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A CASE STUDY OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE

AT MEDIA GENERAL'S TAMPA NEWS CENTER

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ABSTRACT

In March 2000, Media General made created industry attention by creating the Tampa News Center and moving the operations of *The Tampa Tribune*, WFLA-TV, and the Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) service under the same roof. Viewed as a possible model for future newsrooms, this media convergence experiment has generated considerable interest in the trade press, but, despite its importance for academic studies, it has received little scholarly treatment. We conducted a series of in-depth interviews with a total of 12 news directors, editors, producers, reporters, and technical personnel from the News Center to understand the meaning of media convergence, changes in the newsroom culture, and implications for journalism education. Respondents viewed media convergence and its impact in the newsroom primarily as a newsgathering tool that has led to combined as well as additional resources. Jobs and roles have changed due to the additional resources, common facilities, and new responsibilities. Respondents also felt that they do more multimedia thinking about storytelling because they have been required to learn more about the other platforms. In terms of journalism and mass communication education, respondents stressed the importance of strong fundamentals such as writing, reporting, and communication skills, but they also emphasized the need for adaptability across platforms.

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On June 2, 2003, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (2003) relaxed its media ownership rules to permit, among other things, common ownership of a broadcast station and a daily newspaper in markets with at least four television stations. The FCC concluded that "the record does not contain data or other information demonstrating that common ownership of broadcast stations and daily newspapers in the same community poses a widespread threat to diversity of viewpoint or programming" (p. 149). If affirmed by the courts, this change would mean that a newspaper owner could acquire a television or radio station in about 180 of the 210 television markets (Fitzgerald & Moses, 2003). To those watching the Commission proceedings on C-SPAN, this was a sure sign that media convergence as a complex process blending technologies and industries would continue its inexorable march in the marketplace. Numerous lobbying organizations, columnists, and policymakers, both from the left and the right, have opposed these revisions with rare unity and have argued that the new rules are not in the public interest and will stifle diversity of reporting and viewpoints (e.g., Bednarski, 2003; Labaton, 2003; Safire, 2003; Trigoboff, 2003). Industrialist and CNN founder Ted Turner (2003) expressed his concerns about the further consolidation and news sharing in a *Washington Post* editorial: "Even more troubling are the warning signs that large media corporations—with massive market power—could abuse that power by slanting news coverage in ways that serve their political and financial interests" (p. A23). In contrast, proponents, primarily broadcasters, have contended that the new ownership rules are

necessary to create news and advertising synergies and keep them competitive against rivals in the cable television and direct broadcast satellite industries (see Kirkpatrick, 2003).

Despite ample criticisms leveled at the perceived threat of cross-ownership, few studies have investigated empirically the effects of media convergence on news coverage or newsroom culture. Those that did found no adverse impact or consequences (Pritchard, 2001, 2002; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2003; Spavins, Denison, Roberts, & Frenette, 2002; Zavoina & Reichert, 2000). For instance, Pritchard (2002) revealed that common ownership of a daily newspaper and a television station in 10 markets did not result in a predictable pattern of slanting during the news coverage of the 2000 presidential election. Zavoina and Reichert (2000) reported that photo editors working for the hard copy version of a daily newspaper handled photographic content differently from their web director counterparts working for the online version of the same newspaper. The authors concluded that "[t]here is no correlation between management style and workflow between hard copy and their online counterparts. What works for one isn't necessarily being used for the other" (p. 150).

Obviously, this result is puzzling and appears to contradict the popular assumption that convergence will bring about resource-sharing benefits. To further illuminate the implications of media convergence for the journalistic and academic profession, this case study will describe how media convergence is implemented and managed at the News Center in Tampa, Florida. As explained by leading case study researcher Robert Yin (2003b), a descriptive case study seeks to present "a complete description of a phenomenon within its context" (p. 5). To achieve this goal, we will first

review the historical, organizational, and philosophical aspects of the Tampa News Center. We will then supplement this literature review with a series of in-depth interviews with news directors, editors, producers, reporters, and technical personnel from the News Center. The study will examine three research questions:

(1) How do employees at the News Center define media convergence?

(2) What changes, if any, have they experienced on their jobs and in the newsroom since the creation of the News Center?

(3) What skills do news staff people need to function optimally in the convergence environment of the News Center?

We chose to study the Tampa News Center site for several reasons. Although it is one of 21 grandfathered newspaper-television combinations (FCC, 2003), the News Center has upped the convergence ante by moving its three news units under the same roof in March 2000. *The Tampa Tribune*, the NBC-affiliated WFLA-TV, and the Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) service began operation in a brandnew $40 million, 120,000 square foot building (Strupp, 2000). Often viewed as a model for future newsrooms (Steinberg & Sorkin, 2003; Thelen, 2002), the News Center and its developments have stimulated great interest among professionals during the past three years. After the dust has settled as one observer put it (Garrison, 2000), it is now valuable to evaluate the pros and cons of such operation. Furthermore, the News Center's owner, Media General, has publicly announced that it intends to replicate the News Center's convergence strategies with other current and future properties. A week before the FCC lifted the ban on newspaper-television cross-ownership, J. Stewart Bryan III, Media General's chairman and CEO, spelled out the company's stalwart plans: "Any of the places where we have a

newspaper, we'd like to have a TV station.... Any of the places we have a TV station, we'd like to have a newspaper" (Steinberg & Sorkin, 2003, p. C6). For all these reasons, the Tampa News Center was an ideal setting to investigate the meaning of media convergence, changes in newsroom practices and culture, and the need for curricular modifications.

A MODEL OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE

Although often mistakenly perceived as a pure inductive and exploratory process, case study research relies on theory to define preliminary concepts and select the unit of analysis (Yin, 2003b). In proposing a model of media convergence (see Figure 1), we attempt to define and integrate convergence concepts and issues that have often been discussed separately in the past. From a systems theory perspective, media convergence represents more than a common technical platform, a business strategy, or a regulatory action (see Dennis, 2003).

