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## Radio General Managers and News Directors in the United States: A Descriptive Analysis

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# **RADIO GENERAL MANAGERS AND NEWS DIRECTORS IN THE UNITED STATES: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS**

**By: Jeremy Harris Lipschultz and Michael L. Hilt**

A national survey of radio station general managers and news directors explored their demographic characteristics and stands on social issues. News directors' support for a national health care program, their lack of support for unregulated business, their lack of trust in private enterprise to look out for the workers' welfare, and their less negative view of labor unions may be explained through their own experience, as well as those of their newsroom employees.

Studies of employees as mass communicators have been limited to broader analyses of print and electronic journalists (Wright, C., 1986). Most often these studies have relied on organizational theory (Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979; Soloski, 1989), individual psychological variables (Comstock, 1989), or institutional issues (Bagdikian, 1985; Gitlin, 1980). Systematic research on print and electronic employees tends to focus on demographic characteristics of journalists (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991).

Despite the fact that broadcast managers are likely to wield the most power at a station, little work has been done to understand them and their view. The studies of media management (Goedkoop, 1988; Jacobs, 1990; Pringle, Starr, & McCavitt, 1991; Sherman, 1987) that have been done most often deal only with anecdotal evidence. This circumstance makes generalizations from previous research difficult. When it comes to research that focuses on radio, the emphasis shifts to characteristics of the station (Riffe & Shaw, 1990) and to concerns about audience members (Andreasen, 1986; Niehoff, 1988; Wright, J., 1986).

The purpose of the present study is . to survey U.S. radio general managers (GMs) and news directors (NDs) to paint what Weaver and Wilhoit call a social "portrait"; we seek to describe radio managers as people who help shape and deliver information to the public.

Little is known about the similarity of views between GMs and NDs, or the degree to which NDs are more like other journalists rather than their bosses. Although these issues are beyond the scope of the present study, measurement of social distance between the two groups is a starting point .

## JOURNALISTS AND OCCUPATION ROLES

In the study of journalists, occupation has been related to role theory and demographics: "Factors known to influence occupational performance include social background and traits that are idiosyncratic to particular individuals" (Graber, 1989, p. 60). Surprisingly, broadcast researchers have ignored the importance of occupational roles. General managers and news directors, for example, are members of nation-wide professional organizations such as the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and Radio-Television News Director Association (RTNDA), and are regular readers of trade publications.<sup>1</sup> These types of affiliations might be expected to foster increased occupational role identities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Radio stations in the United States are distinguished from broadcast entities in other countries by private ownership and a history of localism (Head & Sterling, 1990). The total number of radio stations continued to increase in the past decade. Recent figures in *Broadcasting* magazine (October 5, 1992) show 9,692 commercial radio stations on the air.

Despite the large numbers of local stations, some authors argue that there is little content diversity, and that station owners are mainly concerned about profit (Bagdikian, 1985). Mainstream values may be passed on from media owners and corporations to the day-to-day management personnel.

### *Social Views of Mass Communicators and their Organization*

Research on mass communicators is grounded in traditional sociology, and the "long-standing sociological interests in status and role, occupations and professions, analyses of complex organizations, and the sociology of work" (Wright, C., 1986, p. 61). McQuail (1987) argues that neither an individual's social background nor the work-place socialization of their organizations should be discounted. Owners and managers are seen as a "prime beneficiary" (Tunstall, 1971) group in terms of the efforts of the organization.

### *General Managers and News Directors Roles*

There is a growing trend among general managers to view their news directors as future GMs (Stone, 1986). Quarderer and Stone (

1989a) found that news directors and their general managers "embrace common beliefs" about news profitability: "But when it comes to hard data on the bottom line, they share impressions more often than they share numbers" (Quarderer and Stone 1989b; Stone, 1988). The administrative research of Quarderer and Stone highlights a useful approach to studying general managers and news directors, even though the work is not well grounded in social theory.

## METHODOLOGY

General managers and news directors at commercial radio stations across the United States were selected as a stratified random sample (Babbie, 1989) using the 1991 *Broadcasting Yearbook*.<sup>2</sup> In the first stage, the 262 radio markets were each divided into four groups based on size. Then 26 markets were randomly selected within each of these subgroups. In the second stage, individual radio general managers were randomly selected to represent each of the markets. The sample represented roughly equal numbers of

general managers and news directors for comparative purposes.<sup>3</sup> The sample groups radio respondents by market size to study political and social views of the occupational roles of GMs and NDs.

