Television Executives Discuss. Quality in the Public and Private Sectors

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■ *What do television executives think about quality and television? A research project charged by CAC to UPF shows that, according to these professionals, quality on television is a purpose based on the pact with the spectator which still has to be achieved. On the one hand, public broadcasters emphasize the term public service to define quality. On the other hand, private broadcasters relate quality to business efficiency. The report also includes a section about strategies for quality improvement and control on television.*

Introduction

The history of the past fifteen years of television in Europe shows that the public and private sectors have risen to the challenge of competing head-on to become the audience leaders among the big general stations. The public sector has also tried to retain its social and political influence. This raises the following problem: how can we guarantee and control the quality of the television service in the public and private sectors?

To help find answers to this question, the Catalonia Broadcasting Council commissioned the Pompeu Fabra University with developing a research project to try to define the problems that surround the concept of quality applied to television and that offered a number of strategies for improving the control of the content that ends up reaching

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our TV screens. The author of this work, with the collaboration of Carmina Puig, carried out a number of in-depth interviews with public and private TV station managers and heads of programming in Catalonia and Spain (with regard to their coverage in Catalonia), the results and conclusions of which are briefly summarized in this article. We approached the question of quality from the TV executives' point of view to underline the most effective way of participating in daily television reality, in order for the organizations responsible for controlling television to improve quality without interfering in professional creativity and freedom.

The need to establish a set of quality standards for TV professionals is not very useful, given that production rates, the complexity of the television process and the number of professionals involved in that process make it very difficult to reach a consensus for determining priorities that could or should be applied at any given time to achieve an abstract concept such as television quality. Attempting to establish TV quality standards is therefore not very useful because among other things it can lead to the application of the subjectivity of the people who judge programs (academics, critics, professionals, journalists, politically controlled regulatory authorities, etc.) and the points of view they use to judge them. However, it would be extremely useful for the CAC to uphold the strategy of monitoring TV and radio programming based on the self-assessment indices set out in the document The *Definition of the Public Service Model*, which it developed, and to combine this control mechanism with more direct intervention in daily broadcasting practice by equipping television stations with staff members who, from the point of view of professional autonomy, would work to ensure the station met the indices the Council had prepared (*Quaderns del CAC*, No. 10, Oct. 2001, 46-49). We will return to this point in the conclusions to this article.

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The concept of quality in television

What does *quality* mean? As Frith says, "Quality does not describe what good television is but the ideological context in which we judge what good television is and is not" (2000, page 41). It does not appear to be particularly useful for professionals to listen to the opinions or judgments that other groups make about their work in order to make them reflect, feel responsible or, in exceptional cases, proud, but these judgments exist, e.g., through prestigious forums such as INPUT, which has performed extraordinary work in trying to establish regular discussions on quality in public television and has assembled an impressive archive that includes new ways of developing the medium. In any case, the TV industry has to make an effort to effectively and professionally tackle the question of quality and, unfortunately, there are not many possibilities for making decisions in forums in today's quotidian media reality. Public and private television stations need executive and effective instruments to apply quality to be able to achieve this goal efficiently.

The purpose of this research work was therefore to discover what TV executives thought and the criteria they apply, to be able to find common criteria that would make it possible to draw up a policy that could be applied to quality in the industry. This would not involve making unfavorable comparisons with discussions that other people have developed in this area, as the complementary nature of the different contributions contained in this monograph demonstrates. However, this research work prioritized TV executives because they are the people who have to put the abstract concept of *television quality* into practice in the public and private television services, and in a context of financial competitiveness.

As the conclusions show, this article defends the idea that a key point in the strategy to apply to achieve quality television lies with the heads of programming, because they are the people who have to bring criteria of excellence into line with previously established financial and cultural requirements. The results of this research suggest that the key figure we should consider when measuring TV quality is the person who chooses whether or not something makes good television. This is obviously a risky approach, as we are confiding decision-making and content-management about television quality in a single person and the team he or she works with, but it is one of the most effective measures in a realistic approach to the television production process. Most decision-making is in their hands and the development of each TV project will be followed and controlled by this person. He or she is therefore key to ensuring quality becomes a plausible reality. Any other policy that pursued TV quality without taking into account the position and priorities of the people who execute and decide a station's content would fail, as it would ignore the tumultuous context in which the TV industry works, where schedule changes occur regularly and particular strategies are based on what the competition is doing and the production situation of each project.