Technical Convergence

Although it has become the common buzzword of the communications industry in the last decade, media convergence is not a new construct. Twenty years ago, the late MIT political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983) coined the term "convergence of modes" and offered the first and primary conceptualization of media convergence as a process "blurring the lines between media" (p. 24). In his view, the traditional separations between the media industries, such as the press, broadcasting, and telephone networks, were slowly collapsing due to the growing use and influence of digital electronics (see

also Mueller, 1999). In recent years, some definitions of convergence— technological convergence—have placed a greater emphasis on the technology itself. For instance, Pavlik (1996) defines convergence as the "coming together of all forms of mediated communications in an electronic, digital form, driven by computers" (p. 132). Vallath (2000) points out that "Technological convergence is leading to a fully digital network, capable of carrying any type of information, be it text, data, voice or video" (p. 33; see also Blackman, 1998). Technological convergence is not without its critics, though. For instance, Noll (2003) argued that just because television sets increasingly incorporate digital components does not mean that television and computers are merging into a single home appliance. "Just because media are digital does not mean that media have converged" (p. 13). While some convergence applications, such as streaming media and Internet telephony, have aroused considerable consumer interest, others, such as WebTV, have been less successful.

As indicated in Figure 1, technological convergence can lead to economic or regulatory convergence. In such cases, it becomes a necessary condition for economic and regulatory convergence and assumes the role of an exogenous (predetermined) construct. For instance, before offering video service to its customers, a telephone company would first need to deploy a broadband infrastructure for video programming transmission (see Baldwin, McVoy, & Steinfield, 1996). In other cases, economic and regulatory convergence can operate as exogenous constructs, while technological convergence would then turn into an endogenous (determined) construct. For instance, an inter-industry merger or the relaxation of a cross-ownership rule could result into bundled cross-media offerings, which may require a substantial infrastructural upgrade. The

model also shows that regulatory convergence can determine economic convergence. For instance, if the ban on newspaper-television combinations is ultimately lifted, companies could acquire cross-media properties and develop convergence assets and services (Steinberg & Sorkin, 2003).

Economic Convergence

As the European Commission's *Green Paper* (1997) clearly stated, convergence goes beyond technology. "It is about services and new ways of doing business of interacting with society" (p. ii). Economic convergence, also known as market or industrial convergence, can take place at the customer or institutional level. Customer-oriented economic convergence may or may not involve significant vertical integration activity because it targets products and services, not acquisitions. For instance, some cable operators can offer cable and broadcast programming, video on demand, voice telephony, and Internet access in a bundled fashion on the same platform. Pool (1983) predicted that cable operators would "no longer just distribute broadcast programs, but also transmit data among business offices and sell alarm services, movies, news, and educational courses" (p. 27; see also Baldwin et al., 1996).

At the institutional level, economic convergence has produced mixed, if not disappointing, results. John Haile, a former *Orlando Sentinel* editor and a consultant, calls this form of convergence "complete convergence" and defines it as "a single business operating with multiple platforms: common management, ads sold across multiple media, and a shared news operation" (Aaron, Robinson, & Smothers, 2002, p. 18). This definition is strangely similar to the mission of the Tampa News Center that

will be addressed in the next section. But even convergence advocates, such as Robert Decherd, chairman and chief executive of Belo, a leading media group that owns a newspaper-television combination in Dallas, questioned the economic expectations of this type of integration. "There is a belief on the part of some people in the financial community that there are tremendous efficiencies and revenue opportunities associated with any cross-ownership.... That is just not correct" (Steinberg & Sorkin, 2003, p. C6).

Thus far, institutional economic convergence, which is supposed to produce cross-media mergers, has not fared well in the marketplace, often because of philosophical and management differences. The failures of the AOL Time Warner and AT&T Broadband mergers are two frequently mentioned examples. Mueller (1999) contends that most of the mergers and acquisitions after the Telecommunications Act of 1996 have fallen within the horizontal integration category—which involves the acquisition of units that operate at the same level of production (see also Dennis, 2003). Chan-Olmsted (1998) reported that despite a 200% increase in the number of transactions in the radio, television, cable, and telephone business between 1991 and 1996, the primary merger and acquisition strategy remained intra-industry. She concluded that "firms in these four industries seem to achieve growth through internal strategic alliances rather than true convergence with firms from different industries" (p. 44).

Regulatory Convergence

First, we should make a useful and important distinction between full and partial regulatory convergence. Full regulatory convergence "refers to the confluence of previously separate industry-based laws and regulations into a single legal and regulatory

framework" (Garcia-Murillo & MacInnes, 2003, p. 58). On the other hand, partial

regulatory convergence entails limited regulatory action that allows media organizations

to engage into economic or technological convergence (Figure 1). For instance, the

Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the FCC's recently revised ownership rules have

the potential to offer cross-medium services to consumers and create inter-industry

alliances among media companies (Labaton, 2003; Steinberg & Sorkin, 2003).

Pool (1983) was primarily concerned with the question of full regulatory

convergence and its First Amendment implications: Which of the three main regulatory

models— print, broadcast, and common carrier— would govern these media once they

have converged (see also Blackman, 1998)? Contrary to Pool's expectations, full

regulatory convergence has never materialized. None of the regulatory models has

prevailed over others in the public policy sphere. Instead, these industries continue to be

regulated differently without a unifying structure even when they offer similar services

(see McGregor, 1994). We should also note that the FCC has been confronted with

regulatory convergence issues ever since it issued the *Computer I Notice of Inquiry* in

1966 to determine how to handle unregulated data processing services offered by

regulated communications companies (see Cannon, 2003).

Convergence Effects

All three types of convergence can yield direct convergence effects at the

individual, institutional, or educational level (see Figure 1). At the individual level,

researchers have examined whether the Internet has displaced traditional media use and

has established itself as the prevalent medium at home (e.g., Bromley & Bowles, 1995;

Kayany & Yelsma, 2000) and whether gratifications derived from the Internet are similar to those of older media (e.g., Ferguson & Perse, 2000).

