informally while editing their work. Although they have been coaching journalists in an informal way while editing their articles, the editors and senior editors could be trained to facilitate some of the in-house training courses. It is important to train them in facilitation skills, particularly how to share their professional knowledge. They have accumulated many examples of well and badly written articles that could be used as case studies in training. Further, journalists who have experienced different types of assignments can also be asked to share with new journalists.

The last implication for practice is for continuing journalism education, particularly training at journalists' workplaces. In fact, this implication affects and challenges adult educators because they serve as the training personnel in media organizations. There is a need to conduct journalism training programs that are effective in producing critical journalists. This need is becoming increasingly paramount because of the local formal journalism preparatory education at college level. It has been pointed out that media education and studies in Malaysia is one that essentially encourages conformity and not creativity and thus, produces uncritical journalists

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(Zaharom, 2003). Therefore, if the workplaces are now expected to turn the uncritically-trained graduates into critical journalists, the role and burden now lie with adult educators at workplaces. Hence, it is a challenge to adult educators – how to "untrain" such journalists to become critical journalists within the constraints of Malaysian media ownership?

There are several research studies beyond the scope of this research project that could be considered. The timing of this research project coincided with the issue of a major change of ownership to a political party that was still fresh in the memory of the journalism fraternity. This has resulted in the inevitability of the subject being brought up in a few interviews with the study participants. It would enrich the literature of journalism and journalists' learning if a case study about how this particular change of ownership to a political party affects journalists learning. A comparative study on their reflections of the effects on learning before and after the change of ownership would be enlightening. This would expand the initial observations that this study has managed to examine coincidentally.

A number of follow-up studies would be suggested to extend this research project. It was rationalized that the critical incident method would be useful in soliciting journalists' sharing of learning, and to find out if ownership did affect their learning. However, it is found that critical incident method was a more useful tool in soliciting information about learning the basic journalism skills. This is because most did not have the necessary skills at the initial stage of their career. They inevitably cited incidents that became their "unforgettable" and marked learning experiences when they were explained the critical incident method used for the study. They shared more freely about their real learning experiences at work when asked specifically about their preparation in becoming a journalist. Therefore, perhaps, an open-ended interview or

a direct-leading-questions method might be a more effective way in finding out how they learn under the power of media ownership.

Journalists who write on topics related to politics have been identified as feeling the effects of ownership on their learning the most. A follow-up study on a larger sample of journalists in this category would provide more detailed insights of the effects of ownership on this particular group of journalists' learning. It will also describe the methods such journalists adopt in learning as part of their efforts in maintaining equilibrium of power, in order to get their articles published, particularly those concerning "non-safe" issues. This will also ascertain whether it is a common trend among such journalists to devise methods of learning to maintain equilibrium. Lastly, it can determine if many might have been shaped and conditioned to learn to carry out instructions without using any method to maintain equilibrium. It will also be interesting to find out if journalists writing on specific types of topic would feel more the effects of ownership.

Another interesting follow-up study can be devised to explore resistance to learning among journalists as a response to the power of media ownership. A particular group of journalists who have self-identified as being "punished" and "put in cold storage" for refusing to learn to take instruction or doing "outside the norm" could form the sample for such study. It can aim at examining types of resistances to learning. Examples of such "punished" and "put in cold storage" sample include journalists who have been transferred to less important sections, less important bureaus, particularly feature desks, taken out from covering important assignments, or no longer being given assignments by their editors. Such follow-up study could use a critical incident method to explore what forms of resistance to learning that landed them in "cold storage" and how the factor of concentrated media ownership comes into play.

Closing Notes

Throughout my research project and my quest for knowledge through qualitative research method, I have found that there are a lot of similarities between the field of qualitative research and journalism, my former profession. This is no surprise as one of the greatest contributors to the field of qualitative research was a former journalist, Robert Park (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Like journalism, one of the greatest features of qualitative research is that it is supposed to be descriptive about findings and not be judgmental. One is not able to make an ultimate conclusion. Conclusion is open to debates, so to speak. Therefore, I have deliberately not probed on political inclination when interviewing my study participants. Besides, it was not the aim of this research project to examine if political inclination affects journalists' approach to learning. However, as I analyzed my my study participants' statements here and there, I began to wonder if and how their political stance might affect their learning. This was particularly so when I linked them to some of their private and personal details that I knew. I knew some of my study participants before I embarked on my data collection. At the same time, I never knew some of my respondents until I conducted my research project. However, being an insider I have easy access to some of their private details although I did not deliberately seek for them. I could not possibly detach my knowledge of all these private details when attempting to analyze their political inclination and learning. The descriptive nature of qualitative research that provides me with the very useful tool to answer my research project turned out to be a challenge for me in analyzing too.

