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Rationalising Public Service: Scheduling as a Tool of Management in RTÉ Television

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Rationalising Public Service:
Scheduling as a Tool of Management in RTÉ Television

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Abstract

Developments in the media industry, notably the increasing commercialisation of broadcasting and deregulation, have combined to create a television system that is now driven primarily by ratings. Public broadcast organisations must adopt novel strategies to survive and compete in this new environment, where they need to combine public service with popularity. In this context, scheduling has emerged as the central management tool, organising production and controlling budgets, and is now the driving force in television.

Located within Weber’s theoretical framework of rationalisation, this study analyses the rise of scheduling as part of a wider organisational response to political and economic pressures. It is based on a longitudinal analysis of the RTÉ television schedules and interviews with key personnel involved in scheduling. The analysis tracks changes in programme output between 1990 and 2005, a period of fundamental change in the Irish broadcast landscape. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with producers and senior management from RTÉ Television provide an insight into the constraints, dilemmas and choices at the centre of programme scheduling.

The dissertation argues that scheduling has been transformed from a marginal administrative function to a highly rationalised organisational system. It functions as a strategic management tool, enhancing competitiveness, cost efficiency and accountability. This is a practical and reasonable response to the demands of increasing competition and political pressure for efficiency and accountability. However, this dissertation considers whether the ‘means’ adopted in such survival strategies are in fact incompatible with the 'ends' of public service broadcasting.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any Institute.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute's guidelines for ethics in research.

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Signature __________________________ Date ________________

Candidate
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Introduction: Scheduling Public Service - Policy and Practice in the European Broadcast Sector

Public service broadcast organisations today stand at an important juncture. Since the early 1990s, policy makers, academics and broadcasters have worried about how, indeed if, public service broadcasting would survive in the commercial era. So far, many of the original doomsday predictions have proved to be unfounded. By and large, public broadcasters have managed to maintain their position in the radio and television landscape (Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 66; Picard, 2002: 235). Indeed, Ellis argues that ‘after years of self-deprecation in the face of commercial onslaughts of various kinds, they now discover that their record and their history actually count for something’ with the public (2000: 36). Moreover, national governments and European regulators have expressed their support for public service broadcast institutions. Now though, having survived the so called ‘crisis’, public broadcasters face the challenge of forging their role in the new media landscape.

While they continue to hold their own, public broadcast organisations have had to adapt to survive. Operating in a highly competitive, commercial sector, they must respond to changing social and cultural conditions and consumption practices. They also face increasing scrutiny regarding their role and the scope of their activities. In response to these challenges, public broadcasters have adopted new organisational structures and practices; scheduling is at the heart of these changes.

As we will see, scheduling has been transformed from a marginal, administrative function to a highly strategic activity. Today, it refers not just to the task

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1 Support for public service broadcasting and the right of Member States to fund such services was expressed in the Amsterdam Protocol, signed in 1997. This support was reaffirmed more recently, when the Committee of Ministers recommended that: ‘member states should ensure that public service media organisations have the capacity and critical mass to operate successfully in the new digital environment, fulfil an extended public service remit and maintain their position in a highly concentrated market’ (Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States regarding the remit of public service media in the information society, CM/Rec(2007)3).
of placing programmes in time-slots, but encompasses the whole process of evaluation, strategic planning, and commissioning and programme selection. The role of scheduling in public broadcasting today reflects the demands of increasing competition and political pressure for efficiency and accountability. It functions as a strategic management tool, enhancing competitiveness, cost efficiency and accountability. Yet, while this is a necessary response to environmental pressures, this dissertation examines how such practices affect programme output and ultimately the public service remit.

Two issues in particular are at stake: diversity and creativity. Contributing to diversity is a crucial task for public broadcasting in the contemporary media environment. It is a key element of RTÉ’s public service remit (see Titley et al., 2010: 116 – 121). Moreover, in the context of recent demographic and socio-economic change in Ireland, cultural diversity is of special concern to policy makers at present\(^2\). Diversity can be conceived and achieved in different ways, however. A study published by the Irish regulatory authority, the BAI, emphasises the need to ‘focus as much on the diversity of genres, programmes, and perspectives broadcast as the more conventional idea of diversity as involving the representation of diverse identities’ (Titley et al., 2010: 12). Changes in scheduling practices therefore have a direct impact on a broadcaster’s ability to promote diversity.

Nurturing creativity is another vital element of the public service remit (Tracey, 1998: 26; Blumler & Nossiter, 1991: 422). Moreover, facilitating cultural expression, creativity and innovation is an important step in encouraging diversity in all its forms. Although apparently not of immediate concern among policy makers, it is a pressing issue in the contemporary broadcast environment. Competition can encourage innovation in programming (see for example van der Wurff and van Cuilenburg, 2001).

\(^2\) The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) recently published two reports on diversity: McGonagle (2010) and Titley et al. (2010).
However, pressure to maintain audience share in a highly competitive environment can also squeeze creative freedom. If public broadcasters are to contribute to a broadcasting culture, they must create the conditions to encourage innovation in programme making, through appropriate organisational structures and practices. As the principal tool of management, scheduling plays a crucial role in establishing a climate of creativity.

Changes in scheduling can therefore have a profound effect on the type of service that broadcasters provide. Hence, the rise of scheduling as a management tool is of particular significance in the context of ongoing policy debates regarding the definition of public service broadcasting. Public service has always been an imprecise, ‘elastic’ concept, meaning different things in different social contexts and in various periods in history (Syvertsen, 1999: 6). However, following the entrance of commercial operators to the European broadcast sector (and in the context of greater scrutiny of the public sector generally), this position is becoming increasingly untenable. Significant steps have already been taken to define and monitor the activities of public broadcasters (Coppens and Saeys, 2006). Yet there are continuing calls for greater clarity and transparency in relation to the role and parameters of public service broadcasting3. However, even as this work continues, the concept itself is being transformed from within public broadcast organisations.

This dissertation sits within a broader field of studies concerned with theories of the institution. These studies are ‘primarily concerned with the organizational structure of television and the embedding of this within specific political and economic systems’ (Corner, 1997: 255). They see a direct connection between the character of programming, the institution in which it is produced, and the wider social, political,

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3 The 2009 Communication on State Aid demands that the ‘definition of the public service mandate by the Member States should be as precise as possible’ so as to allow for monitoring of compliance (S. 45), ‘Communication from the Commission on the application of State aid rules to public service broadcasting’ (C 257)).
economic and technological context. Scheduling is the point at which those environmental pressures converge with organisational structures and practices to shape programme output. It directly affects the range of programmes available to the viewer. It also defines the relations between management and producers and therefore shapes the conditions of creative work. As such it is a key site of inquiry into public broadcast institutions.

Søndergaard points out that while there is literature available on the changes in scheduling, there are still very few studies on the ‘institutional and organisational transformations behind these changes’ (2002: 5). Following the work of Hellman (1999), Hujanen (2002), Meier (2003) and Ytreberg (2000), this dissertation will go some way towards filling that gap, by bringing together an analysis of RTÉ’s programme output with a study of structural change in the organisation, situated within a broader political, economic and social context. It aims to contribute to the ongoing debates on the role of public service broadcasting by unpacking the constraints, dilemmas and choices at the centre of programme scheduling, which define, not in words but in practice, the kind of public service audiences receive today.

The study combines three approaches: a quantitative analysis of programme output combined with an examination of scheduling practices; in-depth semi-structured interviews with key personnel involved in scheduling, and analysis of primary source documents, including annual reports and review documents. This three-pronged approach provides for a richer, more detailed understanding of the role of scheduling in RTÉ. Max Weber’s theory of rationalisation provides the theoretical framework for the study.

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4 A detailed description of the design of the schedule analysis and the interviews is provided in Appendix I.
Rationalisation is particularly relevant for the study or organisations; it therefore allows for an analysis of scheduling in the context of organisational structures and management practices. Weber’s concepts of formal and substantive rationality and of competing value spheres provide tools for exploring how scheduling functions as a management tool and the consequences for public service broadcasting. Specifically, can RTÉ accommodate the competing demands of competitiveness, commercial viability and fulfilling the public service remit? What is the effect of applying commercial scheduling practices in a public broadcast organisation; or put another way, are commercial means appropriate for public service ends? Weber’s multi-causal approach is also appropriate here, since it emphasises the multiple and competing influences – social, political and economic - on scheduling practices in commercially funded public broadcast organisations.

Chapter one provides a socio-historical overview of scheduling in public service broadcasting, linking changes in scheduling practices to broader transformations in the economy, society and the home. Chapter two situates the rise of scheduling as a tool of management within a broader political and economic context, examining the reregulation of the European public broadcast sector from a public service monopoly to a commercial system. Chapter three outlines Weber’s theoretical framework of rationalisation and argues for its usefulness in understanding the effects of commercial pressures on public service broadcast organisations. Chapter four provides an account of institutional and organisational change in RTÉ, based on an analysis of primary source documents. These link the rise of scheduling as a management tool to broader organisational change in RTÉ during a period of radical transformation in the European broadcast sector.

Chapter five presents a longitudinal analysis of the television schedules between 1990 and 2005, a period of fundamental change in the Irish broadcast landscape. It
examines broad structural changes in the range of programme types and trends in scheduling practices. Chapter six analyses a set of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with producers and senior management from RTÉ Television. These go behind the scenes to explain some of the phenomena found in the schedule analysis and to investigate exactly how scheduling functions as a management tool. The interviews also provide an insight into the dilemmas and constraints that those involved in scheduling in RTÉ face and how they negotiate the competing obligations of commercial viability and public service through the schedule. The concluding chapter discusses the implications of these changes, focusing on two key aspects of the public service mission, creativity and diversity, and points to an underlying and fundamental transformation in the nature and practice of public service broadcasting.
Chapter One: Scheduling - From Informal Practice to Rationalised System

Until quite recently, scheduling was thought to be little more than a matter of placing programmes in time slots. Today however, scheduling plays a central role in public broadcast institutions. It organises production and manages budgets. Scheduling has changed from an informal practice, guided by instinct, to a highly rationalised organisational system. The schedule has become, in short, a management tool. While there is growing interest in scheduling among media scholars in Europe, particularly in the Nordic countries, it receives very little attention compared with the study of audiences or content (Hujanen, 2002; Ytreberg, 2000, 2002; Ellis, 2000; Meier, 2003). Yet it can be argued that scheduling is now the driving force in television. It is the point where several factors which affect broadcasting - the market, audiences, technology and regulation - converge.

To understand how scheduling has come to occupy such a central strategic position in television, it is necessary to locate it within a broader historical and social context. The schedule is the product of a variety of influences: social, economic, political and technological. This chapter begins to unpack these influences, focusing on how changes in scheduling practices reflect developments in the broadcast industry as well broader changes in the economy, society and the home.

The chapter begins with a historical account of socio-cultural change in Ireland since the 1950s. It then charts the development of scheduling practices based on a model of the audience as family. The chapter concludes by discussing how changing social conditions and the emergence of new viewing practices have made scheduling a far more competitive activity. As a result, scheduling is of critical strategic importance in broadcasting today and occupies a central position in public broadcast organisations.
Scheduling cannot be understood as an isolated event, or a process that occurs in a vacuum. It is shaped by the social context in which it is constructed. As Hujanen argues, the process ‘is about a series of choices which are dependent not only on broadcasters and their audiences but also on the society and culture as a whole’ (2000: 68). Consequently scheduling evolves as society changes. Ireland has seen remarkable political, economic and cultural change since the birth of Irish television in 1961. For many years Ireland was ‘a poor nation on the periphery of Europe’ (Bartley and Kitchin, 2007: 1). In the 1960s agriculture was the main economic activity, employing one third of the labour force (Commins, 1995: 179). This was mainly in the form of small, family-run farms (Fahey, 1995: 212). Emigration was so high that the population fell steadily from the time of the Great Famine, 1845 – 49, until 1961 (Mac Éinri, 2007: 236). A policy of protectionism, which put a cap on foreign investments, had been in place since the 1930s, with the aim of reducing economic dependency on Britain (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007: 70). However, protectionism was not successful; by the 1940s economic growth had slowed down and the level of imports, particularly from the US, grew (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007: 71).