At the institutional level, a few studies have assessed the impact of newspaper-television cross-ownership on local news coverage bias, quality, and output. The results were rather surprising. Pritchard (2002) analyzed whether 10 cross-owned newspaper-television combinations displayed a consistent slant in their news coverage in favor of a particular presidential candidate during the 2000 elections. In five combinations, including Tampa, the overall slant of newspaper coverage was significantly different from that of television coverage. While most of the coverage of Media General's WFLA-TV was coded neutral, the coverage of *The Tampa Tribune* was deemed pro-Bush. Another FCC report found that affiliated television stations that own daily newspapers aired more local news and public affairs programs and received more awards than those without such newspaper ownership (Spavins et al., 2002; see also Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2003). With the exception of Zavoina and Reichert (2000), which was described above, little research has examined how convergent news operations, such as those at the News Center in Tampa, have affected newsroom practices and culture. Killebrew (2003) contends that "Reporters, editors and the supervisors charged with making convergence or "*new media*" journalism a reality are finding a great deal of dissonance in the workplace today" (p. 43). Although he does not present specific empirical evidence, he hypothesizes that convergence will disrupt news operations due to differences in cultures and decisionmaking procedures.

At the educational level, a growing number of journalism schools have modified their curricula to adapt to trends in media convergence (see South & Nicholson, 2002).

These schools believe that students must be able to present news across different platforms— newspaper, television, and the web. But again, if a convergence curriculum is to be successful, it is important to determine what new practices, if any, are being implemented in convergence newsrooms.

THE TAMPA NEWS CENTER

History

The Media General web site contains an extensive company history (http://www.mediageneral.com/history/index.htm). Below is a brief historical overview based primarily on that source. In 1966, Richmond Newspapers, Inc. (RNI) acquired a majority control of The Tribune Company's properties including *The Tampa Tribune*, *The Tampa Times*, and WFLA-TV. In 1969, Media General, Inc. was born with RNI as its subsidiary and fully owned The Tribune Company the year after. In 1975, the Tampa newspapers migrated to a new $25 million downtown facility. The same year, the FCC (1975) banned common ownership of a broadcast station and a daily newspaper in the same market, but grandfathered Media General's newspaper-television combination. In 1982, the operations of *The Tampa Times* were consolidated into those of *The Tampa Tribune*. In 1994, *The Tampa Tribune* launched Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) as its newspaper's web site. At that time, *The Tribune*/TBO.com and WFLA-TV were located in separate downtown buildings. In March 2000, Media General inaugurated the 120,000 square foot and $40 million News Center to house its three Tampa news properties under the same roof (Strupp, 2000). In February 2002, about three-fourths of the *Tribune* and WFLA photographers were equipped with both still and video cameras (Stevens, 2002).

As of June 2003, Media General owned 26 television stations in 12 states covering 9% of

TV homes, 25 daily newspapers in seven states, 100 weeklies and other periodicals, and

50 online interests related to its publications and TV stations

(http://www.mediageneral.com/map/index.htm; "The Top 25 TV Station Groups," 2003).

Organization

The four-story News Center was designed to foster interaction and coordination

between the staff members of TBO.com, WFLA-TV, and *The Tampa Tribune* (Garrison,

2000). The first floor (and, by extension, part of the second floor) houses two large

WFLA production studios. The second floor provides space to both the WFLA and

TBO.com newsrooms. The third floor is home to the *Tribune* newsroom and TBO.com

executive offices. The fourth floor houses the WFLA executive offices. A central piece of

the building is an atrium, which rises through the second and third floors. Lying in the

middle of the atrium on the second floor is the so-called "superdesk"—a circular

multimedia assignment desk where editors of the three news organizations work side-by-

side (Downie & Kaiser, 2002; Gabettas, 2000; Garrison, 2000). The atrium is often an

area bubbling with activity where employees interact and even pass on videotapes. Doug

Anderson, WFLA's former assignment manager, notes that "There's a lot of yelling to

each other, but it makes for easier communication" (Strupp, 2000, p. 20). Two other

buildings housing the business operations and the presses are connected to the News

Center.

Philosophy

The media convergence theme will be analyzed in detail through the interviews, but as part of this case study research it is useful to review the accounts published in the trade press about the News Center (e.g., Colón, 2000; Downie & Kaiser, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2001; Gabettas, 2000; Sanders, 2003; Strupp, 2000). Methodologically, documents play a vital role in the data collection of a case study and offer a means to verify other evidence sources. In the words of Bryan, Media General believes "that the best way to ensure the production and delivery of strong local news is to allow companies like ours to practice good journalism across various media platforms" (*Media General 2002 Annual Report*, 2003b, p. 3; see also Colón, 2000). For this corporation, "Convergence brings together the depth of newspaper coverage, the immediacy of television and the interactivity of the Web" (*Media General 2002 Annual Report*, 2003b, p. 4; see also Gabettas, 2000). For instance, WFLA can rely on the *Tribune*'s archives and in-depth knowledge of beat reporters, while TBO.com can borrow content from both the newspaper and the television station. Thus the primary mission of the News Center is to cultivate cooperation and resource sharing in its news gathering operations (Thelen, 2002), thereby creating a form of "editorial gestalt" in which the convergence newsroom is greater than the sum of its individual parts. In 2000, the News Center reported 660 cross-medium "acts of convergence," which led the *Tribune*'s former assistant managing editor, Patti Breckenridge, to conclude that "[c]onvergence has become a day-in, day-out part of our culture" (Fitzgerald, 2001, p. 30). But she also pointed out that of all convergence issues, "no challenge has been greater than the technological challenge" (p.

30), referring to initial computer compatibility problems across units and resistance to the new uniform news content budget database BudgetBank.