Methodological procedures used in this research work

The study summarized below was aimed at trying to paint the panorama in which TV executives understand quality as applied to their professional responsibilities. The work was established from the conviction that this approach would not only indicate their views on television quality but also their strategies for achieving it in their respective mediums, public or private.

Catalonia currently has seven free-to-air television stations that cover the whole territory. The public stations are TV3, 33 (which broadcasts on the same frequency as the infants' and youths' station K3) and TVE1 and 2. The three private stations are Tele5, A3TV and Canal+. The seven stations were the subject of this research work, based on in-depth interviews with their respective managers and heads of programming[ii]. We were able to interview the following people responsible for the stations: Miquel Puig, director-general of CRTVC and director of TVC, Francesc Escribano, head of programming at TV3, Francesc Fàbregas, head of programming at 33, Francesc Xavier Grima, director of TVE Catalunya, Manel Arranz, head of programming at TVE Catalunya, Paolo Vasile, director-general and CEO of Telecinco, Alejandro Gómez Lavilla, programming manager at Telecinco, Manuel Villanueva, director of A3TV and, at the time, head of programming at A3TV and Pedro Revaldería, head of programming at Canal+ in Spain. The interviews were held during fall 2000

and winter 2001 in Barcelona and Madrid. They lasted two hours on average, were recorded in their entirety on cassette and were led by the author of this article. All the interviews had been previously structured and a qualitative analysis was made of each. We chose these two figures because they were responsible for the design and content of the stations subjected to this analysis, and we felt that their work as executives would mean they would prepare a discussion on the strategies they apply at their station in terms of the context of the TV industry and where their stations fit into it.

During the course of the interviews, the managers and heads of programming continually articulated a dual discussion that moved between professionalism applied to products and the need to transfer a discussion aimed at the market that is the basis for decision-making. It seemed to be important to include the managers' points of view in discussions about television quality because scriptwriters, producers, program-makers and directors talk more from their own experience, and we needed to have a wider view to be able to show the contradictions in the production system and communication policies applied in each case according to the context of the industry.

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Starting points of the research work

Our approach to the problem naturally started from work that has already been done in this field, such as the seven points outlined by Barnett and Seymour (1999) identifying the main reasons for the decline in television quality and creativity, among which it is important to emphasize the importance of quantitative audience research that puts pressure on professionals and leads to a fall in the number of issues on the agenda, and future uncertainty of the public-service role of television in the current competitive media environment, which unsettles professionals who have until now applied public-service criteria and makes them unsure about financial priorities applied to the profitability of public media.

We should make a conceptual appraisal on this point. Most studies about quality and television make the connection between quality and high culture and quality and public service, but we have to overcome this temptation when it

comes to establishing the results of this research work and not define television quality through cultural domains or a public-service function which is often confused with being an inevitable carrier of quality. The problem with making these immediate associations has been shown in previous studies (Mulgan, 1990).

We have to frame the discussion about television quality within discussions about the targets of each station or program we analyzed. For example, if we introduce the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation into the discussion, we can see that, in accordance with the 1994 Document, the CBC established its concept of television quality through particular targets which included meeting the needs of ethnic minorities and cultural interests and making use of television as a public forum that is also able to entertain. In the Spanish broadcast context, the legislative framework and regulatory authorities such as the Catalonia Broadcasting Council emphasize the need to provide viewers with a quality public service and stress the function of quality but fail to define the requisites needed for this programming quality to exist. However, they emphasize that a good television service should be based on majority audience programming, although it should also meet the needs of cultural and technological diversity (*Quaderns del CAC*, October 2001, 23).

It is important to look at studies that have assessed television quality through the views of professionals who work directly on programs, because they do not start from the financial structure of the public television service, which is a determining factor in complaints and criticisms by program-makers about the conditions in which they work preventing them from reaching high quality indices (Koboldt, Hogg and Robinson 1999; Mepham, 1990; BFI: 1999). As a medium of cultural production and as an industrial product, any assessment of television quality has to make these two aspects compatible. The financial structure of public and private broadcasters cannot be considered an excuse for upholding a minority cultural discourse but rather it is important to consider it an inherent element that must be made to fit within the prevailing cultures of the medium.

