

## MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RESOURCES

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### Summary

New and converging information-intensive technologies combined with changing roles of nation-states, regions and non-governmental organizations contribute to complexity and uncertainty in the environment of communication, information and media organizations. Particularly important is the rise of cross-national alliances and other networked organizational forms. These dramatic changes possess implications for the management of such organizations in this new and increasingly interconnected information era. From structural and strategic issues to knowledge and change challenges, there are specific managerial approaches that best match these issues and challenges set in their complex and uncertain environment. Special attention is paid to leadership and communication including a focus on communities of sustainable change. Management of technological change as well as policy-making are part of the list of critical success factors for the media and communications world of today. Managerial

ethics and values are highlighted along with the social responsibility of effective leaders in the communications arena of a new millennium.

## **1. Introduction**

At no other time in our history has there been such a complex and uncertain environment for the management of information, communication and media resources. This complexity as well as related uncertainty derives from rapidly changing and converging technologies, in addition to increasing globalization. (See *Media Globalization and Localization and Electronic Commerce, Competition and Organization*.) The facts that new technologies are information-intensive ones, and that telecommunications, computing, cable, video and sound-related technologies are converging, contribute to the resultant depth and pace of change.

The very term "mass communications and media" today means something quite different than the term meant just one or two decades ago. The world of the Web is bringing about major change in mass communications and media. (See *The Internet as a Mass Communications Medium*.) From Web radio to world news or even music on the Web, the domains of mass communication and media present new and dramatic contours: traditional broadcast journalism (the nightly news) now ends with a reminder to visit the network's Web site for further information or special event coverage. Television coverage of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, included a visual reminder flashed on the screen periodically for the viewer to go to the special network Web site for additional Olympics information.

Paralleling these remarkable changes that redefine the domains of mass communication and media are changes in the concepts of effective management and leadership. Taken together, the changing environment for mass communication and media along with changing communication technology amplify the challenges of effective management of such resources.

## **2. A Changing Environment**

### **2.4. Technology-Related Changes**

Communication- and information-related technologies are rapidly changing and influencing the ways in which people and organizations receive, use and even transmit information. There are three particularly important aspects of this change to highlight: 1) the information-intensive nature of the technology itself, 2) the convergence of a range of information- and communication-related technologies from print journalism to cable to Web, and 3) the interactive potential of the new and converging technologies.

As to the future, mass communication technologies have again a great potential for interactivity. In the days of oral traditions of communication, individuals could interact directly with the source of, for example, news or other information. Now, in this new millennium, the interactions are being transformed from involving one individual and one source to countless individuals and almost equally large numbers of information sources, made possible by the new communications-related technologies and their

interactive potential. The presence and the increasing ubiquity of the Internet in certain parts of the world dramatically shape the roles and range of mass communications and media.

## **2.5. Nation-State, Private Sector, and Other Role Changes**

There are three major roles that influence management of mass communication and media resources in this new millennium. First, the roles of nation-states are changing in significant ways. There are multiple layers of government, multiple private actors, and multiple non-governmental and civil society actors on today's governance stage. In some parts of the world, regional organizations and regional governments are playing stronger roles. The private sector itself is becoming more and more involved with governments as globalization issues abound and privatization increases. Government-industry roles are changing accordingly. For example, in the United States, the Department of Commerce now works together with industry to do strategic planning and implementation. These patterns did not always exist. Going back a decade or so, a U.S. government agency such as the Department of Commerce saw its role as clearly separate from the roles of the private sector. In other parts of the world, such as Japan or Germany, government and industry have had closer working relationships, shaped by each country's history and culture. Privatization has become a major theme in many parts of the world. A concomitant change is the regulatory roles and attitudes of nation-state governments. Whether it's telecommunication or sanitation, governments are privatizing and contracting out services. And globally, almost all governments are separating regulatory issues from telecommunication-operating issues. These changing roles shape in a new way the social structure of the media industry.

## **2.6. New Organizational Forms**

To counteract the uncertainties about the shape of the media industry, its management and technology, as well as the future trajectories, new organizational forms are taking center stage. The number of networks, mergers and alliances -- all types of interorganizational arrangements -- is growing dramatically. Such networks or connections of formerly non-linked organizations help to cut down on the uncertainty of the environment and match better its complexity. They do this by providing one or more of the following: access to information about and involvement in new markets; access to new ways of doing their work (know-how and show-how!); and access to new kinds and ways of learning which extend an organization's capacity for absorbing and using effectively new information. The discussion below highlights these purposes in more detail.