While the News Center management team rarely mentions, or even downplays, the financial benefits that could result from this convergence experiment (see Beard, 2003), the potential economic windfall is not lost on Media General's leadership. In May 2003, Bryan commented that "When quality improves, circulation and audience share increase, all of which create revenue growth" (Fitzgerald & Moses, 2003, p. 11). The *Media General 2002 Annual Report* (2003) painted a relatively rosy picture of the News Center's financial results in 2002: The daily circulation of *The Tampa Tribune* increased by 5.8% from December 2001 to December 2002 and NBC-affiliated WFLA solidified its No. 1 position in the Tampa TV market (13th DMA) with an audience share of 12% in November 2002. In a press release, Media General (2003a) also reported that the number of TBO.com page views rose by 11% from 2001 to 2002. But it is not entirely clear whether the convergence itself is responsible for these positive results and whether it has led to significant revenue growth. According to Media General, the Tampa integration only produced an additional $6.4 million in revenue in 2001, and cross-medium sales rose by a mere 2% the same year (Beard, 2003). Gil Thelen, acting publisher and senior vice president of *The Tampa Tribune*, admits that "commission-sensitive sales teams have had trouble finding ways to co-operate" (Beard, 2003, p. 28). Still, he feels that "the editorial benefits of convergence will translate into greater financial ones over time" (p. 28).

Not surprisingly, the three-year Tampa venture has its internal and external critics who have expressed concerns that the convergence newsroom would damage the editorial

independence of news operations, reduce the amount of original content, and augment employee workloads without proper compensation. Despite common ownership of the three news outlets, the News Center has repeatedly pledged to retain its journalistic independence (see Gabettas, 2000; Thelen, 2002). In practice, however, it is not always immune from subtle or not-so-subtle editorial interference. For instance, *Tribune* television reporter Walt Belcher acknowledged being asked not to cover several WFLA-related stories (see Strupp, 2000). Critics also fear that the unification of the three news operations will limit the amount and type of local news coverage (Gabettas, 2000; Strupp, 2000). *The Washington Post* Executive Editor Leonard Downie Jr. and Associate Editor Robert G. Kaiser (2002) argue that much of the News Center's news sharing is cross-promotional in nature and consists of repurposed stories with little original content. Rival *St. Petersburg Times'* managing editor Neil Brown contends that a convergence newsroom could dilute content and adversely affect how the news is being covered. Thelen has acknowledged that "the Tampa News Center still housed three different and often conflicting news cultures" (Downie & Kaiser, 2002, p. 55). He wryly added: "Convergence is a contact sport that is shaped one staff collision at a time" (Gabettas, 2000, p. 28). Along with issues of journalistic integrity and quality, there has been concern about fair compensation and working conditions (Sanders, 2003; Strupp, 2000). Economies of scale in a convergence newsroom could easily invite management to demand more from fewer employees. These fears have thus far not materialized. In fact, total employment has remained about the same between March 2000 and July 2003. In July 2003, there were 15 journalists at TBO.com, 100 at WFLA, and 300 at the *Tribune* (B. Coffey, personal communication, July 24, 2003).

METHOD

A case study is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2003a, p. 13). It is best used to understand complex social and organizational issues. Case study evidence to answer research questions and contribute to theory development originates from a variety of sources, such as documentation, archival records, interviews (qualitative or quantitative), and direct observation (Yin, 2003a). In this study, we focused on a single organization as the unit of analysis and used a combination of documents and in-depth interviews to address our three research questions. In-depth or long interviews have been called "one of the most powerful methods" in qualitative research because they allow investigators to "step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). They will enable us to better understand the meaning of media convergence, the changes in the newsroom culture, and the implications for the journalism curriculum.

Data Collection

Prior to conducting the in-depth interviews, we completed a pilot study to help us identify potential respondents, construct the unstructured questionnaire, and determine the interview schedule (see Yin, 2003a). This preliminary field visit took place on June 6, 2003. It included observation of facilities and several staff meetings of the different News Center units. The authors also participated in a lengthy overview panel discussion held with six news, circulation, and advertising staff members involved in convergence. The

panel discussion was audiotaped for later review in preparation of the in-depth interviews.

Following the pilot study, we first developed a short unstructured questionnaire containing open-ended items for the in-depth interviews (see Appendix 1). We then selected one dozen individuals and contacted them in advance by telephone to arrange interview appointments. Appendix 2 provides general a description of the respondents and their News Center functions.

We conducted the in-depth interviews on June 19 and 20, 2003. All interviews but one took place on site in the WFLA and *Tampa Tribune* newsrooms, the News Research Center, or News Center conference rooms. Because one respondent, a news manager, was on vacation at that time, that interview was conducted over the phone on July 2, 2003. Each interview averaged 45 minutes and was audiotaped with the expressed permission of the respondent.

Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by two supervised and experienced typists using a professional transcription recorder (see McCracken, 1988). Transcriptions were manually reviewed by the authors using procedures recommended by McCracken (1988) and Yin (2003a). McCracken suggests five stages to analyze long interview content, each representing a higher level of generality to identify news convergence themes and theses. These stages include observation of a useful utterance, development of expanded observation, examination of interconnection of observed comments, collective scrutiny of observations for patterns and themes, and review and

analysis of the themes across all interviews for development of theses (McCracken, 1988).

FINDINGS

The interview transcripts were reviewed for themes and other patterns of emphasis that answered the three research questions of the study.

(1) How do employees at the News Center define media convergence?

News Center journalists viewed media convergence in the terms of their experience over the past three years. The single recurring theme was *resources*. Regardless of whether the journalist was part of the newspaper, television station, or online staffs, the dominant perception focused on the availability of additional resources in terms of people, equipment, and ideas and sharing them across the different units.