We could interpret that the poor discussion about quality in television that has existed until now is a direct result of systematically ignoring the financial context in which television is developed and upholding an exclusivist and

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elitist view of culture through television. The cultural dimension often becomes the only point of view for assessing television quality and financial costs are only mentioned as an added value. Fortunately, documents such as the previously mentioned CAC one correct this point of view, relating quality not only to creativity and innovation but also to the need to make television a medium devoted to broad audiences - one of the fundamental principles of public service understood as a basic right of citizens (2001, 29).

Who talks about quality and television?

The research this article reflects centers on a discussion about quality by only one of the parties involved in manufacturing a quality discourse, i.e., the professionals - in this case the executives who run television stations. However, we should bear in mind that discussions about quality are also articulated by audiences (through viewers' associations, feedback, etc.), the market, regulatory organizations and institutions responsible for television functioning and content, and social science researchers interested in the matter, who represent critical platforms of expression on the issue.

This article only provides reflections on the discussions of broadcast professionals from the point of view of media managers, i.e., the people with the authority to design and project a station's targets and provide the station with the technical crew and talent that make it possible for the targets to be a qualitative reality in the programs we see on our screens. This work endeavored to define their discussions about quality and highlight contradictions in order to offer a view of what they take quality in television to mean. The research hypotheses were:

(i) Catalan and Spanish TV managers have their own discourse about quality television.

(ii) Catalan and Spanish TV managers believe they know the concept of television quality that their respective audiences have and expect.

(iii) The pressure of competition within the industry makes it difficult to balance financial and cultural targets and masks the concept of quality programming.

(iv) Each manager has his or her own concept of quality linked to the production ability of their station and they tend to identify quality with their own critically and commercially successful programming.

(v) Catalan and Spanish TV managers do not identify television quality with cultural programming.

(vi) Catalan and Spanish TV managers do not establish programs according to prior criteria of television quality but rather according to intuition, internal and external production opportunities and analyses of quantitative and qualitative results from their audiences.

(vii) Catalan and Spanish TV managers find it hard to control the day-to-day aspects of programming at their stations, and the complexity of decision-making in complex professional structures makes it harder to achieve quality television programming.

The structure of the interviews was based on these seven points and the qualitative analysis of the discussions centered on the result of their reflections on these questions.

Managers' attitudes towards discussions about quality

We should emphasize a number of factors that conditioned the managers' overall discussions about quality: (i) their unstable positions, both in the public and private sectors, which does not facilitate long-term professional strategies or confidence in the sector when it comes to making decisions[iii], (ii) their approach to the concept of quality differed according to whether they worked in the public or private sector (public TV managers systematically related the concept of public service to quality and took it to be a factor inherent in their programming, while private-sector managers related quality to external criticism, financial profitability and audience success)[iv], and finally, (iii) in both sectors, managers' discussions about quality television were defined by strongly defensive attitudes. Every interviewee implicitly felt threatened and pressured by an external party judging their work and they hastened to trivialize the points of view of non-professionals:

"Everyone talks about television and the only people who don't are the television professionals, by which I mean the people who make television. What does professional mean? Someone who works for particular targets and who knows what it takes to think them up and actually reach them. It is very important to mention this, because at the end of the day other people, from ethics academics through to politicians, talk about it... if you found you had to make a schedule that served the maximum number of people as far as possible, you would realize you have to use this type of content."

(Francesc Escribano, head of programming at TV3)

This defensive position can also be explained because external discussions tend to be negative and to rate the medium lowly with regard to other areas of the cultural industry, perhaps because it is a medium that viewers have traditionally enjoyed free of charge and without making any effort beyond sitting on the sofa and pressing a button. Watching TV is the last leisure activity and is associated with not being bothered to do anything more useful.

Another significant point in the executives' discussions was the call by outsiders to contextualize the audiovisual industry within the marketplace, to condition the parameters of activity of this cultural industry. The executives felt that while this occurs with regard to cinema it was often ignored in the case of television.