A total of 208 management-level employees were identified for the survey mailing list. The present study was part of a larger study of radio and television managers. The survey followed an exploratory two-state census in 1990. The survey was self-administered. The Total Design Method for mail surveys was used (Dillman, 1979).<sup>4</sup> Personalized cover-letters, survey booklets, and business reply envelopes were sent. The first wave of surveys was mailed in November 1991. This mailing was followed by a reminder postcard two weeks later, and a second mailing of the survey to nonrespondents in early December.

The radio response rate was 43.3 percent (N=90). The response rate was average for mail surveys for "management-level populations" (Garrison & Salwen, 1989). Response rates did not deviate dramatically for any of the subpopulations.<sup>5</sup> General managers and news directors were compared as occupational groups, using the SPSSx statistical package.

## RESULTS

General managers and news directors were studied using three variable sets: (1) demographic "portrait," (2) views of their jobs and communities, and (3) social issue stands.

### *Demographic Portrait of Radio GMs and NOs*

The use of "basic characteristics" (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991, p. 12) of mass communicators is one way to compare and contrast occupational groups such as GMs and NDs. Based on a review of the demographic data, radio respondents were grouped for the comparison of occupations.

As one might expect, the general managers' mean average age was about eight years older than the news directors (Table 1 ).

Both groups were predominantly white males, although women have made greater inroads as news directors. Both groups were most likely to be married, but GMs were likely to have children while NDs were likely to have none. News directors were more likely than general managers to never have been married. A *huge* income gap existed between the two groups, with 73 percent of general managers in the sample reporting individual incomes greater than \$50,000 a year, and all respondent news directors making less.<sup>6</sup> Most often, both groups reported that their fathers were manager/professionals and their mothers were homemakers.

As was the case in Weaver and Wilhoit's ( 1991) study of journalists, the majority of both general managers and news directors considered themselves politically middle of the road. Of the rest, GMs were more likely than NDs to say they were conservative, and NDs were more likely than GMs to say they were liberal. Overwhelmingly, both GMs and NDs saw the political stand of their communities as being conservative. A majority of general managers identified with the Republican Party while equal numbers of news directors said they were independent or Republican. More general managers and news directors identified themselves as independent rather than Democrat.

### *Views of their Jobs and Communities*

Radio general managers and news directors consider competent management, the opportunity to be a success and the opportunity to advance as most important in judging a particular job in broadcasting.

Least important to both groups were freedom from supervision and union representation. Overwhelmingly, respondents said they expected to remain in broadcasting for at least the next five years.

Radio general managers and news directors were strongly positive in their perceptions of their communities. They saw their community as a good place to raise a family, offering good leisure activities and good schools. They disagreed that their community had a high rate of poverty, and that the community had pollution problems.

#### *Stands on Social Issues*

On only four of 15 statements were there statistically significant differences between radio general managers and news directors (Table 2).

The three statements that both groups most strongly agreed with were: "Government spending should be cut to reduce the budget deficit"; "More money should be spent on public education"; and "A woman has the right to decide about an abortion." The next most strongly held views were disagreements with the statements: "Social programs should be cut, not defense spending"; and "Social security benefits should be reduced." They also strongly disagreed with the statements: "Environmental problems are overstated"; and "Taxes need to be raised to cut the budget deficit."

On four statements, there were statistically significant differences between general managers and news directors. On the statement "Private enterprise is fair to workers," general managers as a group agreed (3.70), while news directors were leaning toward disagreement (2.63). On the statement "Labor unions do not serve the best interests of workers," GMs agreed (3.91), while NDs did not agree as strongly (3.26). More news directors than general managers supported a national health care program, while more general managers than news directors agreed that less regulation of business is good for the country.

#### *Broadcast Regulation Views*

Additionally, radio general managers and news directors were asked for their views about broadcast regulation. On only two of ten statements were there statistically significant differences between groups. On the statement, "Broadcast deregulation has not served the public interest," NDs (3.54) leaned toward agreement while GMs (3.00) were neutral ( $t = -2.25$ ;  $\alpha = .027$ ). On the statement, "The fairness doctrine should be reinstated," GMs (2.28) were in disagreement, while NDs (3.04) were neutral ( $t = -3.62$ ;  $\alpha = .000$ ).

