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# Innovations to Broadcasting Curriculum to Meet Workplace Expectations

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## Abstract

Workplace ready or professional preparedness and the development of generic workplace competencies are the common factors emanating from the university education system that will launch a student for future employment. Talents for the broadcasting industry are increasingly being trained while they are undergoing tertiary level education. The highly esteemed way of creating these generic competencies is to have an effective curriculum. Having one is considered to be crucial not only in determining the achievement of an educational institution, but also the future and success of students following that program. Keeping these in mind this study aims to (i) assess current practices and future training needs in the Malaysian broadcasting industry; (ii) discuss the expectations of practitioners and the academia on developing evolving curricula that accommodate changes in the industry.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper discusses broadcast education within the broader communication studies. It argues that broadcast education in developing countries is still in a dilemma on where to draw the line when it comes to development communication (Choudhury, 2011). To move ahead in broadcasting curricula development and adoption there need to be Development Support Communication (DSC) programs utilizing various mass media or a selection of media technologies (Sybil, N.D.).

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Current in-house professional broadcast training institutions help inculcate outcome based workplace behavior to meet broad agenda specific concerns. But broadcasting companies on the go are increasingly repositioning themselves to meet the demands of the digital world. The objectives of the two entities are not exactly congruent. How can they reconfigure their direction to enhance training expertise and tools that foster new performance-driven culture for the workplace that also generate results for long-term economic growth, audience satisfaction and meaningful contributions to society?

The role of the university, on the other hand, was once known to teach the theories and how to put these theories into motion. However, the expectations of the workplace now and in the future will be far more than just understanding theories and operationalizing them. Universities and institutions of higher learning are expected to produce workplace ready talents who can manage routine tasks on the first day of work. Employers expect talents to fit into their organizations' culture as quickly as possible. On the whole, future talents are expected to be technically abreast with the latest in the industry and socially well rounded.

A review of Roger Bennett (2002) and several online advertisements by recruiting agencies provided these insights when agencies are looking for the right people:

*... agencies seek to match qualifications and personalities to employers requirements; provide cost-effective staffing solutions; provide skilled employees who arrive at the workplace ready to contribute productively, including traditional temps, project staffing, professional-level staff, strategic partnerships and regular, full-time hires; assess your needs and get the most suitable staff at the shortest possible time, and most of all to suit your budget.*

Essentially, a few key words in the above advertisement capture the essence for employers' expectations among new talents. Labels such as qualifications and personalities, cost-effective, workplace ready, professional-level, budget, reflect the crucial expectations of current employers.

### *1.1. The Problem*

Given the rapid changes in the media environment, broadcasters are earnestly seeking new competencies from among their new talents and renewed skills from their existing staff. Current training methodologies, conventional classroom practices, and single skill training may no longer meet industry expectations. While stakeholders are relying on media and broadcasting sectors to be part of the national development agenda, innovations in teaching, learning and training cannot be over emphasized. The dilemma however is the broadcasting industry and the higher education providers have not come to terms with their practices and future training needs. They are unable to determine the required cutting edge education that will continue to raise the quality in the creative industry. Discussions on the expectations and any collaborative undertaking of sorts between practitioners and the academia on developing evolving curricula are not moving ahead. The search for continuous updates on relevant educational, training and curricula research on broadcasting is important to the management of such uncertainties in the industry.

The study aims to:

- assess current practices and future training needs in the Malaysian broadcasting industry
- discuss the expectations of practitioners and the academia on developing evolving curricula that accommodate changes in the industry

## **2. Background and Theoretical Framework**

The broadcasting industry knows itself best; it understands the internal vibrations of its own heart-beat well. Training providers from outside of the industry must first internalize the industry's training needs completely and

thoroughly. In this sense universities being the major source of talent producers for the industry, are not in any bargaining position but to supplement the industry's training and human capital needs.

Public and private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia are required by their governing and qualifying authorities to put in place strategies that meet the national education agenda. In this regard private institutions of higher learning go beyond compliance to ensure their long term sustenance as an all-round academic institution, fostering teaching and learning excellence through academic development and training.