The concept of quality defined by the TV executives

"If quality was easy to define, it would become a reachable target, and reachable targets are not strategic."

(Francesc Escribano, head of programming at TV3)

"Quality, like truth, does not exist."

(Paolo Vasile, director-general of Tele 5)

"The quality of a cultural good is measured by the strength of an idea in relation to technological procedures and creativity in relation to production costs."

(Francesc Fábregas, head of programming at 33)

These three quotes indicate that TV managers and heads of programming at public and private stations do not define television quality according to a set of indicators their programs should necessarily meet, but as an objective that can be reached through the attitudes or perspectives listed below:

Quality as harmony. All the interviewees agreed that the perception of television quality becomes clear when there is a certain harmony between content and the result of the production process. There has to be a global perception, and this perception is hard to describe objectively and systematically.

Quality in relation to targets. Quality is directly related to reaching the targets designed for a particular product or type of programming. Quality is directly linked to reaching the targets for each strategy and program. Of course, disagreement about the role that programming should play blurs this relationship, and financial targets, historical context and production and programming strategies in each case link quality levels with very different parameters for each channel.

"When I say that quality does not exist, I mean I believe that any discussion about quality in television is pretentious, because we have to know if we are talking about the quality of the television culture or the quality of the television industry."

(Paolo Vasile, director-general of Tele5)

This view from the head of Tele5 is not off the mark, because a station's quality targets arise from its managers' interpretation of audience wishes and needs in relation to the station's possibilities of satisfying them, and they are the people responsible for establishing these links.

"Quality has to be compatible with productivity, because our aim is to be profitable and so our programming has to be able to produce profits."

(Manuel Villanueva, director of A3TV)

Financial priorities were clearly more important than cultural ones to the private-sector managers, who based and justified their point of view on what audiences want, i.e., they interpreted satisfying the maximum number of viewers as satisfying their audiences' TV quality desires.

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"It is clear to me that television quality is based on being able to satisfy the people who pay (advertisers and audience). We shouldn't move outside these parameters."

(Pedro Revaldería, head of programming at Canal+)

The director of A3TV made a point that we believe well explains private stations' content strategy with regard to the low priority they give to experimentation and innovation in programming.

"Paraphrasing a poem by Bennedetti: "My tactic is to love you as you are (the viewers) and my strategy is that one day, without you knowing how, when or why, you will need me, you will look for me because you need my entertainment and my presence".

(Manuel Villanueva, director of A3TV)

Quality and the concept of public service. The discussion about public service was superimposed on the discussion about quality. It is important to distinguish between public-service targets and the quality applied to reach them. We deliberately did not raise the issue of public service in the interviews, the but public-station managers referred to it in relation to quality in the following areas: (i) offering programming to broad and diverse audiences, (ii) neutrality and plurality of content, (iii) balance of genres and issues, and (iv) attention to ethnic and cultural minorities. These four premises help form the basis of the concept of public service, but observing them does not guarantee quality television. If we want to have a mature discussion about quality in the competitive broadcasting market, we have to know how to distinguish it from the public-service discourse, because otherwise it would be tempting to assume that public service is, by its very nature, synonymous with quality or that because television can be a public service we do not have to judge the quality of TV productions. Both these perceptions fail to help improve the quality of our broadcasting space.

Quality as a reason for making a program. Some managers felt that quality could be defined by answering the question "Why are we making this program?" If the answer was only to get good ratings, the quality standards were low. We need to find other motivations for making a program or a programming strategy that justifies our work.

"Big Brother is a great idea as a TV show, but it doesn't respond to anything other than getting good ratings. So why make Big Brother? My criteria is that if there is no other motivation than making a financially profitable product, we could be endangering quality."

(Francesc Escribano, head of programming at TV3)

Asking ourselves what added value a program has, aside from where it fits into the industrial structure it is part of, is a good strategy, but it does not go far enough, because acting in response to non-financial targets will not necessarily generate quality programming.