For instance, the multimedia desk manager talked at length about the additional resources created through convergence: "*Over time, one of the things that I've seen that the best use for convergence for us ... has been the sharing of resources. We still have reporters writing stories for print, going on air for broadcast, writing and doing things in print and broadcast through the Web. But ... the best way for us to converge is through resource-sharing. Making sure reporters talk to each other, how do they feel, making sure that they create these bonds that have us, as a News Center, to get the information out to our users, viewers, or readers.*"

The assignments manager for WFLA-TV, responsible for making certain reporters, photographers, and other television news resources are used efficiently on a

given day, gave an example of shared resources: *"If we run out of photographers to respond to a story, they (*The Tribune*) may have a photographer at a story that we wouldn't have covered otherwise. Now we're at a position where* The Tampa Tribune *photographers are also shooting video for us, so a lot of times we're able to shoot video of assignments that we're not able to get just because we're out of people. The same goes for them.*

Shared human resources are often mentioned by respondents when defining convergence. There are more people to use in covering a story and more stories to cover with more people with less duplication. A *Tribune* photo editor explained: *"We've got more eyes— visual eyes— that can feed us. And they have more visual eyes that can feed them. It's really been a huge thing. We also enhance our collaborative effort as far as how we do things here. And I think, too, it adds the urgency on this floor."*

Discussion of resources by respondents went well beyond people. The shared new building housing the News Center was mentioned often. There is less duplication of facilities with the new model. A *Tribune* business section reporter who specializes in real estate coverage spoke about the shared building and facilities: *"I think that of the few things that say convergence, number one is the building, how it's set up. The facility says a lot about convergence. It's still a treat to bring people into this building for the first time and point out, 'This is the only place in the country where you're going to see a TV station and a print newsroom in the same building.'*

Respondents also mentioned the shared daily news story budgets. With database developed internally—Budget Bank—editors and other gatekeepers at all three platforms know what is going to happen and what will be covered. This information is taken to staff

meetings and discussed to maximize use of reporters, photographers, and others involved in coverage. Shared reporters and photographers have increased the breadth and, perhaps, depth of coverage of the three news organizations. Journalists discussed a perceived growth in sharing story ideas and story tips, a process facilitated by Budget Bank.

One news manager, the WFLA-TV news director, said tracking of convergence "acts" by the News Center was also revealing, noting hundreds of acts of convergence each month, many involving shared resources: *"We chart something like 300 different acts of convergence per month. Most of them we had some level of cooperation that probably wasn't even visible to the home viewer. Sometimes the levels of cooperation are much more explicit like in the Super Bowl; we worked with each other hand in hand. The TV reporters were frequently assisted by newspaper reporters in getting the coverage on the air. In the anniversary of the 911 attacks in September, we aired a series of nearly two dozen stories in concert.*

The News Library, or research center, has become an icon of resource sharing. Previously used and funded exclusively by the *Tribune*, the research center now serves journalists working for all platforms. Respondents also often mentioned increased availability of new equipment such as desktop and portable computers, software, telephones and telephone system, and cameras. The News Center also shares a single cell phone service arrangement. Journalists at the News Center often cited a perceived increase in choices and options in covering news in the Tampa Bay area.

Convergence was rarely discussed in terms of distribution of content involving a single delivery platform or cross-promotional activity. When it was, comments were limited to shared or loaned journalists who prepared content for another platform. For

example, newspaper reporters often make themselves available for television news "talkbacks" where they comment on the news they have covered and are often interviewed by television reporters. Some newspaper journalists function even more like television reporters and prepare reports on the air.

Yet, at least one respondent, the TBO weather and sports team coordinator, offered a glimpse into what convergence could mean for distribution of content at the News Center: *[W]e're treating our market as one market. We're trying to deliver news to a market as opposed to* The Tribune *serving its readers, TBO serving its users. I think we're starting to understand that we as a News Center can deliver news to the Tampa Bay market in the best means possible, using all three mediums to best do that."*

Other themes in defining convergence included enhanced communication within the newsroom, a changing understanding of news competition and the market the News Center served, the process of covering and reporting stories, especially breaking news, and an evolution of the process of story telling that has been impacted by convergence. These thoughts, however, were secondary in almost all cases.

(2) What changes have they experienced on their jobs and in the newsroom since the creation of the News Center?

Respondents often echoed themes uncovered in discussing their definitions of convergence when they were asked about how convergence has impacted on their work. The jobs and responsibilities have changed because convergence has brought additional new resources and duties. At the core, in many ways, however, their tasks are much the same as they have always been.

The multimedia desk manager sees the change involving jobs and roles as a gradual process. "*What we have determined over time is that convergence sort of changed for us. Initially, the convergence was going to be making sure that we complemented all coverage with another platform. You'll see a lot of broadcast reporters writing stories for print, a lot of print reporters going on air. In fact, TBO and Web producers are doing both, going on air and writing stories for the newspaper.*"

The *Tribune* business reporter agreed: *"I think there was a period where this was all new. It was all very exciting and it was a big topic of conversation. There were some reporters who had been here for a while that were saying, 'They're not getting me to go on TV.' And there was always that idea in the back of your head that, any moment, there could be a breaking story and you could end up live on Channel 8, which was scary, a little intimidating, but a little exciting, at the same time for a reporter. But now that we're all here and we're in the same building, everyone kind of knows what's expected of them."*

Respondents, in some cases, noted that their positions are now more demanding because there is more to do. Television reporters, for example, are given the opportunity to write for the newspaper. In a small number of cases so far, this has occurred. Print and broadcast photographers are asked to shoot images for both platforms. These demanding situations have left some individuals without sufficient time to do everything, respondents noted, and at least one journalist wondered aloud if managers realized the amount of time and effort required writing across platforms. The manager of the news research center was well aware of the additional work load in her department: "*A lot more work … I would say in terms of me personally as a manager, it's juggling the balls.*

It's been a real culture shock for the library staff ... When I first got here, there were

people who only took care of the photo archives, people who only took care of the text

archives, and those people never did research. We have a really talented group of people

in here that just weren't being utilized. So there were changes that I made, in terms of if

you are going to enhance text for the digital archive, why not do the photos at the same

time, the same person, that way you know how to work the photo database ... We're not

going to get a lot more people, so let's diversify the job duties here and it's working so

much better now."

Jobs have changed, of course, for those who work across the three platforms. Some newspaper writers and reporters, particularly specialists such as beat reporters, have begun to appear on television newscasts. For individuals such as those in the news research center, there is a greater diversity of work required as well as a larger volume of requests to fulfill since the researchers now serve three platforms instead of just the newspaper.

One interesting observation by several respondents centered upon increased collegiality and the willingness to work across platforms in covering both major news stories and routine news on a daily basis. While it might be expected by everyone in the News Center for major stories such as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' Super Bowl championship in early 2003, jobs and responsibilities have also been affected by cross-platform approaches to daily news. There is now a daily routine, many respondents observed, to meeting with, seeing, talking to, and interacting in other ways with journalists from platforms other than the one within which an individual works. More than one individual attributed this new sense of community to the new facility, its design,

and the fact that all news platforms are centered in a two-floor area opened up with few walls and the common atrium. This has led to a team approach and a declining sense of internal competition and conflict over approaches and resources.

The Tribune senior editor of multimedia explained, using shared reporting sources as an example:

"I think one of the things that initially is always difficult for reporters is to open their notebooks, open up their source list to another reporter. I think that was one of the hurdles that initially we had to get over because, as a reporter myself, we used to compete against reporters at the WFLA. It was just the idea of sharing the information that I worked so hard to gather, to open it up and share it with another reporter. ... I think that it is an amazing thing, the evolution. It was difficult, [for] reporters at first, because I was dealing with them. The idea of them opening a notebook and of them sharing this resource, they had to think about it. They did it, but it was something that was tough, initially. But I think that our environment— we've been doing it for three years, which is not a long time, but the strides that we've made as far as sharing resources and information— has come a long way. It's a second nature now."

Gatekeepers have felt the impact of convergence. Respondents sensed an increase in the number of choices about coverage in their convergent newsroom. These decisions involve the number of stories covered in a given day, the number of reporters and photographers involved, and even the basic range of stories to cover. It is the view of several respondents that convergence has increased this form of work. Furthermore, at least a television news producer observed that her position has changed because there are more ideas to share and consider over the course of any news day.

The multimedia environment has also brought change to many newsroom jobs. Journalists said that they think more about multimedia at several levels. Multimedia approaches to coverage of a given news story may be first on this list. Multimedia, especially for the online platform, is at the heart of storytelling and the coverage a story receives. Journalists stated that they think differently about how to cover a story and how to report it and this perception is common across all platforms.

The news team leader for TBO, a veteran local government reporter for *The Tribune* prior to taking his current position three years ago, made this point: *"It doesn't make me think differently about journalism. It makes me think differently about presentation and opportunity. I brought to TBO my value system and my journalism experience as a print reporter and I still adhere to that as an online journalist because I don't know any other way. What I look at is the opportunity be more creative. I look at it as layering … [like] those old overhead projectors: they would take the first one and there's a map and then they do an overlay. Well, that's how you build a story online. It is one overlay after another as you fill in that puzzle."*

In addition to the multimedia thinking about news coverage, journalists feel jobs have changed because they have been required to learn about the other platforms with which they work on a regular basis. One print journalist remarked about the need to learn television jargon just to be able to communicate with his television news colleagues: *"… [L]earning more about the other platforms. Learning what they are looking for, what their wants and desires are, essentially just understanding how they talk their language. You know, the language they use…. So this is not just an understanding across … but also understanding their language."*

Respondents also noted that convergence has required some jobs in some departments to be realigned. This is especially true in central departments serving all platforms such as the news research center. New positions and departments that did not exist prior to the creation of the News Center are an obvious example of significant job change. The Multimedia Desk, which serves all platforms, has been staffed with individuals brought from previous positions at one of the three platforms, clearly creating a significantly different work situation. This has led to a sense of evolution for new departments or jobs impacted by convergence. Respondents noted that positions have matured as needs have forced refinement or modification of original job descriptions. It was also noted that job changes were felt most intensely during the first year of the convergence of newsrooms and has been less significant in the past two years.

(3) What skills do news staff people need to function in the convergence environment of the News Center?

Interviews pointed to five themes of interest to journalism and mass communication educators. First, respondents felt that students must be very good at one task or skill, but able to do others as well. Second, they emphasized writing and reporting as fundamental elements for any platform. Third, they identified the need for adaptability and collegiality across platforms. Fourth, News Center journalists highlighted a need for students to be good communicators regardless of platform. Finally, they stated that students must obtain experience working in a converged newsroom.

The news team manager for TBO elaborated on the need for new journalists working in a converged newsroom to be strong in at least one skill and able to handle

others as well: *"I think that whatever concentration they want, become really good at it. And focus your attention there and become a valuable employee to the market, but at the same time understand your partners and what their wants and needs are and how they go about collecting information and presenting information. I know people that are very good online that are able to do video and broadcast, but they can't write worth a lick. And I've seen writers who are tremendous and either don't feel comfortable in front of TV or don't know anything about the Web."*

The Weather/Sports team leader at TBO was typical of individuals who emphasized the need to gather news: *"I think they should still be reporters, first and foremost. Newsgathering should be the most important thing; still be a reporter. It is fine to know all the bells and whistles in video and audio and Flash and all that. Those skills are useful in what you're doing, but I think being able to write a tight lead [is important].*

Receptivity to new technologies and convergence is important for graduates, a *Tribune* business reporter stated: *"The biggest skill is you need to be open to it…. People need to be receptive to the environment. I don't think people who come and say, 'I'm going to be a print reporter and that's all I'm going to do' are going to get very far…. That works two ways. On the first hand, a student starting out in journalism needs to realize that the image of what a journalist does has changed, but at the same time it's incumbent on the media organizations to let them know."*

Communication basics and abilities are the keys for new graduates, the director of *Tribune* news photography argued: *"[Graduating students] need to be good communicators as well. They need to be able to communicate with a lot of different types*

of people. And if you are a journalist of any sort, you should have those skills as well

coming in— being able to communicate with a lot of different types of people.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Shared resources benefit all journalists in the Media General News Center in

Tampa, but the real winner seems to be the television news operation. It benefits from the

depth of resources of the newspaper that did not exist when the operations were housed in

separate locations and did not work together. The business or financial sides of the

platforms have yet to completely merge under convergence, although there is more effort

to share costs across platforms. There are still, for example, *Tribune* employees, not

News Center employees, paid by *The Tribune* budget, not a News Center budget. This

appears likely to change as employee and other costs-expenses for operating and

maintaining the news research center, for example, are increasingly being shared as each

new fiscal year budget is planned. There is also a desire to continue growth of sharing

through a single, common content writing, editing, and production computer system.

Movement in this direction is apparent and will continue during the next several years.

Central management across all platforms is another issue that apparently has

received little attention at the News Center. To an outside observer, this seems critical for

success of convergent news facilities. For three years, managers of individual news

organizations have cooperated and been successful. Can this informal approach continue

to work? Perhaps. Is this the best strategy? There seems to be concerns about budgets and

other fiscal controls involving common expenses (e.g., news research or shared

employees) as well as unique expenses (e.g., television production equipment and facilities) that more centralized management would address.

Journalists at the News Center did not think about convergence in terms of distribution of news or other content. This appears to be a distant goal of convergence and, of course, is not the fault of the News Center. Distribution technologies are not in place; nor are the markets served ready for it. The three distribution platforms remain separate and will be so in the near future. There is some evidence of cross-media promotion and merged content as print journalists work on television or television reporters write for the newspaper, but that is the limit. Without improvement in ways to deliver a converged product into homes, convergence in delivery is a long way from occurring.

Job and role changes are not surprising given the scope and depth of the News Center operation. The fact that journalists see their core work as generally unchanged is somewhat surprising, however. Most changes related to additional duties or responsibilities beyond those originally stipulated in a single-platform environment. This possibility may be explained by the fact that convergence has brought additional efficiency through shared resources that allow the same number of people to get more done in a given time period such as a news day.

Convergence, as anyone in education knows, has implications for the next generation of journalists. There is much involving convergence to consider for mass communication faculty in the decade ahead. The impact of convergence will cut at the heart of organizational charts, budgets, and even personnel. Faculty must consider the

need to redesign curricula and programs and whether to create new programs for the next generation of students who come to our campuses.

How do these findings relate to the model of media convergence presented in Figure 1, a process that Yin (2003a) calls "analytic generalization"? The News Center could be described as the confluent product of regulatory, economic, and technical convergence. First, partial regulatory convergence in the form of grandfathering allowed *The Tampa Tribune*-WFLA combination. Then, the creation of the News Center in 2000 led Media General to anticipate economic convergence derivatives, such as cross-media advertising sales. However, our examination of trade press articles suggests that these expected economic advantages have not yet met their full potential. Instead, our in-depth interviews reveal a gradual emphasis on organizational and technical convergence, whereby employees of the three units cooperate more frequently, share resources and equipment, and use uniform database systems. Not only has media convergence at the News Center fostered a greater sense of community among the different units, but it has also brought to the forefront the importance of versatility in news gathering operations. Respondents are now thinking about their job duties at different levels. Most of them view these changes as an evolutionary trend rather than a complete overhaul of the existing newsroom culture.

But News Center staff has also voiced concern about the increasing work load that such a convergence newsroom has brought about. To what extent these additional responsibilities could affect and further reduce the satisfaction level of journalists is an open question that warrants future research. In their latest 1992 survey of U.S. journalists, Weaver and Wilhoit (1994) continued to report a decline in job satisfaction among daily

newspaper journalists. The quantitative literature on job satisfaction in mass communication industries is vast, but no study has examined the impact of convergent news operations on job satisfaction. Daniels and Hollifield (2002) analyzed the effects organizational changes at CNN Headline News on newsroom personnel and found that Headline News staff responded negatively to these changes. They concluded that "The degree to which change affects morale and drives talented professionals from news organizations and the industry should be a question of serious concern to media scholars and professionals" (p. 676). This is one of several important issues that await convergence researchers.

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FIGURE 1: A MODEL OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE
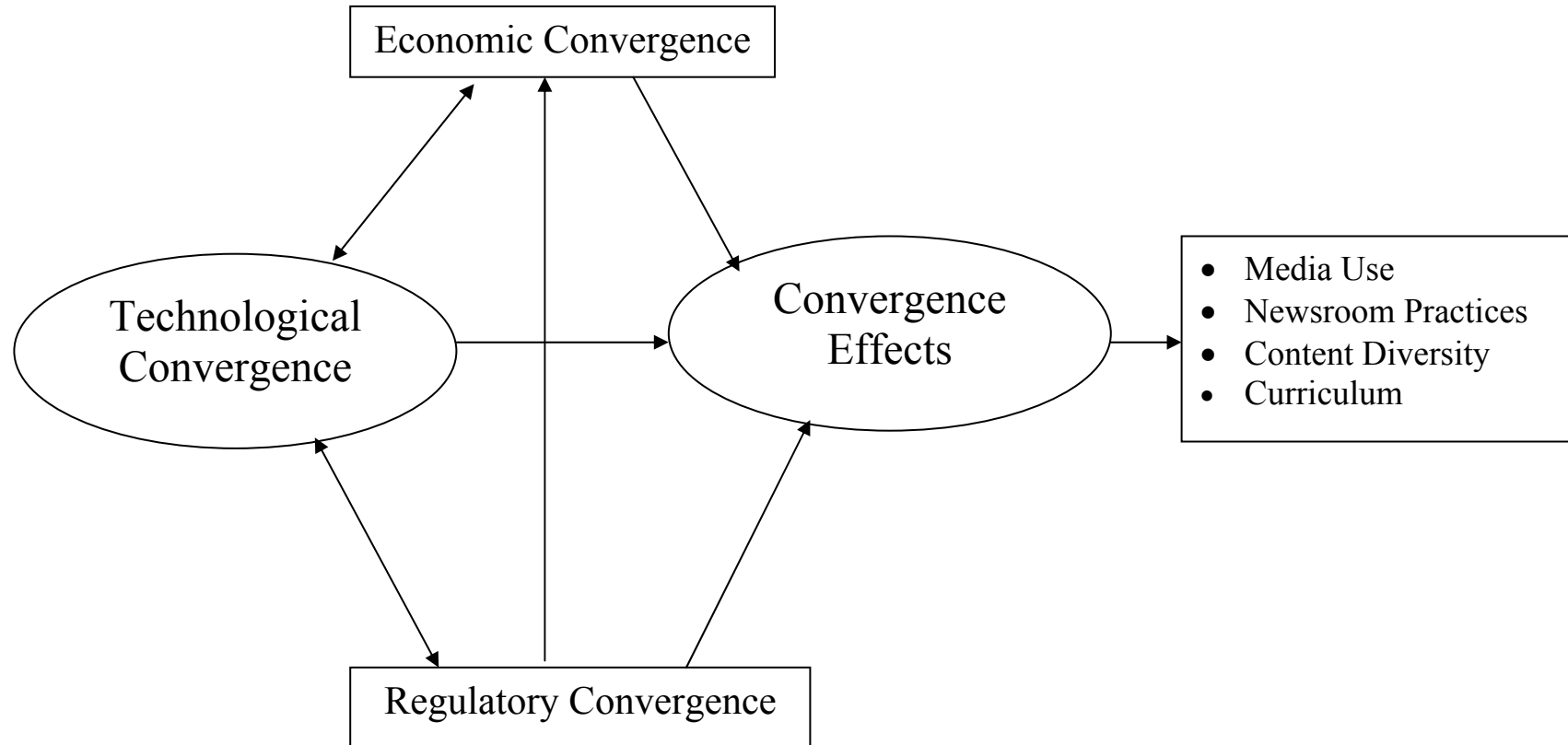
APPENDIX 1

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. Meaning of media convergence
- How would you define media convergence?
- How does this definition apply to the News Center? What is the primary characteristic that makes the News Center a media convergence entity? How does convergence work at the News Center?
- Can you give me some recent examples of media convergence at the News Center?
- What is the mission and guiding goals of the News Center?

B. Changes in newsroom practices and culture
- What changes have you experienced on your job or in the newsroom since the creation of the News Center in March 2000?
- What benefits have you experienced since the newspaper, television, and on-line operations were moved under the same roof?
- What challenges have you experienced since the newspaper, television, and on-line operations were moved under the same roof?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with your job at the News Center? If there is something that you regret about the consolidation of the three units, what would it be?
- Have tensions ever arisen among the different news departments and newsroom staff members?

C. Implications for the curriculum
- What skills do news staff people need to operate in the convergence environment of the News Center?
- What do students need to succeed in such a convergence environment?

APPENDIX 2

PROFILES OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

News Archives and Research Center manager— Female, white, has worked at the News Center since September 2000. She is a former news librarian at newspapers in Fort Wayne, IN, and Daytona Beach, FL.

Tampa Bay Online news team manager— Male, white, has worked for the Tampa Bay Online since 1995. He served as a *Tampa Tribune* city hall reporter and moved to TBO.com in the summer of 2000.

Tampa Bay Online sports and weather team manager— Male, white, has worked for *The Tampa Tribune* and TBO.com since 1986. He is a former copy editor for *The Tampa Tribune* sports department before moving to TBO.com in June 2000.

***Tampa Tribune* business and real estate reporter**— Male, white, started working at *The Tribune* in late 1999. Before joining the newspaper, he was a real estate and economic development beat reporter for a specialized business newspaper in Tampa.

***Tampa Tribune* news photography team leader**— Male, black, has worked at the News Center since fall of 2000. He served as night photo editor before moving to current position overseeing a staff of 22 people. Before coming to the *Tribune*, he worked as a photographer for 12 years at Pensacola.

***Tampa Tribune* senior editor of photography and convergence technology director**— Male, white, has worked for *The Tampa Tribune* since 1984 when he began as a *Tampa Tribune* intern in photography. He is the developer of BudgetBank, the information management software used in the three newsrooms for combined news budgets and news planning. He is a former director of photography and a former photographer.

***Tampa Tribune* Senior editor of multimedia**— Male, black, has worked at *The Tampa Tribune* since 1988. He has worked as a reporter, copy editor, and bureau chief for *The Tampa Tribune*. He moved into his current position in March 2000.

***Tampa Tribune* senior features editor**— Female, white, has been at *The Tampa Tribune* since 1981. She is a former bureau reporter, bureau chief, and regional editor in Central Florida.

WFLA 5:30 newscast producer— Female, white, has been with WFLA less than one year, beginning in mid 2002. Prior to coming to Tampa, she worked as a newscast producer for a network-affiliate station in Jacksonville.

WFLA assignments manager— Male, white, has worked at WFLA-TV since early 2000 and has been in his current position since early 2002. He has previously worked as an assignment editor for another network-affiliate station in the same market.

WFLA motion graphics artist/designer/animator— Male, white, has been with WFLA since August 2002. He previously worked for three years for a commercial station in San Diego that was operated by Paramount and Univision.

WFLA news director— Male, white, has served as news director since March 2001. Prior to his current role, he served as assistant news director from 1993 to 1997 and as the 11:00 pm news producer from 1987 to 1989. He is co-author of a broadcast news handbook.