Considering that highly in demand graduates possess three skills sets - occupational skill attainment, academic preparedness and workplace readiness (O'Brien & Deans, 1995), the need for a well-structured curriculum becomes apparent. Specifically, 'workplace readiness' is considered to be the most essential quality (Connor, 1991) or graduate capabilities. In preparation for the workplace, graduate qualities are inculcated through Discipline Specific Knowledge, Professional Practice, Cognitive Capabilities, Project-based Learning Initiatives and Soft Skills.

- **Discipline Specific Knowledge:** The Industrial Research Projects and Internship Project serves as a showcase of the key qualities, abilities and skills the graduating students have to acquire during their course of study. The projects provide opportunities for students to develop new industrial capabilities.
- **Professional Practice:** Students learn professional and ethical practices through authentic case studies and strategically planned activities. Activities are planned so as to allow students to experience team dynamics, exercise critical thinking, reflect on decisions and actions, and consider their civic responsibilities.
- **Cognitive Capabilities:** Lifelong Learning as in thinking and problem solving skills. Project-based Learning Initiative or Collaborative projects involving analysis and design of communication practice. Students apply technical knowledge learnt in one subject to real life scenarios and cases studies in the other, solving problems and dealing with communication issues.
- **Soft Skills:** Include communication skills, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills citizenship, global perspectives and digital literacy.

At the institutional level a typical strategy (*as in Taylor's University*) of good practices among universities follows the Input-Process-Output Model:

Table 1. Input-Process-Output Model

<b>Institutional Input Dimension 20%</b>	
Students	Quality entrance, diversified student population
Academic	Staff talent and quality
Resource	Physical, environmental, financial bursary
Governance	Academic, staff, management, strategic planning, student representation, affiliation to industry, IAP – industry advisory panel Evaluation of quality governance
<b>Process Dimension 40%</b>	
Curriculum	Relevant, current, comprehensive, challenging content.
Delivery	Pedagogical effectiveness, use of technology and blended learning, project base lifelong learning.
Assessment	Transparent, valid, reliable.
Monitoring	Accreditation, program monitoring, student performance and progression.
Ancillary activities	Internship, outreach, student exchange, industry linkages.
<b>Output Dimension 40%</b>	
Generic Students' Attributes	Continuous learning, entrepreneurship, leadership, social and communication skills, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, moral and ethical professionalism.  Graduate marketability, Graduate satisfaction. Employer satisfaction, Tracer study and output monitoring survey.

Source: Taylor's University [www.taylors.edu.my](http://www.taylors.edu.my) (Policies, Procedures and Documents).

Numerous skills sets have been proposed by educationists calling for reforms in professional curricula. Such curriculum reforms aspire to equip students with multiple intelligence to help them adapt to their future workplaces. These intelligences include social-networking intelligence, economic-managerial intelligence, political decision making intelligence, cultural-moral intelligence and scientific-technological intelligence (Ng, 2011). Except for scientific-technological intelligence, taught at varying levels in classrooms and laboratories, other aspects of intelligence are generally imparted through case studies and by visiting real-time industry experts.