### **DISCUSSION**

The largely middle-of-the-road social views found in Weaver and Wilhoit's survey of journalists also exists in the present study. At the same time, general managers rather than news directors were more likely to lean to the right of the political center.

This study begins to document in a systematic way the basic characteristics of radio general managers and news directors in the United States. The demographic portrait provides insight into the backgrounds of these broadcasters as well as their social views.

Although it is important to recognize that general managers and news directors interact within their stations, the approach in this study emphasizes professional roles rather than organizational factors. The emphasis on professional roles takes into account industry factors such as job turnover, career advancement, and outside recruitment of managers (Sherman, 1987). From this perspective, it is easy to see why general managers and news directors might share some social views.

The demographic portrait shows general managers as older, more likely to make above \$50,000, and more likely to identify with the Republican party and conservative stands. On the four stands on social issues where general managers differed significantly from news directors, they were in the direction of being more conservative.

The four items where general managers and news directors differ significantly could be explained in part as issues that affect NDs personally. News directors' support for a national health care program, their leaning toward neutrality about labor unions, concerns about deregulation, and lack of trust in private enterprise to look out for the workers' welfare may be understood through their own experiences, as well as those of their newsroom employees.

When it comes to issues that affect the industry directly, general managers and news directors are even more likely to share views. On all ten broadcast regulation statements, general managers lean toward the business, deregulatory approach to broadcasting. On the two statements where general managers and news directors differ significantly- "broadcast deregulation has not served the public interest," and "the fairness doctrine should be reinstated" - news directors were less likely than general managers to believe in broadcast deregulation.

When it comes to day-to-day concerns of radio general managers and news directors - rather than philosophical issues - we do not know how often they face decisions that affect both news judgment and the bottom line; however, Quarderer and Stone (1989b) argue that they share beliefs, at least when it comes to news profitability.

Graber (1989) categorizes the kinds of variables measured in this study as "background .and personality factors" influencing "occupational performance." She concludes that the "diversity of influences" in media production makes it "yet impossible to assess the precise impact" (pp. 60, 68).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The readership results of the present survey, not directly part of this study, indicate that 91.5 percent of radio and television general managers and news directors read *Broadcasting* or other trade magazines, and 73.3 percent were regular readers.

<sup>2</sup> The yearbook is more comprehensive than other directories (e.g., RTNDA) in that it lists by station rather than by membership of individuals.

<sup>3</sup> Babbie, 1989, on multistage cluster sampling, explains the process of first identifying and "sampling of *groups* of elements- clusters- followed by the selection of elements within each of the selected clusters." We first selected randomly from our clusters of market size representative markets (TV: 1-52, 53-1 04, 1 05-156, and 1 57-209; and Radio: 1-65, 66- 130, 131-196, and 197-262). Then we randomly selected general managers and news directors from stations in selected markets, and the respondents were not necessarily from the same station.

<sup>4</sup> We adapted the method and limited follow-ups because of budgetary restrictions. The present survey was refined from a two-state census of radio and television GMs and NDs. For details see Jeremy H. Lipschultz and Michael L. Hilt, 'First amendment vs. business orientations of broadcast general managers and news directors,' *Journalism Quarterly*, in press.

<sup>5</sup> Sub-population response rates were: 51 of 104 television general managers surveyed; 43 of 10 radio general managers; 49 of 1 04 television news directors; and 47 of 104 radio news directors.

<sup>6</sup> For radio general managers in the sample, 95.2 percent were above the \$35,000 mark, and 85.4 percent were above \$50,000 in reported *household* annual income. For the news director group, 63.6 percent were below \$35,000 (31.8 percent, \$20,000-35,000; 29.5 per cent, \$10,000-20,000; and 2.3 percent, below \$10,000). For GMs, 92.7 percent had an *individual* gross annual income of more than \$35,000, and 73.2 percent made more than \$50,000. For NDs, 81.8 percent had an individual gross annual income of less than \$35,000. U.S. Census Data (1988) reported 45.7 percent of households above \$35,000, including 25.7 percent above \$50,000. See U.S. Department of Commerce, *Bureau of the Census, in Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990*, 110th edition (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), tables 726-727, p.450. The latest national survey of news director salaries reports the median income for television news directors was \$45,000, and the median income *for* radio news directors was \$17,810. See Vernon Stone, "News salaries stand still," *Communicator* 46(2): 14-15 (Feb. 1992).