Therefore, to do justice to my analysis, it was best that I left out any such analysis. However, analyzing the political inclination of my study participants could be an interesting, if not important aspect of this research. This is because if a journalist is a staunch supporter of the

establishment, working and learning might be approached differently. After all, the mainstream media organizations are acting or are expected to act to the tune and beat of the ruling political parties (Wang, 1998; Zaharom, 1991, 1998, 2000, 2002; Zaharom & Mustafa, 1998). However, at the same time, asking openly about one's political inclination is a taboo in Malaysian society (Mazalan & Mazanah, 2002). The price could be too high for both they and I.

With this rationale, I would like to "analyze" the political inclinations of my study participants, their views on politics, economics and journalism by presenting just their quotes below. There is a common saying among Malaysian journalists that one should read in-between the lines. As a former journalist, I shall ask readers of my dissertation to do so when reading the quotes. You are also advised to read them as the "unquotable quotes" in a journalist's notebook. But as a qualitative researcher, I shall ask my readers to read them as "merely descriptions of words," and nothing else. Following are some of the quotes with the name of the persons quoted in brackets:

> Once you get there [in higher positions in media organizations], you wear a…
>
> Pierre Cardin suit and you get used to the good things in life, you wouldn't want
>
> to give it up! You earn, what, 15,000 to 20,000 dollars a month, would you want
>
> to settle for less? (Ramanesh)
>
> You know, you have bills to pay at the end of the day. You have to think about all
>
> your…why you want to beat the drum and say I want the freedom of the press,
>
> and I want this, I want that. Please-*lah*…And as you grow older, this is something
>
> a lot of people don't want to acknowledge-*lah*, unless you are a bit freak-*lah*, your
>
> tendency is to become a pro-establishment. When you are younger you will be
>
> anti-establishment. Anything the government do is wrong. (Ramanesh)

Like people say how do you come to work for the pro-establishment people. I said, it's a, it's not like, it will be difficult if I am anti-establishment. I may not be pro-establishment, you know, but I am not anti-establishment because to a certain degree, I am quite comfortable with the establishment. What I am not comfortable about are probably the accesses, probably the, the, the arrogance of the power that be at times, in dealing with issues. But all in all, er, I would be, and I would think that er, I have not, er, denied the fact I am quite comfortable with the establishment. Meaning I'm quite comfortable that the country is managed by this group of a coalition partners. I am quite comfortable with the system that they have er… established within, within our day-to-day operation, you know, the value, the love, and what not, and the interest. I am comfortable, you know. But what I am not comfortable about is the excessive, the excesses. And this is what I would want to believe that should continuously be addressed, be scrutinized. (Shahzam)

Finally, here is a saying that I saw on a mug sold in a souvenir shop in Newseum, a museum about broadcasting and journalism located in Washington D.C., when I visited it several years ago - "I'm a journalist, trust me."

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APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTION OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT METHOD

Firstly, I would like to thank you for participating in my research. Before we meet for our interview appointment, I would like to provide you with more details about my research project. I would also appreciate if you can take a few minutes to prepare some written or mental notes that will help us both during our interview session.

Brief Description of the Study

This study hopes to understand how journalists learn at work. The focus is on how journalists learn within the daily organizational settings. Learning is defined as skills, things or knowledge acquired that facilitate and shape the carrying out of work responsibilities. It includes all aspects of journalists' work, from collecting information to writing up stories to the interactions with people outside and inside of the organizations in the daily conduct of the journalism practice. I would be using the critical incident method during my interview session with you.

Overview of the Critical Incident Method

The critical incident method requires that you reflect on and recall your experience or experiences at work which remain(s) vividly in your memory. I would like you to particularly recall incidents or experiences that have helped you in learning as a journalist within the setting of your organization. The experiences could be something that is sensitive; hinder or enhance your learning process, or something that commonly occurs in your daily work. Of importance is that the experiences have been instrumental in shaping, guiding and navigating your practice of

journalism.

I would appreciate if you could make some notes prior to our interview appointment about the incidents that will help you to describe them to me.

Please feel free to use any other way that is comfortable in helping you recall and describe the incidents.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I will begin the interview by asking you a few questions about your background:

1) Why did you become a journalist?

2) Can you tell me your career experience, what other kinds of careers were you in and where?

3) Can you briefly share with me your career experience in this company?

4) Can you tell me about your educational background?

5) Can you describe to me how did you prepare yourself or prepared by others to become a journalist?

I will now ask you to recall at least two critical incidents which you have selected and have impacted your learning experience to become a journalist. As you describe them to me, I will be asking you to provide more details of the incidents such as:

1) What was the context of the situation? Please tell me:

   - When did it happen?

   - Where did it happen?

   - How did it take place?

   - Who were involved?

   - Why did it happen in the first place?

2) How did you handle the situation?

3) What were the outcomes of this situation?

6) What have you learned from this incident about what is or are really important in carrying out your professional responsibilities?

7) How do you go about learning the thing(s) that you believe are important in helping you to carry out your professional responsibilities

8) How have this experience influenced your practice as a journalist?

        Please feel free to add any other information about the incidents during our interview together. Thank you for participating in my study. I look forward to talking with you.

APPENDIX C

GLOSSARY OF MANGLISH WORDS

Ah   A tail-ender commonly used by the Chinese Malaysians. It is used to soften a sentence, as a connector between sentences, and sometimes used to emphasize a point

Angpau   Present given during the Lunar Chinese New Year. It is in the form of money in small red envelope given out by married persons to their children, relatives or even friends. However, only the singles are eligible to receive *angpau*.

Datuk   An honorific title bestowed on persons who have contributed to the society by the *Sultans* of the states in Malaysia.

Eh   An exclamation used to informally call someone usually of a lower social rank. However, sometimes it is used as a friendly gesture for calling someone or to catch someone's attention.

Fed up   Slightly more intense than the meaning of the word in standard English, in Manglish, fed up is usually used to express one's disgust and feeling of being irritated and infuriated by someone. It also leads to the one being infuriated to decide to ignore the other party.

Kenduri   A Malay wedding meal, which is usually held during the day at either the house of the bride or bridegroom, with the wedded couple seated on a dais.

Koochi rat A hybridization of Tamil and English languages. *Koochi* in Tamil means stick and is used to describe someone who is thin like a stick. Rat, on the other hand, is a

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small rodent. Therefore, in Manglish, it can be used to insult, scold, or merely
used to describe the powerless and lower ranked people or employees.

Lah   The most commonly used tail-ender in Manglish across all the different ethnic
                groups in Malaysia. It is a direct adaptation from the Malay language that is used
                to soften a sentence spoken or to emphasize a point made, depending on the tone
                of the speaker.

Layan   Literally means "to serve" in Malay language. When used in the form of "I am not
                going to *layan* you," it means that the speaker is going to ignore or not going to
                entertain the request of the person spoken to.

Mah   A tail-ender that is of a direct adaptation from the various dialects spoken by
                Chinese Malaysians. It is commonly used by Chinese speakers which denotes a
                similar meaning with the use of tail-ender *lah*, but usually is used to emphasize a
                point made.

National Service   A military-like training program to instill patriotism among Malaysians
                    aged between 18 to 35 and began in March 2004. It is a rather
                    controversial program, which received a lot of critiques, partly because it
                    is mandatory for those randomly selected through a computer system. It
                    also caused concerns among the non-Muslim citizens who feared that they
                    might be "Islamized" through the program.

One-lah   Similar to the meaning of the tail-ender "lah," which is used to emphasize a point
                made.

Pondan   A derogatory Malay word that literally means a transvestite. However, usually it
                is used to describe or call a man who looks sissy.

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Reformasi   A Malay word for reformation. It is the name of a political reformation movement that emerged following the sacking of the former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Anwar was jailed after he was charged in court and found guilty of sodomy acts. Supporters of Anwar, who believed it was a political conspiracy, started the movement as an effort to free Anwar.

Si Tao   A direct translation from the Chinese dialect, Cantonese, which means boss.

Teh Tarik   A famous cheap and delicious local bubbled milk tea where the bubble is formed by pouring the tea alternately and repeatedly with two containers or glasses. "Teh" means tea in Malay language and "tarik" means pull, hence teh tarik describes the process of repeated pouring of the drink that makes one seem like pulling the tea.

Severe Acute Respiratory Symptom (SARS)

     A disease that was believed to have originated from China and became a global epidemic that hit many parts of Asia, including Malaysia, and North America in 2003.

Wah   An exclamation used to express wonder and amazement, almost similar to the use of "wow" in standard English.

What   A tail-ender that is used to emphasize an obvious point made or to state a fact. It is also usually used in a question tone.

Yang Berhormat (YB)   A Malay word commonly used in its abbreviated form of YB and literally means "the honorable." It is used to address a politician who holds a ministerial portfolio or an elected representative of a constituency.