A pact with the audience. This was the central point of the managers' discussions about quality. Their perception of quality was closely linked to two aspects (one formal and the other based on content) essential for the existence of quality programming:

a) The perception of quality increases when a station is able to create a particular identity. Programs are units we can analyze, but viewers have to receive a coherent and identifiable overall image of the programming, the quality of which is expressed through the ability to anchor the audience on a defined identity.

b) Quality can be guaranteed when there is scrupulous respect for the implicit, non-verbal pact that exists between the audience and the station executives who interpret it and use it as the basis for their actions. That is, managers 'know' what is expected of their programs and this intuitive knowledge is the basis on which decisions are made. Decisions are based not only on quantitative and qualitative audience figures, but also a conviction that when they decide whether to broadcast a program, they do so from the perspective of viewers who identify with the station and would not be attracted by programs that did not fit in with the identity determined for the project they are managing.

"Audiences know our editorial policy and what to expect from us, and Tele5 gives a generic commitment, which it does not explain in detail, but which is present in all our content."

(Alejandro Gómez Lavilla, head of programming at Tele5)

"The implicit pact between the audience and the station cannot be betrayed. If we make a mistake, we can break this pact. The quality we look for every day in the channel is reinforced every day by the respect for this pact."

(Paolo Vasile, director-general of Tele5)

This definition of quality could mistakenly have us believe that TV executives are convinced they know want their audiences want from their stations, and this perception could be confused with the scrupulous monitoring of quantitative audiences. They are different matters, but could be mixed up interpretively in the monitoring of audiences. That is also the case of the public TV managers:

"Quality is hard to define, but the best definition is providing the audience with the things they expect from us and not giving them unpleasant surprises."

(Miquel Puig, director-general of CRTVC and director of TVC)

The problem arises when audience preferences are expressed in quantitative terms, while the critical and qualitative discourse is negative or contradictory to these results. A manager's subjective interpretation of the intersection between audience acceptance of a product and respect for the implicit pact that determines a station's identity is based on intuition and his or her ability to identify with the television project they run. The essential difference in the way TV managers define *quality* compared to how it is defined in external intellectual circles is that the people who run the stations are convinced that commercial criteria are compatible with television quality because quality has to be defined through audience satisfaction, which is indirectly expressed through ratings, and the following of these quantitative goals through particular targets, which differ according to whether the station is public or private.

Analysis of variables in quality factors

The interviews with the managers included the assessment of ten basic concepts used in the definition of *quality television* drawn up by the Research Advisory Board [v], on which a quantiative assessment was later made to establish priorities in the practical application of the stations' programming policies.

Innovation and originality

The managers considered innovation a priority in terms of content, but not in terms of aesthetic or technical crtieria. Most felt that television messages had to be easy to decode and not be hard for viewers to grasp. They did not accept formal audiovisual experimentation to be a quality criterion because it could mistakenly be used to subject viewers to an excluding cultural pressure. The managers interviewed felt that *innovation* and *originality* were basically linked to renovating content and not experimentation.

Balance of functions and genres

The fact that they considered a balance between functions and genres as a factor in television quality was a legacy of a television service model replaced by a multichannel system. This criterion was not considered to be fundamental to television quality, but rather formed part of each station's specific project and its commitments within the legal framework in which it operates.

Attention to minorities

Public and private broadcasters differed on this point. Private station managers felt that attention to minorities could not be a quality criterion in general programming, while public stations defended programing that met minority tastes and targets for generating program quality. This difference was based on private stations' need to justify decision-making based on the interpretation of the tastes and needs of a majority that they could see reflected in audience share results.

Proximity and building collective reference points

All the managers interviewed believed that a key aspect in quality television was being able to reflect content of universal interest with proper and local treatment able to build a unique relationship between the station and its audience.

"Why do we exist? To put it simply, we exist so that our society, Catalan society, can improve; to provide it with information and more knowledge about itself, to build a critical environment and, especially, to uphold certain

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cultural codes and values that have to be expressed even when all we are offering is entertainment. This might sound naive, but every time we make a program, we have to ask the question, "Are we helping make a better society?"

(Miquel Puig, director-general of CRTVC
and director of TVC)

This approach is linked to ethical criteria. Television understood as a producer of culture involves an ideological commitment between station and audience and as such its ethics are fundamental to the production of quality television.[vi]

Similarly, all the managers agreed that an essential feature for creating quality programming was obtaining identification levels with the reality of their respective audiences and fostering their ability to create their own worlds of reference. This creation of collective reference points, when it works, generates a social impact essential for being able to forge bridges of identity between programming and viewers.