In the 1950s the Irish Fianna Fáil-led government, under Seán Lemass, changed its economic policy and adopted a strategy of export-led industrialisation (Fahey, 1995: 212). As Barbrook notes, the ‘the goal of an autarchic nation-state was no longer credible or desirable’ (1992: 206). TK Whitaker, a civil servant in the Department of Finance authored a historic policy document on foreign investment in the Irish economy in 1958. The resulting strategy was successful. Inward investment came primarily from the US and was concentrated in metals and engineering, and later the chemicals and pharmaceutical sectors (van Egeraat and Breathnach, 2007: 129). For transnational corporations (TNCs), Ireland offered a low cost base for the European market (van
Egeraat and Breathnach, 2007: 130). The manufacturing industries quickly grew (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007: 71; Fahey, 1995: 212). In the next twenty years the industrial workforce rose from 16 to 30 per cent while employment in agriculture fell from one third to one fifth of the labour force (Gibbons, 1996: 83).

In addition to economic expansion, Ireland was making other important steps towards modernisation and becoming part of the international community. Ireland became a member of the United Nations in 1956. In 1961 it applied to join the European Economic Community (EEC) and eventually entered in 1973. Gibbons also identifies the Second Vatican Council reforms in the 1960s as a significant step in creating a ‘welcome outward-looking attitude in Irish life’ (1996: 77). Even *Time Magazine* wrote about this new modern Ireland, with its factories and office buildings, hotels, cars and TV antennas (in *Time Magazine*, July 12 1963). The proportion of the population living in urban areas rose from one third in the 1920s to over half in the 1970s, which led to the rise in Ireland of the nuclear family and consumer culture (Barbrook, 1992: 207).

Television played its part in this social and economic development. During the forty years of radio broadcasting from 1926 to 1960 RTÉ, or Radio Éireann as it was then known, played a major role in bolstering the newly formed state by revitalising a national culture (Gibbons, 1996: 70 – 76). Now RTÉ had a new project: Bell argues that television played a part in promoting an ‘ideology of modernization’ (1995: 82). Barbrook states that the large proportion of imported entertainment programmes available on RTÉ, as well as the availability of channels from the UK in many urban areas, caused RTÉ to move away from its original remit of cultural protectionism (1992: 208 – 210). Meanwhile, RTÉ’s own programming, such as its news and current affairs output, chat shows (*The Late Late Show*, 1962 – time of writing) and drama (*Tolka Row*, 1964 – 8) was also challenging entrenched social values and attitudes towards

Foreign direct investment (FDI) created a period of strong growth in the 1960s and 70s. However, TNCs had no links with the domestic economy and therefore gave little back apart from providing jobs (O’ Hearn, 1995: 91). O’ Hearn argues that the export-led policy had a negative effect by making Ireland dependent on foreign capital (1995: 91). When economies abroad hit recession, foreign investment into Ireland dried up (van Egeraat and Breathnach, 2007: 130). Ireland consequently experienced a recession in the 1980s, which resulted in mass long-term unemployment (O’ Hearn, 1995: 93). Emigration soared again; most of those leaving were young, well-educated professional and technical workers (Courtney, 1995: 68). The decade was also marred by political instability, trade union conflict and the continuing Troubles in Northern Ireland (Bartley and Kitchin, 2007: 3 – 4).

The Celtic Tiger

In the 1990s Ireland experienced an unexpected turnaround, the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’. FDI was again responsible for the nation’s economic fortunes although there were a number of other contributory factors (Bartley and Kitchin, 2007: 4). Bartley and Kitchin argue that effective planning and better trade union relations created a favourable environment for foreign companies to work in (2007: 5). Membership of the European Union also brought many advantages. It provided financial resources to improve infrastructure, while the creation of the single market opened up new trade links for Irish companies and for foreign companies located here (Bartley and Kitchin, 2007: 9). Bartley and Kitchin identify the Northern Ireland peace process, which culminated in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, as another key factor because it brought stability to the country (2007: 14). The availability of a young, well-educated, English-speaking
workforce, a product of the 1970s baby boom, was also of benefit (van Egeraat and Breathnach, 2007: 133). Finally, attractive tax rates enticed ‘high-skill, high-value FDI’ (Bartley and Kitchin, 2007: 6).

Changes in the Irish economy have, of course, affected the size and composition of the labour force. Between 1991 and 2005 the workforce grew by eighty per cent (Mac Éinri, 2007: 237). As a result of inward investment in the ‘high-tech’ computer industries, employment in manufacturing grew by 30 per cent, with foreign owned companies employing almost half of the manufacturing workforce (van Egeraat and Breathnach, 2007: 131). The services industries also grew; this growth was predominantly in the software and financial and business services sectors (Breathnach, 2007: 151). As a result, today agriculture directly employs just six per cent of the total workforce, down from one third in the 1960s (Walsh, 2007: 158). The huge rise in the workforce has been facilitated by immigration and also by women moving out of domestic labour into paid employment (Lynch and McLaughlin, 1995: 250).

The economic success that Ireland enjoyed during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom was remarkable by any standard. Yet there were other social trends that helped create what is now recognised as a very different Ireland to that of the earlier part of the twentieth century. After over one hundred years of emigration, Ireland became a country of immigration and this has created a more diverse, multicultural society, right across the country (Hughes and Quinn, 2004: 43). Those arriving in Ireland are mostly young and almost forty per cent hold a third level degree, although the majority are in lower-level employment (Barrett and Bergin, 2007: 71). Many come from outside Europe, including labour migrants on short term work permits, refugees and asylum seekers (MacÉinri, 2007: 238). More recently, there was a significant rise in the number of people coming from the accession countries (countries that are about to join the EU) (MacÉinri, 2007: 248). Despite a reversal of these trends since the downturn in the economy, which
began in 2008, MacÉinri argues that Ireland is now ‘a society where a population of mixed ethnic backgrounds will be the norm’ (2007: 248).

During the 1990s and 2000s, the ‘social conservatism’ that had prevailed in Ireland also waned (Paseta, 2003: 145). Up until the 1960s, and for many years after, Ireland was a predominantly Catholic country, in which the Church wielded power in many areas of Irish life including health and welfare, education and even to some extent, politics (nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 1995: 600 – 609). However, from the 1960s the Church’s influence began to decline (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007: 416). The end of the ban on artificial contraception, decriminalisation of homosexuality and the introduction of divorce all reflected, and contributed to, changing values and mores.

As Hujanen pointed out, scheduling choices are influenced by the wider social context and so it is important to understand the context that RTÉ operates within (2000:68). The enormous changes that have taken place in Ireland have affected society on a number of levels: the employment and socio-demographic profile, lifestyles, attitudes and values. However, it is how all this affects our day-to-day lives that is most relevant for scheduling. This is because, as we will discuss now, broadcast schedules are constructed according to the role television plays in the home and the rhythms of daily family life.

**Television and Family Life**

Silverstone argues that television is primarily ‘a domestic medium’ (Silverstone, 1994: 24). Relative to cinema, say, radio and television were small, affordable devices, which made it possible for them to become household appliances\(^5\). Moreover, until technological advances allowed for mobile receivers, radio and television sets needed to

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\(^5\) For a discussion on the appropriation of media technologies in the home see Moores, 1993; Scannell and Cardiff, 1991
remain within their primary context of reception, usually the home. Buonanno reminds us that this is by no means an inherent feature of television; for many years television occupied public spaces - bars, clubs and street corners - and it is still present in airports, hospitals, banks and ‘other waiting and transit areas’ (2008: 13 – 17). However, while television may be present in these public spaces, in Ireland certainly its social and cultural significance lies in its position as a domestic medium.

Since its introduction, television has become a taken-for-granted technology in the home (Gunter and Svennevig, 1987: 7). Practically every household in Ireland has a television (Comreg, 2008: 51) and the set occupies a central position in the home (Silverstone, 2007: 308). Morley argues that we need to think of television as a physical thing to appreciate it ‘as a totemic object of enormous symbolic importance in the household’ (2006: 28). The physical presence of the television set affects activities and relations within the household and its location will influence how it is used. As television is incorporated into the more intimate spaces in the home it has become integrated more closely into family life. Rather than being reserved for use as a leisure activity, it now accompanies other routines, such as eating.

Berker et al. argue that the process of domestication means that technologies become, at a symbolic level, part of the family and an integral part of everyday life (2006: 2). Rogge and Jensen define everyday family life as ‘the familiar world of a family’s experience, the world in which a family lives’ (1988: 88). Television is certainly domesticated; it is integrated into the household domain in a way that other media, for example, cinema or print media, could never be. It takes up a large amount of leisure time and is still mainly a communal family activity (Gauntlett and Hill, 1999: 288). Therefore television plays an important role in the home.

There is a large body of research dedicated to the relationship between television and everyday family life (Morley, 1990; Lull, 1988; 1990; Silverstone, 1994; Petrie and
Willis, 1995; Gauntlett and Hill, 1999). Research shows that television performs a number of functions within the household, from negotiating family relationships to organising activity. Silverstone argues that television acts as a ‘focus of family activities and as a resource’ (1994: 37). Lull distinguished two types of social uses for television: relational and structural (1990: 35 – 37). Relational use refers to a variety of functions including facilitating communication, bringing the family together and exerting authority (Lull, 1990: 36). Structural use refers to providing background noise and companionship, and regulating domestic time and activity (Lull, 1990: 36).

Significantly, it is the schedule which fulfils broadcasting’s time-regulating function.

Scannell (1988) argues that broadcasting, primarily through the schedule, marks out time for individuals, families and society along three planes of temporality. First, broadcasting maintains the temporality of daily life or ‘clock time’ by organising programme output appropriate to different times of the day (Scannell, 1988: 15). Second, broadcasting matches the temporality of the life cycle or ‘life-time’ (Scannell, 1988: 15). Scannell argues that the temporality of the broadcast day intersects with life-time because people’s individual clock time is determined by their ‘life-position’ (1988: 27). One’s life-position depends on a number of factors from age to occupation to geographical location and this will determine one’s routines and lifestyle. For example, pre-school children, students, working people and retired people will have very different daily routines and this will influence how they use broadcasting. Finally, broadcasting follows the temporality of ‘calendrical’ time, changing its output to suit the changing seasons and observing key events in the calendar year (Scannell, 1988: 17-19).

Through the maintenance of these temporalities, particularly calendrical time, broadcasting fulfils an important social and cultural function (Scannell, 1988: 17). Yet it also has a more diurnal quality. The schedule, by reflecting time throughout the day,
provides structure for audiences, helping them to organise activity. It ‘chimes in’ with the routines of daily life by marking out parts of the day (Scannell, 1988: 25). Ruddock argues that television schedules are ‘instrumental in demarcating domestic time, signifying tea-time, bedtime for children and so on’ (2001: 163).