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TABLE 1

Radio General Managers and News Directors: Demographics

<u>Variables</u>	(N=43) <u>GMs</u>	(N=47) <u>NDs</u>	(N=90) <u>Radio</u>
Mean Average Age	45	37	39
College Major			
Percent Communication*	44.0	66.7	55.8
Percent Business	17.0	4.4	10.5
Percent Liberal Arts**	39.0	28.9	33.7
Race			
Percent White	88.4	87.2	87.8
Percent Other	11.6	12.8	12.1
Gender			
Percent Male	88.4	68.1	77.8
Percent Female	11.6	31.9	22.2
Marital Status			
Percent Never Married	7.0	40.0	23.9
Percent Married	81.4	55.6	68.2
Percent Divorced/Widowed	11.6	4.4	7.9
Median Number of Children	2	0	1
Percent Individual Income over \$50,000	73.2	0.0	35.3
Political Party Identification			
Democrat	11.9	31.9	22.5
Republican	54.8	34.0	43.8
Independent or Other	33.3	34.1	33.7
Individual's Political Stand			
Conservative	41.5	23.4	31.8
Middle-of-the-Road	48.8	53.2	51.2
Liberal	18.6	23.4	17.0
Perception of Community Political Stand			
Conservative	60.5	66.0	63.3
Middle-of-the-Road	20.9	19.1	20.0
Liberal	9.7	14.9	16.7
Most Frequent Occupation of Parents			
Percent of Fathers who were Managers/Professionals	48.8	41.9	45.2
Percent of Mothers who were Homemakers	68.3	50.0	58.8

\*Communication includes Mass Communication, Journalism, Speech and Broadcasting.

\*\*Liberal Arts does not include Communication majors, or Business.

TABLE 2

**Radio General Manager and News Director Stands on Social Issues**

<u>Statement (overall) mean*</u>		<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Cases</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>2-tail</u>
Government spending should be cut to reduce the budget deficit (4.25).	GM	4.29	0.84	42	0.96	n.s.
	ND	4.09	1.07	46		
More money should be spent on public education (3.95).	GM	3.77	0.97	43	-1.87	n.s.
	ND	4.15	0.97	46		
A women has the right to decide about an abortion (3.83)	GM	3.86	1.28	43	-0.44	n.s.
	ND	3.98	1.22	46		
Nuclear arms reductions would make the world a safer place (3.69).	GM	3.43	0.99	42	-1.55	n.s.
	ND	3.76	1.02	46		
A national health care program is needed (3.61).	GM	3.36	1.14	42	-2.56	.012
	ND	3.93	0.98	46		
Labor unions do not serve the best interests of workers (3.55).	GM	3.91	0.81	43	3.13	.002
	ND	3.26	1.10	46		
Politicians cannot be trusted (3.41).	GM	3.36	1.03	42	0.65	n.s.
	ND	3.22	0.90	45		
Less regulation of business is good for the USA (3.35).	GM	3.56	1.08	43	2.61	.011
	ND	2.96	1.09	45		
Private enterprise is fair to workers (3.32).	GM	3.70	0.77	43	5.70	.000
	ND	2.63	0.97	46		
National news media coverage is biased (2.91).	GM	3.42	1.07	43	1.97	n.s.
	ND	2.96	1.13	46		
Farm subsidies should be eliminated (2.89).	GM	3.02	0.92	42	0.99	n.s.
	ND	2.83	0.95	46		
Taxes need to be raised to cut the budget deficit (2.47).	GM	2.50	1.24	42	-0.25	n.s.
	ND	2.57	1.21	46		
Environmental problems are overstated (2.37).	GM	2.43	1.04	42	0.25	n.s.
	ND	2.37	1.14	46		
Social security benefits should be reduced (2.24).	GM	2.30	0.80	43	0.11	n.s.
	ND	2.28	0.94	46		
Social programs should be cut, not defense spending (2.21).	GM	2.44	1.03	43	1.50	n.s.
	ND	2.09	1.19	46		

\*The overall mean is the score for all radio and television respondents. \*\*t values are pooled variance estimates.

\*\*\*represents significance at alpha level of .05.