Ethics

Ethics is a basic point when discussing quality becuse criticisms of the media are not based on lack of innovation or balance of topics but the ploys TV stations use to attract audiences: abuse of the private sphere or personal space, emotional exploitation, sex and violence. Some managers felt that an ethical attitude to combat this tendency should be based on asking what the reason behind making a program was and the mechanisms involved. The managers admitted it was hard to transfer ethical values that the station defended to the producers and directors responsible for making the progams and ensuring that the station controls the final product. With regard to the relationship between stations and producers, they admitted there was often no open or straightforward dialogue that could allow feedback on control. This often explains why there are few producers, and stations contract the companies they already know and who know how to manage each station's identity and targets. The managers concluded that professional ethics was no guarantee of quality, but was an essential condition for achieving it, even though the line between ethics and the transgression needed to innovate content can often be hard to define.

Managing talent

The reality of the stations analyzed is that prime-time essentially depends on external productions from big entertainment companies (El Terrat, Gestmusic-Endemol, Globomedia, etc.) and that these producers receive commissions from the stations, without assuming production risks, usually because the law states that it is important to foster the external industrial market. However, private-TV managers, and to a lesser extent the public ones, preferred in-house production because it allows them more control over the product and they can prevent conflicts in editorial policy. Controlling content quality was felt to be difficult because external producers perceive control as censorship rather than a legitimate right of the party administering the airtime, i.e., the station, who is ultimately responsible for ensuring the content broadcast on TV.

Quality control

The TV station managers felt that quality control was an intuitive relationship between their own perception of what programming should involve and the results of qualitative and quantative monitoring of their audiences. They did not believe that the role of external organizations, such as the CAC, was either efficient or fluid because they often acted as controllers that promoted the negative aspects of the medium. This defensive attitude was based on a lack of tradition in this country of external regulatory bodies in the broadcast industry.

Conclusions

The basic conclusions from the interviews with the managers of public and private TV stations about the concept and application of quality focus on the following points:

I. **The stations studied indicated that TV broadcasters articulate discussions about quality defined through a pact with viewers.**

II. **TV broadcasters have an intituive idea about quality in television that does not betray or spontaneously prioritize attributes or elements the concept involves.**

Systemizing or speaking out in relation to particular quality attributes generated insecurity and broke away from the preconceived dicussion.

III. **Public broadcasters use the public-service concept as a shield against the competition to define quality.** During the interviews, the notion of public service was defined by being the opposite of the service offered by private channels. Oddly, private broadcasters never indicated they knew that, according to the Private Television Act (1988), running their stations is a public service that involves a number of obligations to be met through the messages they generate or transmit. However, public broadcasters implicitly felt that simply by offering a public service their content was automatically significant in terms of quality. Howerever, when it came to trying to define programming quality on a day-to-day basis, the discussion was never detailed.

IV. **The private sector identifies quality with business efficacy. The interviews with private sector broadcasters involved a clear idea: quality is associated with a company's internal targets and hence commercial commitments, and with external targets, i.e., the audience, with whom it establishes a 'pact' of identification and efficacy of the service which has to translate into a balance between audience and acceptance.** Private-TV station managers did not feel that quality should be assessed by any civil institution or organization except the market, the customer (advertiser) and the audience (receiver), nor did they believe that criteria established outside market parameters were either useful or significant. This is one of the hardest barriers to crack when trying to establish quality control on TV content, and the private market is strong enough to rule out justifying controlling only publicly owned television as a target if our aim is to defend the common good.

V. **Majority audience shares are an intrinsic goal of general TV stations and so quality is indirectly defined by reaching them.** This premise was explicitly stated in the private sector and was implicit in the public sector. This is the argument that distances any discussion on quality television from minority products, an element not considered within the industry. TV managers do not give more qualitative value to products considered minority with stronger formal and conceptual requirement criteria. It is interesting to note that broadcasters dismiss discussions on quality television from their professional practice, although they use the label for propoganda purposes in interviews, promotional slogans or to publicly justify their service.

VI. **Innovation does not have to be a qualitative priority for general TV stations because their services would not be needed if audiences did not take innovation on board.** This is an interesting concept: innovation as a quality criterion is not necessarily an attribute that has to be observed in general broacasting. The very fact that it is experimental programming means that innovation does not correspond to general TV's sphere of action, according to the managers interviewed in this study.

VII. **Relationships with independent audiovisual producers is a factor that fails to guarantee station quality.** The relationship with external producers is complex and does not always reflect a station's targets. An analysis of the interviews shows that independent production is never a criterion that defines quality. This is probably an excuse for the scant or total lack of dynamics of independent production between stations and cultural creators. Quality has to be studied in relation to production, whether generated within or outside a station structure, because independent production does not always guarantee quality or meet the targets of the broadcaster that provides them with the signal to transmit their works. An anlaysis of the interviews found there was a commitment, whether legal or not, with the external audiovisual sector, but that it generated reticency and disfunctionality, both in the case of independent and associate production. This is one of the reasons why broadcasters admitted to a fall in content control in maximum viewing times, which is pre-cisely when external producers want their work to be shown.

VIII. **Quality is also defined by ethical criteria.** The ethics of TV production formed part of the discourse of all the broadcasters. Public broadcasters felt that ethics defined product quality whenever a product was not made purely in the pursuit of commercial success. Private

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broadcasters felt that ethics corresponded to not aggressively impacting viewers' rights and respect for plurality and diversity. They felt viewers imposed the limits. There was a transferral of responsibility with regard to ethics from the broadcaster to the viewer. In any case, the broadcasters appeared to want further reflection on this matter and we felt that if they took measures similar to those established by the CAC in relation to the question of the treatment of tragedies, there would be a greater level of awareness on the part of professionals. Similar action would be desirable in relation to the contents of entertainment and large-format programs that occupy a big part of programming schedules, following research work already carried out by British teams into informed consent.

IX. **Television managers discredit discussions on TV quality generated outside the professional sphere.** The managers felt that control by organizations who don't work in the industry was legitimate but did not always help the medium improve because it was often performed by people who did not understand television's daily practices or production processes. They strongly criticized a *priori* or demonizing discussions about television in external forums that fail to assess the contributions it makes and maintain elitist discussions in which TV is held responsible for the problems in society.

These are some thoughts that came from an analysis of the managers' discussions which, contrasted with the reality of their programming in maximum viewing times, could enable them to define a number of strategies that could help improve the control of television quality in public and private stations.

Strategies to improve and control quality in television

A) **To improve the quality of the television message, we should establish the attributes considered as priorities for providing a public broadcasting service that guarantees quality standards.**

This is a useful strategy for public-service broadcasting, but not enough for checking how television messages are produced. The existence of quality standards would be a valid starting point for stations that would have to include the way in which the attributes described in the report on which this article is based are developed. It would be important to guarantee:

1. Quality in the construction of messages of proximity and impact on civil society

2. Quality in the construction of collective references

3. Quality in the relationship with and respect for viewers and regulations, which would involve respect for all groups

4. Quality through the incorporation of new and original approaches towards content and new formats in the audiovisual language, both in terms of technical measures and content

5. Quality expressed through plurality and diversity of content, different types of publics and viewer proposals in television models aimed at including a universal public.

These attributes cannot be established or covered through quotas on products, nor through ongoing reception studies. They can only be checked by the professionalism of the people who execute projects and do not depend on the source of the messages but rather who is in charge of them, who monitors them, who programs them and who entrusts the stations with this public service, regardless of who the station is owned by.

As such,

B) **Quality control involves efficiently identifying the person and qualities of the person in a position to impact the way in which television messages are produced, i.e., the way in which messages able to check these attributes and their harmonious balance within programming are articulated.** Together with his or her team, this person should be able to execute the application of the criteria discussed. This person should be the head of programming for the following reasons:

1. The head of programming is the person who has or could have an overall view.

2. The head of programming controls the balance of contents within the programming schedule.

3. The head of programming is able to rectify and review specific content.

4. The head of programming has direct links with directors, producers, program-makers and scriptwriters, i.e., the people that execute the quality described in this report through the use of the attributes mentioned.

5. The head of programming can access new formats and new formulas and design projects.

6. The head of programming provides access to the use of the station brand and can determine its character.

7. The head of programming has the trust of the station's managers and therefore the owners or board of directors of the institution or corporation.

C) **The above factors mean that a good strategy for controlling television quality would be to (i) have a say in the selection of heads of programming to guarantee that they met professional profiles that correctly reflect the harmony and balance that they themselves have defined as a key feature of quality programming, and (ii) establish a fluid relationship with the heads of programming at the various stations, as they are the people responsible for daily communication flow with the people directly involved, i.e., the professionals that put television messages on the air.** If the professionals who carry out this work meet the qualities we have described earlier, the qualities will be transferred according to the possibilities of each station to the programming schedule through station management.

D) **In both the public and private sectors, this strategy would include making pacts with the stations to provide them [in the stations?] with an in-house professional responsible to the head of programming who would work to influence decision-making at the station**, in contact with external control organizations (the Catalonia Broadcasting Council) and other institutions and organizations that could be qualified to play a role, such as the Information Council of Catalonia or viewers' associations.

If we applied market criteria to television production, as in fact is happening in both the public and private sectors, we believe that stations should have quality-control units made up of people belonging to station management who come from the station's structure (and hence know its technical and human resources) who could act as a bridge between the heads of programming and daily production reality, i.e., the reality that ends up being defined by programming.

E) **It is important to insist on the need to refocus the institutional discussion about television quality to eradicate the burden of negativity that has grown up between the media and the public, who have the idea that everything that appears on their screens is bad, between professionals and the institutions or organizations that also articulate discussions about quality in television.** The institutions should find practical solutions and actions, without adding criticism through other media that fail to contribute anything useful to discussions on television quality.

F) **Finally, it is important to mention the generally positive attitude the public and private broadcasters had (except for the heads of RTVE in Madrid) towards exploring the concept of *quality* in television and adopting a constructive attitude towards developing valid strategies that could facilitate this work.** The broadcasters did not have a passive attitude towards the objective of pursuing better quality products. They live in a work context in which the characteristics that determine the decisions they make do not take any elements into account other than those provided by audience polls, their intuition or the proposals they receive from well-known producers. That is why, in accordance with the broadcasters and in keeping with the day-to-day working of TV channels, quality-control measures that could be practical would be well received by the heads of public and private stations alike. We believe that we could perhaps therefore contribute to improving the relationship between television and civil society and recover television's naturally groundbreaking and stimulating nature.

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Notes

i   The length of this article meant I was unable to express the analysis and contrasts the ethnographic research uncovered in contrast with the qualitative analysis of prime-time programming of one week's research, which completed the report entitled "Television Broadcasts and Quality", presented to the CAC in July 2001 and was developed by the author of this article with the collaboration of Carmina Puig and Lorena Gómez. This report was part of a number of contributions that included group discussion sessions with other researchers (J. Balló, J.M.Baget, X. Cubeles, M. Martí, E. Pujadas, S. Schaaff). A copy of the study "Quality and Television", which formed the basis for this project, is on file at the CAC.

ii   Except for the heads of TVE1 and TVE2 in Madrid, who were unable to find two free hours to devote to this research work, despite having a year to change their diaries in order to offer their contributions on quality and television. However, the director and head of programming at TVE Catalunya conveyed RTVE's criteria to this project, along with their own contributions.

iii   Proof of which is the fact that, of the people interviewed for this research work, four no longer hold the positions they held then. The public television executives that stepped down, either because of a lack of political consensus or following managerial restructuring, were Miquel Puig, Francesc Fàbregas, Francesc Xavier Grima and Manel Arranz.

iv   We believe that previous training of executives is a basic requirement in this area: in the public media, directors and heads of programming are former journalists who trained at the station or came from other public stations, while in the case of the private stations, the professionals come from private broadcasters and moved from one station to another according to the business structure.

v   The Research Advisory Board consisted of professors Jordi Balló, Josep M. Baget, Xavier Cubeles, Montserrat Martí, Eva Pujadas, Sergi Schaaff and the author of this article.

vi   For detailed information on this issue, see Pujadas (2001).

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