Television is integrated into many of the routines and rituals of home life. Mealtimes, housework and leisure can all involve television. Some people watch television in the morning while they get ready for work or school. Many people watch television while they eat (Petrie, 1995: 15). Some will, where possible, plan their routines around the television schedule. For example, in their analysis of the BFI tracking study Gauntlett and Hill found that many respondents organised their meals to coincide with their favourite programme (1999: 24). News and soap opera programmes in particular play an important role in the daily routines of audiences because they are shown on a daily or near-daily basis. This highlights the importance of regularity in the schedule. Scannell argues that BBC schedulers recognised this early on and began to organise their programme output along ‘more routinised, regular lines’ (1988: 25).

There is clearly a close link between the time structures of broadcasting and those of domestic life. Silverstone argues that ‘broadcast schedules reproduce (or define) the structure of the household day (itself significantly determined by the temporality of work in industrial society…) particularly of the housewife’ (1994: 20). Meanwhile, Ellis argues that in moulding itself to the patterns of everyday life television has ‘defined and standardized them’ (2002: 43). Hart, on the other hand, points out that people’s work and leisure patterns are well established and therefore the schedule has to fit around these (1991: 44). So, the schedule does not dictate how people spend their day. Scannell maintains that broadcasting does not determine the ‘patterns of day-to-day life’ (1988: 27) although it does play a role in ‘the organisation of the rhythm of work and leisure’ (1988: 24). The relationship between broadcasting
and daily family life can therefore be characterised as dialectical; people’s routines and lifestyles collectively influence the structure and content of broadcasting and this in turn shapes, to an extent, the pattern of the average day.

The Origins of the Family Model

As we have seen, broadcasting is closely integrated into domestic family life and plays an important role in structuring people’s days. In turn, the routines of domestic family life inform broadcasting and in particular scheduling. However, this was not always the case. Scannell and Cardiff argue that although the BBC was conscious that listening took place in a domestic context, a ‘home-centred culture of radio’ did not exist (1991: 369). Scannell argues, up until the 1930s BBC broadcasters ‘suppressed or misunderstood’ the nature of radio and its place in everyday domestic life (1988: 24).

Radio was initially perceived as a cultural resource, like theatre or cinema, and not as the ordinary accompaniment to domestic life that it is today (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 373). It was expected that audiences would choose programmes ‘selectively’ and give them their full attention (Scannell, 1988: 24, Moores, 1993: 85). This approach was based on Reithian ideas about the role of public service broadcasting in developing cultural taste (see Briggs and Burke, 2005: 178). It was also a reaction against the American format of broadcasting, with its standard slots and flow between programmes (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 372). Programmes were broadcast in isolation, with moments of silence between them, and fixed scheduling was avoided (Scannell, 1988: 24; Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 371). Variety and balance were the guiding principles of programme output, a function of the PSB remit to cater for all tastes and to inform, educate and entertain (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 372; Burke and Briggs, 2005: 178).
When public broadcasting was first established, one of the main concerns was how this new medium could contribute to a national culture⁶ (Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 277 – 303; Savage, 1996: 5). Radio played a role in public life and ‘was treated as part of a network of local, neighbourhood activities, with a wider social context and range than the home itself’ (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 369). It tended to focus on events and issues of national public interest (Scannell, 1988: 17; Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 7-8). Furthermore, Ang argues that as a public good, public service broadcasting’s ‘ideal-typical concept’ of audience constitutes the public, citizens of the nation (1991: 105). Thus, although audiences were situated in the home, they were not conceived of, or served, as such. Instead they were regarded and addressed as citizens of the nation.

By the mid-1930s, the BBC began to pay more attention to the domestic circumstances in which listening took place. Ellis (2002) argues that the attention to the private sphere was actually linked with broadcasting’s public role. He states that, in order to identify the pattern of ‘average national daily life’, ‘it became important to know when the various sections of the population awoke in the morning, took their meals, returned from work, went to bed…’ (2002: 43). The desire to know the actual circumstances of listening led the BBC Listener Research department (in spite of concerns from Lord Reith and others within the BBC that audience research would popularise programme output) to undertake extensive audience research (Briggs, 1995: 240).

The research data showed that, rather than using radio as an elite cultural resource, audiences integrated radio casually into their daily activities (Scannell, 1988: 24; Moores, 1993: 85). Scannell argues:

⁶ RTÉ’s duties with respect to national culture were set out in Section 17, Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960.
…the BBC was obliged to admit that for people most of the time, irrespective of class or education, radio was regarded as no more than a domestic utility for relaxation and entertainment – a familiar convenience, a cheerful noise in the background – which in moments of national crisis, mourning or celebration became compulsive listening for the whole population. (Scannell, 1988: 24)

From this research came an awareness that the audience was a group of people with different tastes and habits, not simply ‘an abstract entity, an ideal-typical national community’ (Ang, 1991: 111). The audience was now recognized ‘as a constellation of individuals positioned in families’ (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 14). Moores describes how this insight influenced programme output.

It was the imagined daily routine of the mother that provided a basis for the broadcaster’s programming plans. Her supposed round of household activities was used as a general guide to the changing shape of audiences throughout the day, as schedulers tried to take account of who would be listening at what particular times. (Moores, 1993: 85)

As Moores suggests, broadcasters did not have definitive information on the daily movements of their audience. Rather, a model of the family audience was constructed from research as well as anecdotal evidence and assumptions.

The family model may also have emerged as a practical response to the dilemma of universal service. Public service general interest channels must appeal to all sections of the population. The nuclear family unit, composed of men, women and children is a microcosm of the population. Constructing the audience as a family, the broadcaster is able to turn an unknowable, mass population into a tangible, workable model. So, in serving mother, father and children, the broadcaster is able to serve the whole population, that is, men and women, young and old. Of course, the nuclear family model does not fully reflect the many types of household and family (Morley, 1992: 163; Silverstone, 1994: 33). In Ireland today, the average number of persons per household is less than three, which means that the two-parent family with 2.4 children is
not in the majority\(^7\). The model of the audience as a nuclear family cannot fully encompass the complex realities of society. However as Abercrombie observes, ‘programme planners have to make some assumptions about the lives of their audiences in order to schedule at all’ (1996: 133). Thus the family model may be the most practical solution to the problem of serving a diversity of audience groups across a limited number of channels with finite resources.

By the time television was introduced, the nuclear family model was well established. Today, the audience-as-family is manifest in the content, form and scheduling of programme output and in broadcast institutions’ policies. The content of many television programmes and genres is geared towards families. For example, Ellis points out that in news bulletins information on say, the economy is contextualised for ‘the average family’ (1992: 114). He also argues that ‘the ideological notion of the family in its domestic setting provides the overarching conception within which broadcast TV operates’ (1992: 115). Images of, and references to, families dominate television and themes related to the family, such as romance, marriage and childhood, recur in many programme genres as well as advertising (Ellis, 1992: 113 – 115).

The family model also influences the organisation of television content into serials and series. Ellis (1992) relates this organisation to the domestic context. He argues that because of the domestic setting ‘and the multiple distractions that it can offer’ viewers do not give a huge amount of attention to television (Ellis, 1992: 115). The series and serial formats work in the domestic context, where viewers give varying degrees of time and attention to programmes (see Gauntlett and Hill, 1999: 7). It is argued that the structure of segmentation and repetition appeals to the domestic viewer because it allows for discontinuous viewing. Paterson argues that the series format

\(^7\) CSO Statistics, 2006
‘offers predictability to the heavy viewer without putting off intermittent viewers’ (1993: 149). The soap opera genre, which has an open-ended serial narrative, is considered to be particularly suited to the demands of domestic work (Allen, 2004: 245). Because their form fits so well with domestic routines, series and serials of all kinds form the basis of the television schedule.

The audience-as-family is evident in many broadcast institutions’ policies on programme standards and scheduling. In the UK, the communications regulator, OFCOM, has a family viewing policy that is implemented in its programme code for broadcasters. In Ireland, the broadcasting regulator, the BAI, and RTÉ each have their family viewing policies; both of their codes of programme standards contain guidelines on scheduling with regard to suitability for children. RTÉ’s rules state that programme output must take account of the presence of children in the audience throughout the day and even refers to the period from 7 – 9pm as ‘family viewing’. The most explicit and well-established expression of the family viewing policy is the watershed, which guarantees that material that would be unsuitable for children will not be broadcast before 9pm. The watershed was introduced in Britain in the 1960s and is still observed on the terrestrial channels (Buckingham et al., 1999: 84; Cooney, 2002: 32).

Finally, of course, the family audience shapes the schedule. Traditionally the working model for schedulers consisted of the mother at home doing housework and taking care of children, father at work during day and returning in the early evening. This model, as we have seen, has been in place since before television. The housewife was a major influence on the BBC’s daytime radio schedule, which included

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9 The Broadcasting Act 2001 requires the Commission to devise codes on the advertising for children and code of programme standards. RTÉ has drafted its own code, Programme Standards and Guidelines, which includes a number of rules on suitability for a family audience and a specific section on children (2008: 60). Available at www.rte.ie/about [Accessed August 2008]

10 RTÉ Programme Standards and Guidelines, 2008, P.60
programmes such as *Listening with Mother* and *Housewives’ Choice* (Moores, 1993: 85). Today the family audience informs the viewing policy of terrestrial television channels in the UK and Ireland.

In Britain, programming presupposes certain audiences: weekday daytime TV assumes ‘the housewife at home’ until about 4.30 when children become the target audience (commercial TV advertisements register this shift very clearly). 5.45 is the homecoming of the breadwinner, eager to hear news of the world’s affairs, followed by forms of domestic familial entertainment until 9.00. At this hour, children are deemed to have retired for the night (dreaming of the toys advertised between 4.30 and 5.45), and programming changes towards more adult programmes. After 10.30 only ‘minorities’ are deemed to be awake, and it is often around this time that the ‘routine marginal’ programmes are screened. (Ellis, 1982: 229)

By mapping the family’s day on to the television schedule, broadcasters can build a profile of who is available during the day and tailor its programme output to suit those groups. Using the narrative of the family day as described by Ellis, the broadcaster constructs a schedule that will appeal to the available audience. In the professional scheduling literature, this is referred to as compatibility (Eastman, 1989: 13).

In this way, scheduling created a service that was relevant and useful to audiences, an important function of public service broadcasting. It also maximised the number of viewers because it ensured that the programmes appealed to those members of the family who were available at any given time (Paterson, 1993: 146). Therefore scheduling for the family was strategically very successful as it met both public service and competitive aims. However, while the family model continues to guide scheduling decisions, the way in which families live and how this affects their media use is continually changing.

**Scheduling in a Changing Society**

As discussed, a key challenge for broadcasters is to provide programmes that appeal to the audience that is available at any particular time. The available audience depends on
a number of factors: work, family obligations, competing leisure pursuits, socialising, sleep, and so on, which are in turn determined by issues such as age and employment status. As Scannell has argued, clock time interacts with life-time and it is life position ‘that shapes the overall ‘time-geography’ of people’s daily routine’ (1988: 26). For example, Petrie has found that older teenagers watch less television than those in the 11 – 15 year old bracket because new activities such as a job or college mean they are out of the house more (1995: 17). As well as life-position, television use is also sensitive to wider social trends; changing social values, work patterns and lifestyle all shape daily practices and routines. Therefore if broadcasters are to continue to make their services relevant and useful for their audiences, they must adapt their schedules in response to changes in society.

In the early years of broadcasting in Ireland, the audience was a relatively homogenous entity in terms of family structure, work patterns, lifestyle, and so on. Scheduling for that audience was relatively simple. However, Irish society has changed remarkably since the 1960s. Ireland has experienced extraordinary social change since the arrival of television. Different family structures, new work practices, immigration and increased wealth have all had an effect on our lifestyles and daily routines.