These interorganizational arrangements have a range of forms or types and even governance mechanisms. Very often, they span national boundaries. Purposes might include access to markets, access to needed information or know-how, the ability to influence in a greater way government or other law-making bodies either domestically or internationally, the ability to increase power, and the ability to increase visibility and reputation through the arrangement. Matching this variety of purposes is an array of possible structures such as formal networks that sets of organizations can set up. These include joint venture, alliance, consortium or network. A joint venture is formed when a

new and separate yet jointly-owned organization is created and institutionalized through legal documents. An alliance is an agreement among two or more organizations to establish an exchange relationship of some sort; there are neither joint ownership nor necessarily legal documents establishing a new organization. There is, however, a legal agreement. A consortium is a group of participating organizations usually with one major purpose. For example, a consortium could be a group of organizations coming together in one consortium format to conduct research and development for its particular grouping. Again, there is a formal agreement creating the consortium and setting out its operations. A network is the least formal of these interorganizational arrangements. This is a group of organizations (a minimum of two) with some sort of governance mechanism that links parts of the participating organizations to carry out a specified purpose or purposes. There may or may not be a detailed legal document setting forth the network agreement.

### **3. Media Management in a New Millennium**

#### **3.11. Structural Issues**

The management of interorganizational forms often presents a challenge. With solid planning and structuring, joint ventures can operate effectively with their own governance structure and with ongoing support from the participating organizations and their top managers. A network structure provides a great deal of flexibility as well as the potential for competitive strength. An example of a network arrangement is when a group of news organizations come together to cover a complex event and, with advance agreement, have each partner organization focus on a different contribution or output. This is one of the most complex forms to manage because of the number of possible partners and power inequities among the participating organizations. Consortia and joint ventures, which offer a more formal organizational structure, are easier to manage. The ease of management of these forms is due to the presence of a coordinating unit that becomes part of the consortia or joint venture's formal structure, as opposed to the absence of such a unit in informal network forms. In the case of consortia and joint ventures, there is a unit or office specifically charged with coordination (sometimes along with other functions). Often consortia can involve highly unlike participating organizations that run the gamut from private sector to government to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Having a coordinating unit as a part of the consortia structure expedites overall management.

Alliances (which include informal network agreements) have their own challenges. Rarely is there a creation of a new entity such as there would be in the case of a joint venture. Usually there is some sort of central administrative mechanism. Especially in the mass communication and media arena, the high environmental uncertainty related to technological convergence provides a platform for multiple alliance formations. Failure occurs often, especially when attention is not paid to managerial issues and challenges. Because of the flexibility of alliances and the usually large number of alliances in which any one organization may participate, the propensity for alliance dissolution or failure is high. Absence of a specific alliance champion or champions in each of the participating organizations, and the concomitant absence of trust among participants, contribute to alliance dissolution.

There is also high potential for multiple alliances and other interorganizational arrangements to add value to participating organizations in novel ways. For example, an alliance between a traditional media organization (a television news network) and a Web portal company provides the TV news network with a powerful, in-depth, additional service to the customer outlet to complement their network news, and provides the portal company with the additional service to the customer of more useful content – that is, up-to-date, fast-breaking, in-depth news.

### 3.12. Management Issues

Thus there are major managerial implications from a systems perspective. First is the need for strategic planning that includes identification of possible partnering opportunities or threats. Such planning should also include the identification of the best fit for an interorganizational form and the best fit for managing the selected interorganizational forms. Included in such an analysis should be an examination of potential information and knowledge resources of each participating organization, the ability to access such effectively, the building of trust among participants and their organizations, an ongoing evaluation of the interorganizational arrangement's environment in terms of potential resources, opportunities and threats. Is the original purpose of the interorganizational arrangement being met? Are new purposes or opportunities evolving? What changes need to be made over time to ensure the alliance or other network form's effectiveness?

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### **Biographical Sketch**

**Nanette S. Levinson** is Associate Professor of International Relations and Associate Dean, School of International Service, American University, Washington, D.C. 20016. A faculty member of the International Communication Program, she teaches and does research on communication and social and economic development, and on the Internet and international affairs. Her work has also focused on the management and operations of complex cross-national alliances. Recently she co-authored a study on women as leaders in international affairs. Having received her bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees from Harvard University, her regional foci include Europe and Asia. She serves as a member of several boards of nonprofit organizations, and has received recognition for outstanding administration, teaching and curriculum development.