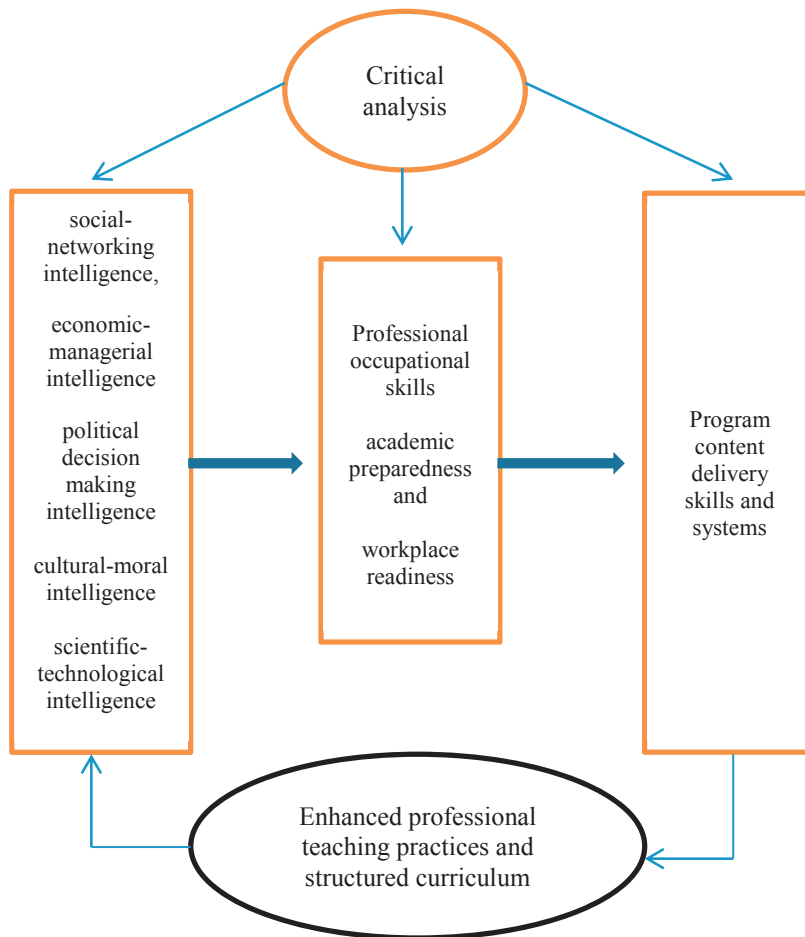


Fig. 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Personal Learning Environment (PLE) often delivered through learning platforms and now increasingly becoming mobile is being reported as a viable strategy in the 2011 Horizon Report K-12 Education. Another proposition is that learning occurs even without teachers. In another sense, Minimally Invasive Education (MIE) shifts learning to the learners (Shimabukuro, 2013). By this approach teachers’ job evolve to be facilitators who can ask questions and tell the students what they have learned. MIE is a positive experience that advantage teachers to stand back and get out of the way, they are not hindering learning, and instead they are facilitating it. Here both teachers and computers are technologies, or media for learning.

Universities can aspire to even go beyond compliance when they keep in touch with their base industry. The industry continuously informs changes to the required expertise vis-a-vis content to curriculum. Enhanced and detailed content for the broadcasting industry can now be supplemented by augmented reality apps (AR) using smart handheld android technology platform (Benkoil, 2009).

Byrne (2013) writes in “Free Technology for Teachers” that QR codes are simply used to create interactive activities by linking lessons to websites, provide 2D 3D real-time information and location coordinates within reach for learners in an exploratory environment. Complex models and processes found in broadcasting studios and archives can be embedded as classroom assignments and opens up before the learners using smartphone devices with QR codes reader application. This augmented reality mode connects the learner to a simulated real world learning experience cost effectively.

The AR apps provide media rich content convergent and on the move for the curious broadcast students. The challenge is to introduce such training into the classroom to keep up with the rapidly changing industry. The usage of augmented reality apps heightens learning that has a real chance to results in long-term learner satisfaction.

### 3. Expectations of the industry

Discipline specific training is provided by the industry in the form of short courses to supplement, to specifically fill the gap in the required knowledge needs and skills. The university on the other hand has the tendency to inculcate disciplines through a broad curriculum at a foundational and introductory level. As such, broadcast training institutions and universities who aspire to cater to higher level training needs in the most effective way, find themselves having to collaborate with each other.

Universities aspire to create effective linkages to learn best practices and current trends from the industry in numerous ways. Broadcast professionals are regularly invited to coach in workshops and presentations at the universities. The expectations of the teaching community is to learn how the professionals do it and the professionals are eager to understand what is going on at the higher learning institutions. Workplace expectations can be summarized as below:

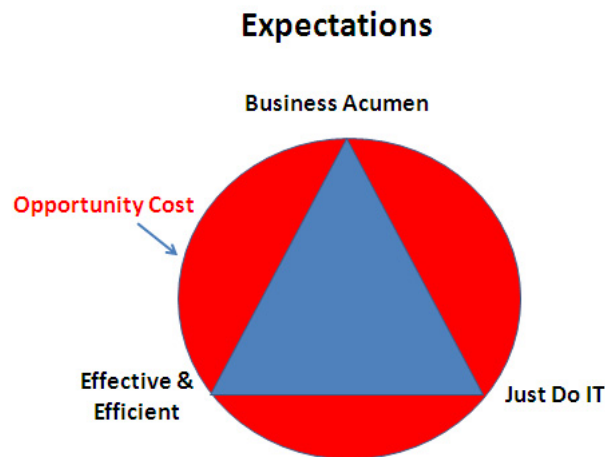


Fig. 2. Expectations of the workplace

When the three paradigms of Foundational Business Acumen (*Attitude, skills and Knowledge*), Just Do It (doing it on the first day of work), and Efficiency & Effectiveness (able to complete tasks following instructions well on time) are infused holistically at the work place, over time this may result in opportunity cost lost in training for the organization in a highly competitive industry like broadcasting. Of course what is central to the triangle is the importance of ensuring graduates met workplace expectations, ideally before they are employed or in the worst case scenario ensure that training programs in place are holistic and meticulously planned to ensure the three paradigms are systematically addressed.

#### 4. Method

The qualitative approach undertaken for this study was deemed appropriate (Goffee, 1996). The researcher combined related data obtained from interview transcripts, observations, content analysis of documents and notes, to identify key themes and patterns for further exploration. The sample of the study consisted of interviewees from broadcasting/telecommunication industry experts, key decision makers from public and private broadcasters, key training providers, universities and administrators in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

To facilitate this study, experts related to the area of inquiry were targeted with the snowballing convenience sampling technique (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 1995); the most practical method suggested was to gather professional opinion as primary data. In order to present an updated picture of the current industry situation, fieldwork was carried out with ten industry experts based on semi-structured interviews. Five represented the industry expectations while an equal number of informants represented the education and broadcast training providers. This study presents its findings in the form of discussion and recommendations.

#### 5. Findings and Discussion

##### 5.1. Current Practices and Future Training Needs

One of the apparent limitations of this study is to investigate empirically the level at which educational institutions in Malaysia are teaching what is required by the industry. Dean of a communication school who spoke on behalf of the university says, “We rope in real-time industry experts into our advisory board to advise us on what is current out there. And we incorporate those needs into our curriculum”. Workplace competencies and generally employability are the main factors which dictate institutions to integrate industry needed content as classroom practice.

Today, the developments in technology are dominated by the internet and social media sites such as forums and online communities. “At training institute lecturers try to integrate the internet and social media as tools for trainees in the classroom lessons. The AR apps are a good example that has influenced lecturers’ teaching with technology. The tools to do it, rather technology mediated knowledge are urgently required to get into action at the workplace”, emphasized the Director of a Public Broadcast Training Institution.

Broadcasting is an applied science that takes students beyond the textbooks and classroom. It is not entirely possible to teach broadcasting in a classroom by generalist lecturers. It requires the consultation of discipline specific industry experts as it happens with professional associations of lawyers and doctors. Without sufficient clinical practice or being admitted to the bar, lecturers in these disciplines are ineffective. Broadcasting lecturers merely dwelling in textbooks without sufficient industry practice would not be able to predict the future direction of the industry hence would be teaching passed knowledge.

“By contrast, practitioners entrenched in the industry”, according to a decision maker in the Strategic Planning Department of a private broadcaster, said “have less time for comprehensive academic research work. The universities may have the time to do that. We are here to do our creative bit for our bosses and our company needs. When we want data, our retainers provide them.”

They are insulated with fixed notions and ideas about their own industry. Teaching and learning for broadcasting needs a balanced input from both the academic and practitioner who are in touch with both worlds to impart critical knowledge.

Which means the industry training institution and the university may utilize the talents of part-time knowledge workers for immediate needs like research. Currently there are active memorandums of understanding between universities and their related industries which include the sharing of expert resources. But beyond that they remain

separate in their respective domains. These experts may be provided with sabbatical opportunity to work in the industry for two years after every five years of teaching and vice versa (see figure 3).

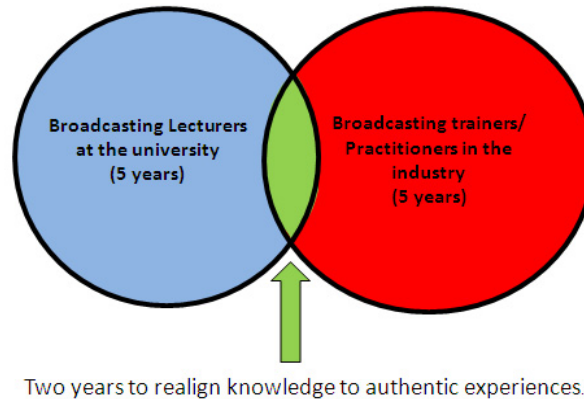


Fig. 3. Aligning knowledge to authentic experiences

### 5.2. Developing an Evolving Curricula

To equip students with mere classroom and lab work knowledge is insufficient. What is current and challenging would be to realign the broadcasting curriculum to discover new knowledge through project-based learning initiative or collaborative projects involving the industry. "Students who return from internship should be trained to identify worthwhile collaborative projects to continue with the same company, to create opportunity to revisit them to demonstrate new skills for hire," said the Dean of another Communication School.

Students and lecturers come face-to-face with authentic learning experiences at their contact with the industry, where they pick up real-time professional skills. This is only possible with an evolving curriculum; forward looking that includes managing instances of uncertainties. The same may not be true with practitioners who insulate themselves at work. A Manager from an independent broadcast content provider lamented that she did not have such liberal opportunities during her industrial training. "I wished I could spare the time from my busy schedule to go back to school to learn something new," she said.

Practitioners could become uncertain of the future of their industry for the lack of comprehensive research undertaking. If the curricula of both the industry training provider and the university do not provide for the management of uncertainties, it is less likely that we can train graduates for the future.

### 5.3. Implications for Workplace Ready Talents.

The educational implications for both students and lecturers shall be that they would be workplace prepared. An official from the Ministry of Information and Communication had a strong conviction about sharing resources that are rare and expensive.

The irony in this approach is that when one learns through apprenticeship or mentoring from the industry the chances are that you cannot be better than your master. While at the university environment one learns some aspects of higher level of cognitive skills without getting their hands wet. An internship on the hand is viewed as a mere corporate social responsibility. Only a longer term attachment of more than six months will earn the confidence of organizations that will entrust interns with responsible tasks and subsequently consider employment.

To open that possibility of employment, internships should be turned into an "integrated training" scheme where lecturers/students/ go back to their broadcasting organization every term vacation during the course of study. In this



way they are constantly in touch with their base industry. Students have a good chance of a positive assessment by their broadcasting organization and of employability. Every broadcasting lecturer/student becomes a part of the broadcasting industry. This would create a massive collaboration of study/work balance that will produce a continuous feed of technically and culturally trained talents for the future broadcasting industry.

While it may be the intention of the university to groom top choice graduates with foundational competence (content knowledge, skills and attitudes), exemplary teaching talents are rare and difficult to come by. The university also expects talents with industry linkages and research skills. To inculcate these skills among talents in addition to managing their performance and subsequently trying to retain them are huge challenges for the university.

## **6. Recommendations**

### *6.1. Sabbatical opportunity*

Teaching and learning or even institutional training for the future of broadcasting needs a balanced input from both the academics and practitioners who are in touch with both worlds to impart critical knowledge. With education programs being industrialized, and a four year curriculum being synthesized into three years, there are constraints for lecturers and trainers to continuously learn to understand future trends. These experts may be provided with sabbatical opportunity to work in the industry for two years after every five years of teaching and vice versa. This approach to continuous learning where academics teach for five years and engage in a working sabbatical with the industry for two years for practical insights and then return to active teaching before they go again to the industry will provide the appreciation of nuances on the ground. For example, they will learn not only the functionalities of transmitters but the social implications before putting them up on mountains. The same applies to the trainer from the industry who aspires to teach in the university or training institute, will discover the nuances of an academic environment when he/she has been there and done it.

### *6.2. Meta-analysis*

The research recommends an archive of training needs in the form of meta-analysis from a compilation of the most recent experiences, publications in broadcast training that informs of the current trends and the truth in the field; that tells of what is being researched, from a “100” journal articles and titles from the region and globally; from the empirical studies and experiences of leaders and practitioners who would provide real time scenarios, who can envisage how the industry would evolve from their experience. Collating the experiences out of practitioners can be a rich and informative payload though they can be pretty impressionist at times. Nevertheless, the collection will inform the process of charting future broadcast curriculum.

### *6.3. Resource sharing*

Resources may not be altogether exclusive. They can be shared among faculties. Broadcast facilities as in the video recording studio, audio recording and dubbing studios, and editing suites can be managed by dedicated technical personals. Such an arrangement would facilitate lecturers and students to achieve their core business of teaching and learning. Such facilities in the university should be common resources available to all relevant faculties through appropriate scheduling

The Malaysian broadcasting industry has embarked on numerous development projects. The National Digitalization Project 2003-2013 is a massive undertaking that will benefit the whole telecommunications industry including broadcasting, but cannot be accomplished by a single broadcast organization. With that come latest innovations including online broadcasting and HDTV transmission. Training now assumes a new dimension as HD production requires complex techniques. Such resources and training are inaccessible and expensive for tertiary institutions; hence resource sharing and collaborative action is the solution for the moment. Joint training with cost



sharing can be undertaken to strengthen ties between institutions/countries. Although there are inherent issues to be addressed here, sharing does produce long term tangible outcome besides saving valuable resources.

#### 6.4. Continuous learning

This approach to continuous learning where academics teach for five years and do a sabbatical with the broadcasting industry for two years to gain practical insights and return to active teaching before they go again to the industry, will provide the true understanding. Internship should be turned into an “integrated training” making every broadcasting lecturer/student part of the broadcasting industry. This would create a massive collaboration of study/work balance that will produce a continuous feed of technically and culturally trained talents for the future broadcasting industry.

## 7. Conclusions

At the tertiary education level no effort is being spare to hone students’ broadcasting skills in preparation to meet the rigor of their future workplace. Yet, findings report that there is always something more and new to learn in an evolving broadcasting industry.

Universities and the industry cannot lose sight of their need to constantly evaluate their practices and future training needs. An ongoing discussion on the expectations of the industry, practitioners and how the academia is going to cope with changes that accommodate the evolving changes in the industry is imperative.

According to Gordon Moore’s law, like technology, knowledge becomes obsolete and renewable every 18 months. Which means by the time students complete their study, what was learned in their first year at the university becomes renewable even before they graduate. For a robust industry like broadcasting where technology is constantly evolving, the emphasis should also be in the commitment to seek knowledge and new tools, not just to learn content; to device a curriculum that prepares students for lifelong and continuous learning.

### 7.1. Implications for Future Research

While the organization of content, education and training processes are meant to bring about change among the learners, which enable them to take away particular skills set and attributes to their workplace, is very much dependent on the learners’ own attitude. For such a high order of development, organizational culture, organizational structure and resources are major determinants.

A more strategic approach to educational curricula development services would include a meaningful database about the nature of the expected workforce; this would be another direction of empirical investigation.

Practitioners uncertain of the future of their industry for the lack of comprehensive research undertaking need to undertake serious research collaboration with research institutions. If the curricula of both the industry training provider and the university do not provide for the management of uncertainties, it is less likely that we can train graduates for the future.

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