Ireland’s economic development has led to substantial changes in work patterns and these have affected the family’s use of time. While the typical working week of Monday to Friday is still the norm for the majority of the population, the rise of flexible working hours, including evenings, Saturdays and shift work has altered the structure of the average household day (Barrett and Bergin, 2007: 74). In addition, a significant rise in the population, coupled with a lack of affordable housing in urban areas has increased commuting times for workers, particularly in the Eastern part of the country\(^{11}\).

\(^{11}\) The average commute is 1.7 hours per day during the week, much more in certain parts of the country (McGinnity \textit{et al.}, 2005: 7).
This obviously has had a significant effect on people’s use of time because it eats into the time people have at home for household chores, social interaction, relaxation and of course television viewing.

There has been a significant increase in the number of married women working outside the home and today the majority of mothers are engaged in paid employment (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007: 262). Women now form half of the services industry workforce, and not just in unskilled, part-time or causal employment (Breathnach, 2007: 150; Lynch and McLaughlin, 1995: 250). Given the scarcity of childcare in Ireland, and the fact that men still do not share domestic labour equally (Share, Tovey and Corcoran, 2007: 262), this means that women are combining demanding jobs with the burdens of home life. This has implications for families’ organisation of housework, childcare and leisure activities.

As we have seen, scheduling practices have been evolving since the 1930s. A model of the family audience emerged early on and schedules were constructed to fit with the daily routines of domestic life. Regularity and predictability were important elements of this approach to scheduling, combined with principles of mix and balance. The nuclear family is still the guiding model for television scheduling policy. However, greater social diversity, changing family structures and more varied work patterns mean that there is no such thing as the typical family or viewer. As the structure of Irish society becomes more diverse and complex, it is more difficult to know the routines and interests of audiences. In this environment creating a schedule that is relevant to, and compatible with, people’s daily lives is an ever more uncertain and imprecise task.

In addition to broad social trends, there are other factors within the broadcast sector which influence scheduling. Within the home, viewing practices are changing and people are watching television less with their families. Advances in technology have altered viewing practices, giving audiences more choice and more control.
Meanwhile commercialisation of broadcasting has created a more competitive and economically challenging environment. The next section will examine how these factors have contributed to the transformation of scheduling from an informal process to a rationalised tool.

Changes in Viewing Practices: Fragmentation

Today, there is growing concern among schedulers that the mass family audience is fragmenting. Television was, for many years, a leisure activity that took place in the evening and involved the whole family gathered around the only television set in the house (Wickham, 2007: 53). Gauntlett and Hill argue that ‘the evening schedule is the most significant space in relation to television and leisure time’, when families gather to relax and spend time together (1999: 49). It is therefore an important time for the relational, or social use of television which Lull (1990) identified.

The dynamics of family viewing have informed scheduling decisions for many years. For example, Paterson describes how, in the UK in the 1970s, an ITV network broadcaster carried out detailed research into the viewing habits of families in an attempt to win Saturday evenings from its rival, the BBC (1993: 147). By analysing who was watching and who was responsible for programme choices at certain times, the company chose the optimum slot for its family entertainment show, Bruce Forsyth’s Big Night (Paterson, 1993: 147).

At one time households had only one television set, usually situated in the living room, ‘the most formal/ public space of the house’ (Morley, 2006: 29). However, since the 1980s there has been a growing trend of households having more than one television. By 1986 over fifty per cent of households in the UK had more than one set and this was most common among families with children (Petrie, 1995: 13; Gunter and Svennevig, 1987: 8). Morley notes that television has penetrated ‘the more intimate
spaces of our kitchens and bedrooms’ (2006: 29). Today, many households will have television sets in more than one reception room and in bedrooms. Livingstone reports that sixty three per cent of children in the UK have a television in their bedroom (2007: 309). In Ireland, just over half of all television households have more than one set and there is a higher than average instance of multiple sets in households with digital TV. There has also been a proliferation of other entertainment media, such as DVD players, video games and the Internet.

Recent research thus indicates a growing trend of ‘individualised media consumption’ (Looms, 2006: 100). Livingstone argues that among young people in Britain, there has been a shift in media use from family television to one of ‘bedroom culture’ (2007: 304). Multiplication of media leads to a drop in audience share. It also challenges the traditional model of scheduling for a family audience since people can now make personal viewing choices, rather than ones based on compromise (see Gitlin, 2000: ix).

Nevertheless, while there has been some degree of fragmentation, for families at least viewing together seems to be the preferred option. Studies have found that television fulfils a relational function for audiences, providing a focus for discussion and an opportunity for emotional and physical contact. In spite of the multiplication of media, Gauntlett and Hill argue that ‘people’s social impulses will most likely mean that they will not become fragmented, isolated viewers to the extent that some have predicted’ (1999: 288). This assertion is borne out by the continuing popularity of family shows, particularly on Saturday evenings. For example, the revived Doctor Who

12 Nielson Media Research Establishment Survey, 2007
13 74 per cent of 9-19 year olds in the UK have access to the Internet at home. Half spend between half an hour and one hour per day online (Livingstone and Bober, 2005: 8 – 10).
series has been a huge success for the BBC because of its ‘cross-generational’ appeal (Grice in The Telegraph, May 21, 2005; see also Wickham, 2007: 54 – 55).

Changes in Viewing Practices: Technology

Advances in technology have altered the way television is distributed and consumed and this has profound effects on scheduling. The remote control, the VCR (Video Cassette Recorder) and more recently the DVR (Digital Video Recorder) and on-demand services have changed viewing practices and given audiences more control. Traditionally, broadcasters created a menu of varied programming according to the perceived needs and routines of audiences. Ellis argues, ‘a basic principle of variety ruled, leavened with beliefs about the home life of listeners and viewers’ (2000: 25). Williams, too, argues that mix and proportion were key concerns in the assembly of programmes (1990: 88). This was the established organisation and experience of television.

This model worked when viewers had no choice about what to watch. However, once viewers had a choice of channels, the remote control gave viewers the ability to opt out of the schedule as created by the broadcaster. Of course, it was always physically possible to change channels, but the remote control made it so much more convenient to do so. Therefore, the remote control undermined viewer inertia (Gitlin, 2000: xi). Wickham argues ‘the effect of the remote control was to give power to the viewer, who could now make quick and easy judgements by switching channels when not satisfied’ (2007: 56).

Bellamy and Walker describe the remote control as a subversive technology because it destabilises the traditional operation of television (1996: 1). Some critics hail the remote control as an empowering device, which gives the user control over the viewing space (Gauntlett and Hill, 1999: 35). On the other hand, although the remote
control allows the viewer to move easily between channels, the choice of programmes on these channels is still determined at the distribution end, by broadcasters. Pauwels and Bauwens question the notion of consumer sovereignty and argue that viewers are often dissatisfied with the choices available to them (2007: 158). Even so, there is no doubt that the remote control transformed viewing practices.

By now the remote control is a taken-for-granted part of the experience of watching television. Yet, this should not obscure the significance of its effects. Bellamy and Walker (1996), writing about the US television system, identify a range of viewing practices that have evolved as a result of the remote control. Grazing refers to moving through channels to see what is on, zapping is the practice of avoiding advertisements and zipping is fast forwarding through content on a video cassette recorder (Bellamy and Walker, 1996: 2 – 3). Grazing disrupts the planned flow of the broadcaster’s schedule because the viewer is now choosing his or her own set of programmes from the available channels. In his textual analysis of one night of network television in the US, Newcomb argues that viewers use the remote control to create their own ‘path’ from the available choice of programmes (1988: 91). Bruhn Jensen refers to this as a ‘customised viewer flow’ (1994: 294). Zapping also threatens revenue because it allows audiences to avoid advertising.

Because of the threat to audience share and revenue, the remote control forced broadcasters to rethink their approach to scheduling. Bellamy and Walker identify a series of initiatives, which broadcasters undertook to combat the effects of the remote control (1996: 70). Programming, or scheduling strategies, (such as placing a weaker or new show between two popular shows), continuity strategies (for example, the voice-over promotional announcement), adjustments to the format and content of the shows, and targeting strategies, are all aimed at minimising the grazing impulse and improving flow from one programme to the next (Bellamy and Walker, 1996: 75 – 82).
al. point out that the initial concerns about the effects of the remote control were ‘overblown’ (2005: 196). Nevertheless, it led to the development of tactics that are now established practices in broadcasting (Eastman, Head and Klein, 1989: 118; Webster, Phalen and Lichty, 2006: 59 – 60).

Like the remote control, the VCR (and now the digital video recorder) has become an established part of the home media set-up. It can be used to watch videos, and to record television programmes to watch them at a more convenient time, a practice referred to as time-shifting (Webster, Phalen and Lichty, 2006: 196). Time-shifting disrupted the previously inflexible relationship between domestic time and broadcast time, by allowing viewers to rearrange the schedule to suit them (Gauntlett and Hill, 1999: 143). Gauntlett and Hill claim that the VCR ‘put TV in its place’ (1999: 146) while Winston argues that the VCR ‘breaks the tyranny of the programme scheduler’ (1998: 127). The VCR certainly posed a challenge to broadcasters. It affected audience share and disrupted the broadcaster’s planned flow between programmes. It also threatened revenue because it allowed the viewer to skip advertisements.

The emancipatory power of the VCR is somewhat diminished by the fact that, as with the remote control, it does not alter the choice of television programmes available. As Bourdon argues, the VCR is still subject to the schedule, which is controlled at the distribution end (2004: 193). Furthermore, although the VCR made broadcasters nervous at first, it turned out to be not as damaging as initially feared, largely because people had difficulty using the technology (Perebinossoff, Gross and Gross, 2005: 210). Moe argues that despite the capability of the VCR to manipulate flow, this potential has been limited and it has not fundamentally threatened the traditional linear schedule.

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14 In Britain VCRs are primarily used for time-shifting, while in the US viewers use it mainly for playing rented videos (Wickham, 2007: 70; Perebinossoff, Gross and Gross, 2005: 21).
mode of presentation (2005: 776). However, the updated digital version, the DVR (also known as a PVR, Personal Video Recorder) is easier to use than the VCR and is likely to make time-shifting more prevalent (Looms, 2006: 101).

Some predict that DVR and other on-demand services, such as the BBC iPlayer, will kill the schedule (Housham, 2006: 9). These technologies fragment the audience for linear television because they allow viewers to work outside the schedule. Wickham argues that the DVR ‘promotes a different kind of consumption’ (2007: 73). On-demand services, including video-on-demand channels or streaming and downloading from websites, allow the user to watch at any given time. So far though, the traditional linear schedule is robust, partly because of responses in programming, including the trend towards ‘event television’\(^\text{15}\). Furthermore, there appears to still be a strong demand from viewers for linear television. Looms argues ‘there are many occasions where viewers will still seek out a channel offering a known and appreciated flow, especially when it comes to news, sports and events’ (2006: 102).

Declarations about the ‘death of the schedule’ therefore appear to be premature. This is not just because linear television is still in demand. Yterberg argues that such predictions tend ‘to be based on overly narrow assumptions about what broadcasters’ assembling and packaging of programmes consists of’ (2002: 285). In fact, as we will see, scheduling controls everything from budgets to production and is the main organisational tool in broadcasting. It might be more helpful to think of the process as programming, a term usually associated with the US commercial system. Eastman \textit{et al.} state that programming combines scheduling, programme selection and evaluation, that is, assessing audience response and adjusting accordingly (1997: 6).

\(^{15}\text{http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_7811000/7811000.stm}\)
When the term ‘scheduling’ is re-defined to include audience research, commissioning and production it is clear that scheduling is, and will continue to be, a controlling force in broadcasting in the future. As Ytreberg argues, ‘digitalization of television’ may cause scheduling strategies to change, but ‘it seems to be a permanent fact that scheduling operates as a distinct but powerful factor in public service broadcasting’ (2000: 26). An important balance of power lies with the scheduler, who makes crucial decisions about the shape of the schedule and thus the programmes that will be commissioned (Housham, 2006: 8). Therefore, the linear schedule may in the future become less relevant, but scheduling still plays a crucial role in determining programme output.

**Competitive Scheduling**

Scheduling has always been a ‘competitive activity’ to some extent, since it involves competing for viewers’ time (Abercrombie, 1996: 132). However, for a long time this was a relatively easy task. When there was just one channel, viewers had no choice about what to watch. Before the development of other domestic media, such as video or computer games, entertainment in the home was limited. Plus, as Wickham points out, in the days before central heating family members would not have been inclined to leave the relatively cosy sitting room (2007: 53). Therefore, attracting the attention of viewers was not very difficult.

Although competition was not the primary concern for schedulers, Ytreberg notes that ‘the wish to maximize the time-continuous viewing of several programmes lay at the base of scheduling as a craft’ (2002: 286). Consequently, some basic principles and practices were developed, including, as discussed earlier, placing programmes in a fixed time-slot, to create a more user-friendly, family oriented schedule (Scannell, 1988: 25). Scheduling was also used to manage limited programme
resources. In 1963, the RTÉ Controller of Programmes, Gunnar Rugheimar, who had previously worked in Canadian television, scheduled each night according to a theme: current affairs on Thursdays, women’s night on Friday, and so on (Doolan et al., 1969: 38). The idea was to focus in-house production resources into a small number of areas and thereby reduce dependence on imported programming.

The arrival of a second channel, RTÉ2 in 1978, gave rise to a new set of challenges and scheduling practices. The two-channel system created a different type of television environment. Where there is more than one channel the aim is to maximise viewers on each channel and across channels. Ytreberg argues that the main concern is not the performance of each channel, ‘but of the broadcaster’s channels seen together’ (2002: 287). RTÉ now had to control the flow of audiences from one channel to another as well as compete with channels from the UK.

Edin argues that the two-channel system allows the public service broadcaster to ‘more easily satisfy both demands for variety and for the broadcast of special interest programs’ (1998: 275). That is, it enables the broadcaster to maintain diversity within the system overall while preserving consistency of programme type on each channel. For example, when BBC2 was launched programme output was organised according to a ‘contrast principle’, whereby the second channel would cater for less mainstream interests and provide an alternative to the more general interest BBC1 (Edin, 1998: 272). This approach requires ‘regularization and coordination’ of the schedules (Ytreberg, 2002: 290). Because of the benefits of regularisation for maintaining flow and creating a memorable schedule, this strategy would be much more widely used once competition arrived (Ytreberg, 2002: 290).

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16 The second Irish channel was mooted in 1973, as a solution to providing choice to viewers outside the multi-channel area (Broadcasting Review Committee, 1974: 63). Initially, it showed programmes from the UK, such as Coronation Street and Top of the Pops, and Irish produced programmes.
Hujanen points out when public service monopolies operated, ‘there was no need to match the competition’; the only concern was to coordinate the schedules to ensure the channels complemented each other (2000: 74). RTÉ was in slightly a different situation, however. Although RTÉ was the only Irish broadcaster until 1996, channels from the UK were available in some areas along the east coast and the border counties because of signal spill-over. Later, cable and Multi-Point Microwave Distribution (MMDS) made these channels available in many parts of the country\(^{17}\). By 1982, with the launch of Channel 4, Holt and Sheehan claim that most areas in the Republic of Ireland had access to six terrestrial channels (1997: 78)\(^{18}\). So, even though RTÉ was officially a monopoly broadcaster, it actually faced competition in many parts of the country.

When viewers have more options available to them, it is important to have a memorable schedule and this necessitates the standardisation of programme schedules (Meier, 2003: 341). Techniques such as stripping, that is, showing a programme at the same time each day, create predictability and help viewers remember a channel’s offering. A certain degree of predictability was established early on; Ellis argues that a ‘grid pattern of 30-minute slots’ had been established in the UK by the early 1980s (2000: 26). At this stage, though, stripping was not used extensively.

As competition increased, broadcasters now recognised the strategic importance of scheduling and began to devote more staff and resources to it (Søndergaard, 2002: 7). However, at this stage the scheduling department was limited in its capacity to shape

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\(^{17}\) Cable delivery systems extended the reach of British channels into urban areas, first to Dublin in 1966 and eventually to all cities – Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway. Multi-Point Microwave Distribution (MMDS), the precursor to satellite, delivered channels from the UK to areas outside those served by cable, although this system did not develop extensively (Flynn, 2002: 165).

\(^{18}\) BBC 1 and 2 were both advertising free, public service channels. ITV was a commercial service, although it was established with specific public policy goals and operated according to public service principles, similar to the BBC (Johnson and Turnock, 2005: 17 – 18; Scannell, 1990: 17). The UK’s fourth channel, Channel 4, was established as a commercially funded public service broadcaster. Some of these channels sold spots to Irish advertisers, using an opt-out facility that allowed them to split their signal.
programme output because it had no control over programming and was dependent on whatever was provided by the production departments. However, once the broadcast sector was deregulated and public broadcasters were forced to operate in a highly competitive, commercial environment, this becomes a priority.

Commercialisation of Broadcasting

The rollout of commercial satellite systems, enabled by deregulation and technology, created an explosion in the number of channels available across Europe. In 1990, there were 103 television channels in Europe. By 2004, there were over 1000 channels with national or international coverage and today there are over 400019 (Ward, 2006: 58). The majority were privately owned channels and broadcast via cable, satellite or DTT (digital terrestrial television) distribution. 75 per cent were niche or special interest channels. By 2007, just over 80 per cent of Irish TV households were receiving multi-channel television20.

Niche channels present their own peculiar scheduling challenge for general interest services. Although no one niche channel can make a serious dent in the viewing figures for a terrestrial channel, collectively they can take up to twenty-five per cent of the peak-time audience share21. Before, broadcasters had a small number of competitors, which they could schedule competitively against. One or two straightforward adjustments could win audiences back. BBC scheduler, David Docherty tells the story of scheduling Crocodile Dundee on a Saturday evening to compete against Blind Date on ITV (1995: 121). However, in a multi-channel environment there

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21 2006 figures for channel share in Republic of Ireland, multi-channel region. Includes named satellite channels and those grouped under ‘All Other TV’ Available from www.medialive.ie
are dozens of niche channels and it is very difficult for broadcasters to schedule competitively against so many channels.

The growth in competition led public broadcasters to focus on entertainment genres such as sports and films and cut down on ‘cultural, experimental and minority programmes’ (Meier, 2003: 341). These findings are reflected elsewhere; Iosifidis reports that there has been a convergence between public and commercial channels, although public broadcasters still provide more information programming than commercial services (2007: 81; see also Léon, 2007: 90). Transmission hours were extended (Ytreberg, 2002: 292). There was also greater emphasis on scheduling strategies that maximise flow from one programme to the next and techniques to make the schedule more predictable and user friendly (Meier, 2003: 341; Hujanen, 2000: 70). Some of these strategies, such as stripping, have been in use in Europe for many years and are well-established practices. For example, news bulletins, stripped at the same time every day, form the backbone to schedules across Europe. However, in recent years the use of strategies to maximise ratings and flow has become much more widespread.

In a more competitive environment maintaining continuity of viewing, or ‘flow’, throughout the evening becomes a priority. Gripsrud argues that the notion of flow is ‘tied to the development of programming in a situation of competition between broadcasting channels’ (1998: 27). Williams claims that schedulers try to create flow in

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22 Hujanen discusses whether the focus on programming as flow, which Williams identified as an American practice, signals Americanisation of the European public broadcasting system (2000: 71). It is a difficult and perhaps redundant question to answer since many of these practices have been in use for many years (see for example Doolan et al, 1969).

23 Williams (1990) devised the concept of flow to describe how television is organised, and experienced, as a continuous sequence of small units. The concept has been widely discussed and critiqued in the context of developments in television delivery (Gripsrud, 1998; Bruhn Jensen, 1994; Moe, 2005). Moe argues that the concept is outdated in some ways but is still valuable for analysing the macro-level of the organisation of television (2005: 777). O’Sullivan argues that the concept ‘directs our attention to the holistic contours of TV output’ (1998: 200). In line with this macro level analysis, I would argue that the concept is most useful when considered as a competitive scheduling device.
an attempt to win viewers from the competition and boost audience ratings. He writes, ‘whenever there is competition between television channels, this becomes a matter of conscious concern: to get viewers in at the beginning of a flow’ (Williams, 1990: 93). Flow is best achieved when similar programmes are scheduled together in blocks because it discourages people from switching channels (Ytreberg, 2002: 296).

Webster argues that audience flow (also referred to as the inheritance effect) is the ‘foundation of programming strategies that have been in use for several decades’ (2006: 323). A huge amount of professional literature, mainly from the US, is dedicated to understanding how to maximise audience flow (see for example Adams, 1997; Eastman et al., 1997; McDowell and Dick, 2003). Most of these studies employ complex quantitative methods, perhaps a sign of an attempt to rationalise an inexact process. The various studies suggest that there are a number of structural determinants of audience flow, including audience availability and the number of programme choices. However Webster argues, in line with others, that ‘constancy in program type’ is now the best predictor of inheritance (2006: 333). That is, placing similar programmes together is the most effective means of holding on to audiences.

Scheduling to maximise flow clearly works against the public service principles of mix and balance; if similar programmes are placed together, it is more difficult to achieve diversity in a particular part of the day. Coordination of programming across channels, as discussed above, allows the broadcaster to achieve some degree of diversity while maximising flow. However, since the principle of flow is based on trying to keep audiences watching from one programme to the next, and flow is maximised by placing similar programmes together, it necessarily compromises diversity. Williams argued back in the 1970s that there had been a significant shift ‘to the concept of sequence as flow’ in response to competition (1990: 89). As television
becomes even more competitive there is greater emphasis on flow, which raises concerns about the level of programme diversity in the current environment.

As stated at the outset, scheduling is the product of a variety of influences. So far in this chapter we have discussed the social, technological and market trends that influence scheduling. In each of these areas there have been profound changes which have transformed scheduling from an informal, imprecise and relatively inconsequential practice to a rationalised system that is of huge strategic importance in the organisation. Audiences today are more diverse and fragmented than ever before. Changes in society and the economy have created flexible work patterns and diverse lifestyles. Technological advances such as the remote control and the VCR have given people the capability to disrupt the planned flow of the broadcaster’s schedule. There is also greater competition for people’s time from other home entertainment media, such as computer games or videos. Cable and satellite delivery systems have created a fiercely competitive multi-channel environment which caters for every conceivable interest. The presence of multiple TV sets, as well as on-demand services such as iPlayer, YouTube and so on, in the home means that viewers can now choose the programme that suits them best rather than watch with the rest of the family.

These trends have combined to create an environment in which it is harder to know and control the audience. In such a competitive environment, people need no longer settle for the ‘least objectionable’ programme (Küng, 2008: 86). Yet, it is also becoming more important than ever to achieve significant audience share, both for advertising revenue and for political legitimacy (Hujanen, 2000: 76; Søndergaard, 2002: 4). Hence as the factors that affect scheduling become more and more uncertain, and the stakes become higher, public broadcasters are forced to pay more attention to audience retention. Demographics, slots and ratings are now key concerns for broadcasters.
Meanwhile, public broadcasters face an uncertain financial and political future. They are finding it increasingly difficult to justify their role in a multi-channel environment (Ward, 2006: 52). Costs are increasing while money available for public service broadcasting remains limited and subject to strict control. In order to justify receipt of the licence fee, public broadcasters are under pressure to prove they are serving the audience, and increasingly this is being measured in terms of audience ratings (Flynn, 2002: 173). As a result dual-funded public broadcasters, such as RTÉ, are more dependent on commercial revenue, but this too is tightly controlled and in decline. In this environment, public broadcasters must adapt to survive and scheduling is a core element of their survival strategy.

Scheduling as a Management Tool

As discussed, scheduling practices have been in use in public broadcast organisations for many years. However scheduling has never been as important to the organisation as it is today. Ytreberg notes that ‘during the Eighties and Nineties scheduling was transformed from a relatively marginal and modestly coordinating role to becoming a high priority with the broadcasters themselves’ (2000: 26). This is because the conditions in which public broadcasting now operate give rise to a need to improve efficiency, increase competitiveness and pay greater attention to the demands of audiences.

The central role of the schedule was initially ‘justified by the needs of the audience’ (Hellman, 1999: 229). Thus, regularity in the schedule was framed as a solution to the audiences’ need to be able to find their favourite programmes in a busy multi-channel environment (Hujanen, 2002: 118). Furthermore, the increase in the practice of targeting, or profiling, was presented as a means of ‘guaranteeing that programmes intended for large audiences will be broadcast during the hours in which
they have the best opportunities to watch television’ (Hellman, 1999: 299). As such, these competitive scheduling practices were defended on the basis of serving the audience. This reflected the new stress on consumer choice. In the market-based environment, public broadcast institutions were considered outdated and paternalistic (Coppens and Saeys, 2006: 261) and in response to this criticism, they began to place greater emphasis on responding to audience demand.

As broadcasters focus more and more on this relationship, the schedule becomes strategically important. The schedule is the basis of the relationship between the broadcaster and its audience because it is the sum total of programme output and the main point of access for viewers (Ellis, 2000: 36). Management by Schedule, as Hujanen calls it, strengthens audience orientation, by ‘structuring and systematising the broadcasters’ relationship with their audiences’ (2002: 118). One of the ways it achieves this is by incorporating audience research into programming strategies, which creates a direct link between the audience and programming.

Scheduling is now a high priority within public service broadcast organisations. Early on broadcasters recognised the value of arranging programme output to suit audiences’ lifestyles. Now though, public broadcasters are operating in a highly competitive environment, in which ratings and cost-efficiency are prioritised. Orienting programme output to the needs of audiences becomes critical when broadcasters have to compete for their attention. Ytreberg links the change in scheduling with recent organisational change in public broadcasting, ‘from being modelled on state bureaucracies toward being modelled more after private sector organizations geared to the needs of competition’ (2000: 26). Public broadcasters are also adjusting to a

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24 This article presents a comparative study of scheduling in public service broadcast organisations in Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden.
changed economic and political climate and have to operate more cost-efficiently while continuing to fulfil their remit.

In such an environment scheduling becomes a strategic tool and takes on a more central role in the organisation. Everything now revolves around the schedule; it incorporates strategy and manages production, budgets, staff and facilities. Born argues that scheduling has become ‘the point of integration for television’s expanding components: strategy, marketing, commissioning, production, accounting; and as all of these bear on the broad editorial judgements that in turn inform practical decisions on finer details of genre and format – on what will be shown’ (2004: 294). Thus the schedule acts as the framework within which all decisions are taken.

Scheduling has undergone a remarkable transformation and it is now the central management tool in public broadcast organisations, used to control budgets, resources and production. From a relatively marginal role, Ellis (2000) argues that scheduling is now the centre of power in television today. This transformation reflects a fundamental shift in the European broadcast sector and in the wider economy and society. The next chapter will examine how profound political economic changes in the general economy reshaped public service broadcasting in Europe, creating a more competitive environment and prompting the introduction of new organisational structures and management practices.
Chapter Two: The Political Economy of Television Scheduling

This chapter situates the rise of scheduling as a management tool within a broader political economic context. It argues that the introduction of scheduling as a management tool is part of wider organisational restructuring, which public broadcast organisations have undertaken in response to profound political and economic change. Transformation of the broadcast sector is linked to the roll-back of state intervention in favour of laissez-faire style regulation and the introduction of flexible modes of production. As public broadcasting is integrated into a market system, public broadcasters are expected to operate according to a quasi-commercial logic and must prioritise economic concerns. Under these circumstances, scheduling becomes an important tool to improve competitiveness, manage resources and increase efficiency.

Modes of Organisation pre-1970s

Broadcasting throughout Europe has been transformed from a predominantly public service monopoly system into a highly competitive, largely commercial activity. These changes are the result of a shift in a wider political economic landscape since the 1970s. Until then, the political economic system that prevailed in Western Europe and the United States could be characterised as an amalgam of Keynesian welfare state policies and a Fordist mode of production (Carpenter and Jefferys, 2000: 133).25

Developed in the early 1900s by American car manufacturer, Henry Ford, the main elements of Fordism were systematic management, rational organisation and control of labour (Harvey, 1990: 125). Fordist organisations engaged in large-scale, mass production of a limited number of types of products using raw materials, such as

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25 The production system referred to as Fordism lasted roughly from the 1930s to the 1970s (Bagguley, 1991: 151).
steel (Allen, 1992: 185). Production was based on ‘short-cycle job tasks with dedicated labour and dedicated tools’ (Lash and Urry, 1994: 113). Fordism developed many of Taylor’s principles of scientific management (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 33). Both were concerned with technically efficient methods; division of labour; hierarchical organisation; control of labour, and financial rewards for workers (Clegg, 1990: 178 – 179).

Fordism, however, was not simply a mode of factory organisation, but a ‘total way of life’ (Harvey, 1990: 135). For example, Fordism involved mass production of a limited number of types of products (Allen, 1992: 185). Ford once famously said customers could have any colour they liked as long as it was black (Ford and Crowther, 1922: 72). As such Fordism was associated with a mass market, which allowed for very little differentiation and this contributed to mass consumption and a particular aesthetic (Harvey, 1990: 135). Another important element of Fordism was that workers were well paid, both to create a secure, compliant labour force and to boost demand for the products being created (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 33; Clegg, 1990: 178). Thus Fordism extended into all areas of social, economic and political life.

The Fordist system of production was underpinned by Keynesian welfare state policies. The basis of Keynesian economics is that governments should intervene to manage and support the economy (Galbraith, 1987: 222 – 236). The Keynesian model came to prominence following the economic collapse of the 1930s, when there was a demand for a change from laissez-faire capitalism to a system involving some state management (Louw, 2001: 77). As Carpenter and Jefferys argue, capitalists needed a welfare state to maintain a stable society and support consumption (2000: 133). Nation states could achieve this by managing demand in the market, regulating wages and supporting full employment (Peck, 1996: 193).
Under Keynesianism, workers enjoyed stable working conditions and relatively high wages. This meant that the labour force, through unions and collective bargaining, exerted a powerful influence in the economy. In addition, under this regime state governments took responsibility for provision of a range of services, including housing, health and education. State intervention had in fact been a feature of European politics, to varying degrees, even before Keynesianism spread from the US (Carpenter and Jefferys, 2000: 37). Therefore large, well-supported public institutions were a prominent feature of society in European countries during the greater part of the twentieth century.

The Fordist-Keynesian system emerged in the US first and then matured and spread across the globe after 1945, secured, as Harvey puts it, ‘under the hegemonic umbrella of the United States’ financial and economic power backed by military domination’ (1990: 137). American companies had already been operating outside their domestic market prior to WWII (Tunstall, 1977: 138 – 143). After the war, the US sought to take advantage of its dominant position by establishing a global political economy that would suit its interests (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 17). It used its power in supranational institutions such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to remove tariffs on trade and ensure that its companies could move freely into foreign markets, evoking the ideological principle of ‘free flow’ (Tunstall, 1977: 208). As a result US based corporations and Fordist production methods prospered.

As discussed above, in Europe under the welfare democracy system and later under Keynesianism, social services were the responsibility of the state and were carried out by large, typically bureaucratic institutions. When broadcasting was introduced in the early part of the twentieth century, it too was managed by the
government. Prior to that, the print media and the film industry were not subject to government regulation or intervention (Louw, 2001: 71). However, for technical, social and political reasons broadcasting was treated differently.

**State Provision of Broadcasting**

The basic rationale for regulating broadcasting was technological. Broadcasting was distributed over the air and since frequencies were relatively limited there was a need for governments to manage spectrum allocation through the issuing of licences (Humphreys, 1996: 113). This was a practical measure to prevent ‘anarchy’ on the airwaves (Louw, 2001: 71). However, as Humphreys argues, once access to the airwaves is rationed, there is a need for further intervention to prevent abuse of a dominant position in the market (1996: 113 – 114).

State intervention was also justified on the basis of broadcasting’s status as a public good. Once a public good is made it enters the public domain and can be enjoyed by everyone, not just those individuals who have paid for it. This is described as the principle of non-excludability. Public goods are also non-rivalrous, meaning that the use of the good by one individual does not diminish its availability to others (Caporaso and Levine, 1992: 93). Broadcasting is defined as a public good because it is available over the air. Therefore, the service is available to everyone, whether they wish to pay for it or not. This means that it is impossible to restrict access to the product or to identify those who actually use it; as a result the producer cannot charge users directly. Because of the inefficiencies involved in rewarding producers for their efforts, free markets are not likely to provide such products - this is a form of market failure (Doyle, 2002: 64 – 65).

In a commercial broadcasting system, the solution to market failure is to sell a secondary product: audiences (Garnham, 1986: 222). Producers can sell advertisers access to audiences with the price based on the number of people reached, as measured
by ratings. These ratings then become the commodity that is bought and sold (Mosco, 2009: 142). However, this method is problematic. When a product is commoditized its use value is transformed into exchange value (Mosco, 2009: 129). That is, a product comes to be valued for the price that it can be sold for rather than for its social or cultural worth. Thus, when broadcasting is commoditized, its exchange value becomes the most important quality and its social, cultural and political use value ‘drops out of the equation’ (Morrison, 1995: 61).

So, advertising resolves the issue of market failure by providing the producer with revenue. However, a second form of market failure then arises, that is ‘the failure of the market to advance socially desirable goals’ (Doyle, 2002: 64). An example of this would be where a commercial broadcaster fails to provide the service to remote parts of the country because it is not cost efficient; this contravenes the principle of universal service, which is important for preserving democracy and social cohesion. A further problem arises because broadcasters must focus their efforts on attracting those audience groups that advertisers wish to reach rather than serving the entire public.

In the US, broadcasting was organised as a commercial system, funded through advertising and sponsorship. State intervention was restricted to managing the airwaves and establishing minimum rules with regard to content. Elsewhere, however, there was support for greater regulation and intervention to prevent market failure. This was based first of all on mistrust of commercialism\(^\text{26}\). Louw argues that ‘many in the rest of the Anglo world developed a distaste for the popular culture emerging from this commercialized US industry’ (2001: 72). McQuail also describes how in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, commercialism became identified with large-scale, low-

\(^{26}\) In fact, broadcasting in Britain was originally organised as a commercial monopoly system; the license was issued to a cartel of radio manufacturers in 1922 (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 5). Nonetheless, the Sykes Committee of 1923 maintained that control of broadcasting should remain with the state (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 6). Shortly afterwards, Lord Reith argued the British Broadcasting Company should be changed to a public corporation under the authority of the state to allow it achieve the objectives of public service (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 8).
cost, ‘low-taste’ production and distribution, especially aimed at the industrial working class (1998: 108). Therefore, because of the social and political importance of broadcasting, state patronage was adopted in most countries in Europe as an alternative to market provision (Garnham, 1986: 222).

In Europe, rather than being viewed as a commercial enterprise, broadcasting was seen to have an important educative, democratic and socialising role. In the UK in the 1920s, Lord Reith, the first director general of the BBC, conceived the service ‘as a cultural, moral and educative force for the improvement of knowledge, taste and manners’ (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 7). Furthermore, Humphreys notes that ‘broadcast media had a very effective capacity to focus public attention, to contribute to the creation of public opinion, to legitimise (or de-legitimise) public policy, and even directly to influence voting behaviour’ (1996: 114). Equally, he argues there was recognition of the fact that broadcast media could be open to abuse (ibid.).

Reith argued that broadcasting should contribute to the democratic life of the nation by informing public debate. Imbued in all these principles was the concept of the nation state. Public service broadcasting systems were organised along political lines, as a national service. Through its democratic and socialising roles, broadcasting was to play an important role in fostering a sense of national identity. In Canada this was to be a major function of the public broadcasting service (Briggs and Burke, 2005: 180). It was also a priority for the fledging Irish state. Section 16 of the Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960 made special reference to the ‘national aims of restoring the Irish language and preserving and developing the national culture’.

Out of these technical, social, economic and political considerations emerged the public service broadcasting (PSB) model. Developed first in the UK, the PSB model

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27 These ideas, now seen as paternalist and elitist, were rooted in Matthew Arnold’s vision of the state as a guardian of culture (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 9).
conceived broadcasting firstly as ‘a public utility to be developed as a national service in the public interest’ (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 6). In addition Lord Reith established a number of fundamental principles, including independence from the state and market influences; universality of service; and diversity of programming which would inform, educate and entertain (Burke and Briggs, 2005: 177). Reith also advocated a monopoly as he argued this was the best way to provide a service in the national interest (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: 8).

The BBC public service model influenced broadcasting systems around the world, including South Africa, Japan, Canada and Ireland, although each country adapted the model for their particular situation. For example, the BBC was funded entirely though public revenue, in the form of the licence fee. However, because of financial constraints and Ireland’s relatively small population, full public funding was not an option\(^\text{28}\). Instead, RTÉ was funded through a combination of licence fee receipts and advertising revenue. Furthermore, RTÉ initially operated under the direct control of the government and only gained statutory independence in 1961, when television was introduced. Even after that, RTÉ was subject to continued interference from the government\(^\text{29}\). Notwithstanding local variations, most countries maintained the principles of broadcasting as a public service and independence from state and market pressures. These principles gave rise to a particular type of organisation, which facilitated its own peculiar form of cultural production.

\(^{28}\) For a comprehensive history of the establishment of television in Ireland, see Savage, 1996; esp. pp. 193 - 210

\(^{29}\) In 1966, the Taoiseach Seán Lemass stated in the Dáil (Parliament) that RTÉ should not be ‘either generally or in regards to its news and current affairs and news programmes, completely independent of government supervision’ (cited in Horgan, 2001: 85). For further discussion of the relationship between RTÉ and its political masters see Flynn, 2002 and Corcoran, 2004: 71 – 73.
Organisational Structure of Public Broadcast Institutions

While in the US broadcasting was a commercial activity, in Europe it was a public service monopoly, managed by the state and funded through public revenue. It therefore remained isolated from the market. Furthermore, because it was a public service, its organisational structures and practices were closer to those of public institutions than capitalist enterprises. For these reasons cultural production in broadcast organisations followed a peculiar logic, which was different to the logic of capitalist production.

When broadcasting was first developed, it was a labour and skills-intensive activity and was mainly studio-based, involving heavy, complicated equipment. It was carried out in large institutions, which were bureaucratic in structure. Beetham notes that the bureaucratic mode of organisation emerged in the early part of the twentieth century, a time when the state was ‘expanding into new areas of welfare provision and economic regulation’ (1987: 58). Weber argued that the demands of modern society, including security and welfare for large populations living in cities necessitated a highly rational form of political administration, that is, the bureaucracy (1978: 972).

Weber characterises bureaucracy as a system that is ordered by rules, has a monocratic hierarchical structure and is based on files (1978: 956 – 957). Kamenka sums it up as: ‘referring to centrally directed and supervised, hierarchically structured routine administration on a scale so large that it must be conducted on the basis of rules; files and delegated but formally limited authority that is related to the functions of each office’ (1989: 158). There were many advantages to bureaucratic organisation, according to Weber: ‘precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination… – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration’ (1978: 973). It also offered objectivity, that is, the ‘discharge of business according to calculable rules and “without regard for persons”’ (Weber, 1978: 975).
Coming from the public sector, public broadcast institutions shared many of the features of bureaucratic administration. RTÉ, like many of its European counterparts, started out under the direct control of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and only gained statutory independence from the government in 1961 (Gorham, 1967: 313; Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 110). As such, it exhibited many of the key characteristics of state bureaucracies at the time; it had a large administrative and managerial staff; a hierarchical structure with clearly defined roles, or offices; departmental organisation and a system of rules and procedures (Dooney, 1976, Appendix II; Weber, 1978: 956 – 959). The Irish civil service was directly inherited from the British administrative system. Ireland had been under direct British rule until 1921 and when power was transferred, it maintained the same administrative system (Dooney, 1976: 1).

RTÉ was also heavily influenced by its British counterpart, the BBC. The BBC was keen to establish a public service in its likeness and to prevent an American commercial service becoming available in the UK (Savage, 1996: 127). Therefore the BBC played a role in the establishment of both the radio and television services (Gorham, 1967: 19; Savage, 1996: 117 - 128). Furthermore, Leon O’Broin, secretary of the department of Posts and Telegraphs, a key figure in the foundation of the Irish television service, was keen to install a public service modelled on the Reithian philosophy (Savage, 1996: 7).

Burns argues that the BBC developed a bureaucratic structure because this was the form of administration of choice at that time (Burns, 1977: 23). Yet, it developed its own ‘idiosyncratic’ form of bureaucracy, with Lord Reith as the charismatic leader at the head (Burns, 1977: 23). By means of a tight hierarchical structure, Lord Reith maintained control over all aspects of the organisation (Burns, 1977: 24). Burns also describes how the administration and output functions were divided into effectively two
separate bureaucratic systems, with administration serving the needs of creative staff (Burns, 1977: 25).

Like the BBC, RTÉ was ostensibly bureaucratic, but had its own unique organisational structure. It was not a rational organisation when measured against Weber’s ideal type. For example, according to Weber, a bureaucracy will have a clear hierarchical structure and a well-defined chain of command (1979: 956 – 957). However, a report by consultants Stokes Kennedy Crowley into the organisational structures and practices in RTÉ, produced in 1985, found that the chain of command between management and programme department heads was ill-defined (Stokes Kennedy Crowley, 1985: 30).

This would be considered irrational in a factory organised along Fordist, or Taylorist principles, which is bureaucratic in structure and where control of labour is a fundamental component (Thompson and McHugh, 2005: 30). However, professional autonomy is quite normal in the media industries. Picard argues that because media production is based on creative work, employers will tend to ‘acquiesce to professional norms and standards’ (2005: 66). Hesmondhalgh argues that in the BBC allowing producers ‘creative space’ was considered critical to the quality of programme output (2002: 162). Seaton adds that in earlier years programme makers enjoyed a high status within the BBC and it was the role of administrators to ‘protect and assist them’ (1997: 310). During this time scheduling was mainly an administrative function, to combine the programmes that producers provided (Ellis, 2000: 26).

Public broadcast organisations also exhibited other seemingly irrational tendencies. For example, calculability, that is the ability to quantify inputs and outputs, is a core element of Weber’s concept of formal rationality (Brubaker, 1984: 36). However, the organisational structure and the budget system in RTÉ were such that it was not possible to relate costs and revenue. Because of the separation between output
and administration, the sales department was completely separate from production departments and there was no relationship between programme budgets and the income that the department was likely to generate. Furthermore, the Stokes Kennedy Crowley report from 1985 found that its advertising slots were notoriously undervalued because of the sales system that was in place at the time (1985: 192).

Clearly this system is highly inefficient in terms of cost. However, this judgement is based on the logic of a commercial system, where the goal is to create profit. Accumulation of profit is the driving force of capitalism and this drive creates certain conditions in the economy and in organisations. As stated above, calculation of means and ends, inputs and outputs, is a core tendency of the formally rational organisation, or bureaucracy. In a capitalist enterprise, this tendency will be oriented towards profit; Weber argues that this involves, before every individual decision, ‘a calculation to ascertain its probable profitableness, and at the end a final balance to ascertain how much profit has been made’ (1930: xxxii).

Judged on these terms, RTÉ’s system would have been considered inefficient and irrational because it prevented calculation of costs and revenues (see Albrow, 1970: 65). A clash of values is evident here, which needs to be discussed briefly. Weber argued, ‘what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another’ (1930: xxxiii). So, when public service institutions are accused of inefficiency or irrationality, that judgement is made from a particular perspective. For example, RTÉ might show a programme in prime time that would contribute to its fulfilment of the public service remit, but may only attract a small number of viewers. Thus, from a commercial perspective it would be considered irrational even though it is in keeping with the principles of public service.

Public broadcasting was deliberately organised in opposition to the values of commercial production. Because of fears about the effects of commercialisation, public
broadcast institutions were regulated, organised and funded in such a way as to protect them from market pressures. The monopoly system and public funding were intended to ensure that public broadcasters served the public interest alone. Thus, with no motivation to earn profit and relatively insulated from market pressures, RTÉ and other public broadcast organisations did not operate according to the logic of commercial production. During this time, there was widespread public and political support for this system (McQuail, 1998: 109). However, this was to change in the shift from a Fordist-Keynesian system to a flexible, neoliberal economy.

**Post-1970s Economy**

Public broadcast organisations managed to operate in relative isolation from the market during the Fordist-Keynesian era. However, in the 1970s a number of economic trends emerged in the general economy which would ultimately reshape the broadcasting system and bring public broadcast institutions into the market domain. These include the roll-back of state intervention and the introduction of new, more flexible modes of production.

The combination of Fordist-style organisation and state intervention led to stable economic growth, low unemployment, a rise in living standards and low inflation in the period between 1945 and the early 1970s (Glyn, 2006: 1). However, in the early 1970s this period of stable growth came to an end. One factor in the downturn, according to Harvey (1990), was that Fordism could no longer sustain growth. The ability to grow and innovate, and maintain a gap ‘between what labour gets and what it creates’ are necessary and fundamental elements of a capitalist economy (Harvey, 1990: 180). Fordism was based around production of a limited number of products and this was contingent on a consumer market for such goods. Eventually, however, this ‘compatibility’ between production and consumption broke down as the market for
mass consumer goods reached saturation and there was greater demand for niche products (Allen, 1992: 170; 186).

Harvey argues that the main problem with the Fordist system was rigidity, which meant that the economy was unable to respond quickly to changing circumstances (1990: 142). For example, a powerful labour force enjoying relatively high wages was a feature of the Fordist-Keynesian era. Eventually however, Glyn argues, this began to hamper growth as strong trade unionism and wage inflation began to squeeze the gap between pay and productivity (2006: 3 – 15). Furthermore, the economy could no longer afford health and welfare provision (Carpenter and Jefferys, 2000: 125). At the level of the organisation, the bureaucratic system, including strict division of labour, authoritarian control and dedicated machinery producing a limited number of products, was now proving impractical and unsuitable in the new ‘postmodern’ economy (Clegg, 1990: 181). Therefore the attributes, and benefits, of the Fordist-Keynesian system were now inhibiting growth. The turning point was the oil crisis of 1973 and the subsequent global recession (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 85 – 87; Lowe and Alm, 1997: 172; Harvey, 1990:145)\(^\text{30}\).

In Marxist terms, this is understood as a crisis of accumulation. Marx argued that there are inherent contradictions in the capitalist system, which means it cannot produce steady growth. As a result, the capitalist system will always produce periods of overaccumulation. According to Harvey, ‘a generalized condition of overaccumulation would be indicated by idle productive capacity, a glut of commodities and an excess of inventories, surplus money capital (held back as hoards), and high unemployment’, conditions typically seen in a recession (1990: 181). In order to overcome these periods

\(^{30}\) When the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) restricted the supply of oil to heavily dependent industrial nations in the West it exacerbated already existing problems in the economy. It contributed to a period of stagflation (high inflation and high unemployment). Yet Harvey argues that the oil crisis also ‘shook the capitalist world out of the suffocating stupor of “stagflation”’ and prompted changes to the Fordist mode of production (1990: 145).
of crisis, capital must ‘renew itself’ (see Flew, 2007: 51). This is achieved by finding ‘new spaces in which capitalist production can proceed’, by opening up new markets and sectors of production, and finding new ways to exploit labour (Harvey, 1990: 183).

Harvey describes the new system as ‘flexible accumulation’, which he argues was ‘characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation’ (1990: 147). It also involved the introduction of flexible labour practices (ibid.) Businesses sought to expand into new markets, either geographically or into new sectors of production (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 92). As a result, over the next twenty years there was a profound shift in the ownership structure of companies and in the spatial arrangement of the economy, from nation-based to global in scale (Glyn, 2006). There was also a push to privatise services that had previously been provided by the state, including broadcasting (Garnham, 1986: 225).

Thus, the economic downturn sparked a departure from the Fordist-Keynesian system as corporations sought to sustain growth, improve efficiencies and ultimately boost profits. There is some debate over whether the changes that have taken place represent a significant deviation from the Fordist mode of production or merely a reworking of the system. Neo-Fordism argues for the end of Fordism as we know it while recognising continuities with the old mode of production. Post-Fordism, on the other hand, refers to a qualitative shift in production and consumption. Some speak of a post-industrial economy to indicate the growing importance of the knowledge and service industries in the advanced economies over heavy goods production in a factory setting (Allen, 1992: 181 – 182). Peck, with reference to Jessop, describes the political transition as a shift from a Keynesian Welfare State to a Schumpeterian Workfare State (SWS), which is geared towards the needs of business rather than citizens’ welfare. It is

There is clearly some ambiguity regarding the definition of the new economy. Yet it is certain that significant changes have taken place in a number of areas, including consumption, production, labour practices, technology, regulation and spatial arrangement of the economy (see Bagguley, 1991: 167). Moreover, while the various schools emphasise different aspects of the transition, all agree that the new economy, at least in the advanced economies and in the ‘high-tech’ industries, is characterised by flexibility (Allen, 1992: 170; see also Bagguley, 1991: 166). Some argue that the need for flexibility was not an inevitable outcome of the crisis of Fordism but rather an ideological offensive, used to legitimise a variety of practices, including casualisation of labour and the introduction of neoliberal policies (Harvey, 1990: 192; Bagguley, 1991: 167). Whatever the cause, however, flexibility is a definite feature of the new mode of production.

The political sector played a constitutive role in this new regime (Mosco, 2009: 176). The global recession led to a turnaround in the economic policies of governments across the globe31. Business needed favourable regulation in order to move into new markets and to change working practices. The political sector responded by re-regulating the economy to allow businesses greater freedom. Therefore, from the 1970s there was a swing from Keynesian welfare state policies to neoliberal, market-based regulation. As part of this process, barriers to trade between countries were removed and public sector monopolies were broken up.

Technology also played an important role in the new regime of flexible accumulation. The development of electronic and micro-chip technologies gave rise to

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31 In a cyclical movement, the dramatic global financial crisis of 2008/2009 has prompted a swing in the opposite direction, from light-touch regulation to state intervention and even nationalisation of banks in a number of countries.
new products, new production equipment and new ways of managing (Carpenter and Jefferys: 2000: 119). For example, it was now possible to engage in short-run batch production rather than mass production, crucial in a market that demanded niche products. Automation allowed companies to reduce staff numbers. ‘Computerised surveillance’ facilitated control of labour activity (Sennett, 2006: 52). Finally, the development of technologies that could control access to media products (such as satellite television decoders) expanded the opportunities for commodification, thus extending corporate power into new markets (Mosco, 2009: 136).

Flexible Organisational Structures

The 1980s and 1990s was a period of innovation as businesses sought ways to overcome the rigidity of the Fordist era and improve efficiency. This was another strategy to overcome the crisis of accumulation (see Harvey, 1990: 186) and it led to considerable changes in production practices and labour relations. Efficiency had always been a concern for the rational organisation; Taylor sought the ‘one best way’ of using resources while Henry Ford devised the assembly line system as the most efficient form of organising (Crowther and Green, 2004: 10). Now though, these rigid methods were seen as inefficient. In the new regime efficiency was measured in terms of flexibility (Sennett 2006: 52). This legitimated many of the practices that were introduced, for example in the area of labour (Harvey, 1990: 192).

One important innovation was to de-integrate the organisation. De-integration meant that many functions that had previously been carried out in-house were outsourced to other firms (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 155). This happened on a global scale; as a benefit of globalisation corporations were able to move their production facilities to regions where labour is cheaper while keeping their information-based activities, such as product design, in countries where the workforce is better
educated (Ruigrok and Tuldor, 1995: 199; Allen, 1992: 194). This made the organisation smaller and thereby reduced fixed costs. Organisational flexibility also involved de-layering the hierarchy. Instead of an up-and-down chain of command, responsibility has been devolved to individual workers and departments. This removed layers of management, leading to a flatter organisational structure (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 156).

Another significant change was the switch from fixed-function to task-oriented labour. This addressed the need to make organisations more nimble and responsive to a changing market. Task-oriented labour means that employees are taken on and let go depending on the task in hand, or alternatively multi-skilled employees are deployed to various tasks (Sennett, 2006: 48; Thompson and McHugh, 2005: 158 – 160). With casual labour contracts, companies are better able to react to periods of slow growth by reducing staff numbers. Multi-skilled workers offer flexibility because they can take on different tasks as needed.

Harvey argues that such changes in working practices were an attempt to increase surplus value (1990: 186). Surplus value is created by the labourer who works on the product and adds value to it (Morrison, 1995: 80 – 81). Through exploitation of labour, that is, by getting the labourer to do this work without paying them commensurately, the owners manage to keep the surplus value for themselves (Harvey, 1990: 180). Thus by getting labourers to do more work in the day, owners can increase surplus value and boost profits. These changes in labour practices were dependent on the relaxation of labour laws and the weakening of unions, and they therefore created insecurity among the labour force (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 95).

Such changes in structures and working practices have changed the shape of organisation in the new economy. Clegg argues that, ‘where modernist organization and jobs were highly differentiated, demarcated and de-skilled, post-modernist organization
and jobs are highly de-differentiated, de-demarcated and multi-skilled’ (1990: 181). Roles and techniques are no longer rigidly defined (Bagguley, 1991: 157). There has been a rise in flexible labour contracts, including contract, shift and part-time work (Thompson and McHugh, 2005: 156 – 160). In addition, as a result of de-integration, small firms with flexible structures have emerged, which are linked in with the larger, more permanent organisations. This gives rise to a two-tier labour market: those who work in larger institutions enjoy relatively secure employment while those in smaller firms operate under more contingent circumstances (Miller et al., 2005: 115 – 116).

At the same time as labour conditions have been destabilised for many workers, there has also been a change in the nature of work. This is due to changes in factory production as well as the emergence of new types of industry. In the new regime of factory production, which is based on innovation and flexibility, workers are valued for their knowledge (Lash and Urry, 1994: 121). They are expected to act quickly, reflexively and autonomously. Lash and Urry argue, ‘this kind of reflexive economic actor is no longer to such a great extent circumscribed by the constraints of “structure”, subject to the rules and resources of the shopfloor’ (1994: 122). Thus where workers are expected to think for themselves and act on their own initiative, the old system of hierarchical control and clearly defined tasks is no longer appropriate.

**Service Industries**

Beyond changes at the level of organisational structures and practices, the post-Fordist, or post-Industrial economy saw significant growth in service industries relative to manufacturing. Harvey argues that one reason for the growth of service industries was de-integration, since functions that had previously been carried out within the firm, for example legal services, were now undertaken by outside firms (1990: 157). Allen attributes it to the fact that consumers had more money to spend on services (1992: 157).
Areas such as finance, insurance, property, health and education have all attracted investment and seen significant growth (Carpenter and Jefferys, 2000: 170).

The growth of service industries was a key factor in the breakdown of the traditional Fordist, bureaucratic model. In the service industries, knowledge and information are the raw materials and do not require the usual factory setting that was necessary for heavy goods. Furthermore, the development of “clean” technologies, that is, computers and electronic equipment, has facilitated a move away from heavy machinery and large workforces (Allen, 1992: 172 – 173). Hesmondhalgh observes that the boom in the cultural industries during the 1980s and 1990s should be considered in the context of this overall shift to service industries (2002: 90). Internationalisation of financial and regulatory systems also played a decisive role in the growth and consolidation of media industries.

**Internationalisation**

The attempt to overcome the crisis of accumulation also led to expansion into new geographical markets and sectors of industry. Mosco argues that these efforts may be understood as ‘the institutional extension of corporate power’ (2009: 158). To take geographical expansion first, the post-Fordist era saw a profound change in the spatial arrangement of the economy from national to international and global in scale. While transnational, mainly US based, corporations had prospered in the post-war years, the economy was mainly organised along national lines. Many countries in Europe, including Britain and France, had exercised protectionist policies in the Keynesian era, imposing limits on entry and foreign ownership. Ireland was an exception to this trend, having adopted a policy to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the 1950s.

However, in the 1970s businesses sought to expand abroad in order to develop new markets to overcome the crisis of accumulation. Hesmondhalgh argues that
corporations moved beyond their domestic borders in an attempt to ‘restore higher profits by investing abroad, in order to spread fixed costs, and to make the most of the cheaper labour markets, as real wages rose in advanced industrial economies’ (2002: 92). Harvey describes this phenomenon as a spatial ‘fix’ (1990: 183).

In order to be able to move freely across national borders, corporations depended on favourable regulation. In the 1980s and 1990s, the OECD countries created open capital markets by lifting trade tariffs and restrictions on inward and outward investment (Glyn, 2006: 65). The global market was also made possible by trade agreements at regional and global level and the creation of international financial institutions (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 28). The IMF, World Bank and WTO supported open economies while the European Single Market, created in 1986, aimed to harmonize national legislation to make trade between countries easier (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 28).

Internationalisation of the economy undermined the Keynesian model and with it, the autonomy of the nation state (Preston, 2001: 175). For example, Peck observes that the globalization of finance meant that nation states lost control of ‘one of the most important macroeconomic levers – establishing interest rates’ (1996: 182). Syvertsen, discussing the media industry, argues that transnational companies treat the media as a single global market with local subdivisions, and if the regulatory framework is not satisfactory, activities may be moved to a different country or region (2003: 161). This means that national governments are under pressure to provide a favourable regulatory environment. