Profession, passion, or play?
Attitudes to unpaid work in the film and TV industries

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University of Northumbria
Introductions

- Former TV documentary producer/director; worked in TV for 15 years
- Ran online community ‘TV Freelancers’ with about 9,000 members
- TV WRAP campaign in 2005 against illegal employment practice
- Joined Northumbria’s media department in Jan 2007
TV vs film reception of anti-unpaid work campaigning

Introductions

- TV Wrap campaign in 2005 helped to raise awareness and influence policy in the TV industry regarding unpaid work
- **Switched focus from TV to the independent low-budget film industry**
- Different response from independent film community – different funding models, different production culture and a different response to the campaign
Is this simply a difference in culture between the 2 industries – or can we map differences in moral attitudes more precisely?
Online survey – 1,100 respondents

Self-selecting sample accessed via variety of online networks and mailing lists: unions, online communities, guilds, job sites, screen agencies, film festivals, indie film sites

557 respondents from TV, 148 from film, 314 ‘both’

Range of questions to build up a profile, then a number of ethical agree/disagree statements about unpaid work
Profiles of respondents
Online survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profiles of respondents</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working mostly on commercially funded productions?</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever engage people on an unpaid basis?</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever worked unpaid?</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age – average</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual income – average</td>
<td>41.7K</td>
<td>24K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelance/self-employed/casually employed</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from sector forms more than 80% of personal income</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Differences in film and TV sectors

**Profiles of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Whole %</th>
<th>TV %</th>
<th>Film %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I believe that asking someone to work for free is morally wrong’</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I believe in the individual’s right to choose to work for free’</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The morality of unpaid work depends on the budget available’</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I would not take part in any form of illegal employment practice’</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘For me, working for free was (or is) the only entry route available’</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Unpaid work is a good selection mechanism for industry entry’</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differences in film and TV sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words which describe unpaid work</th>
<th>Whole %</th>
<th>TV %</th>
<th>Film %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unethical</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Film sector was consistently more positive about unpaid work

...but there were other factors that mapped onto moral attitudes even more closely.

Correlations between anti-unpaid work position, and:

- Higher budget, fully funded production models
- Older and more experienced
- Being freelance or an employee as opposed to an employer
- Higher personal income
- Union connection
- Better legal awareness
Funding models
Factors correlating to ethical attitude

Funding model vs anti unpaid work statements

- 'In principle, I believe that asking someone to work for free is morally wrong'
- 'The law takes precedence over all other considerations - I would not take part in any form of illegal employment practice'
- 'The industry I work in can sustain production without depending on unpaid workers'
- 'Productions should not be made without a big enough budget to pay all the crew they need'

Profession, passion or play?
### Funding models

#### Funding model vs pro unpaid work statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement 1-10</th>
<th>Commercial funded, paid crew</th>
<th>Non- or partially funded productions, some paid crew or deferred payment</th>
<th>Unpaid crew with intention of future income</th>
<th>Unpaid crew with no financial motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Green line**: 'The morality of unpaid work depends entirely on the budget available to the production'
- **Pink line**: 'I believe in the individual's right to choose to work for free'
- **Orange line**: 'The industry I work in would not function without people working for free'
- **Blue line**: 'Unpaid work is a good selection mechanism for entry to the industry, as it filters out the less dedicated'

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Profession, passion or play?
Funding models vs 'only way in'

- Commercial funded, paid crew
- Non/partially funded, some paid crew / deferment
- Unpaid crew, intention of future income
- Unpaid crew with no financial motivation

For me, working for free was (or is) the only route available to enter the industry.
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**Funding models**

**Funding model vs negative word choice**

- Commercial funded, paid crew
- Non/partially funded, some paid crew / deferment
- Unpaid crew, intention of future income
- Unpaid crew with no financial motivation

- Exploitative
- Unregulated
- Promoting inequality
- Unethical
Funding models

Funding model vs positive word choice

- Commercial funded, paid crew
- Non/partially funded, some paid crew / deferment
- Unpaid crew, intention of future income
- Unpaid crew with no financial motivation

- Beneficial
- Only way in
- Foot in the door
- Learning experience
- Networking
- Contacts

Profession, passion or play?
Levels of experience

Experience vs anti unpaid work statements

Profession, passion or play?
Levels of experience

Experience vs pro-unpaid work statements

% variation from sample average

-25 -20 -15 -10 -5 0 5 10 15 20 25

exp 0-2 years exp 3-5 years exp 6-10 years exp 11-20 years exp 21-30 years exp 31-40 years exp >40 years

Beneficial
Industry wouldn't function without UW
Min. wage law no deterrent
Learning experience
Networking

Profession, passion or play?
Levels of experience

Experience vs inevitability (trend over time?)

% variation from sample average

-40 -30 -20 -10 0 10 20 30

exp 0-2 years exp 3-5 years exp 6-10 years exp 11-20 years exp 21-30 years exp 31-40 years exp >40 years

-40 -30 -20 -10 0 10 20 30

-50 -40 -30 -20 -10 0 10 20

Only route available
Inevitable
Necessary
Expensive
Ever worked unpaid

Profession, passion or play?
## Motivation for working unpaid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation for working unpaid</th>
<th>Commercially fully funded</th>
<th>Partial or non-funded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would be prepared to work for free:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a good cause</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve chances of paid work</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve CV or work at higher grade</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support a project I believed in creatively</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work with a big name or company</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop new skills</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other observations
More exploration of the unpaid category

• All those with unpaid worker models, and those with less than 5 years experience, feel more strongly that ethics is dependent on budget
• Yet workers (esp. film) also clearly articulated benefits of unpaid work
• >90% who engage others unpaid, have also worked unpaid themselves
• Key finding: strong agreement that fairness within productions is a very strong driver across the board
• ‘Collective action can bring about change in working practices within the industry’ - strong 7.5 average agreement – also little variation
• Need more statistical data about what is actually happening at entry level – as opposed to anecdotal
Questions

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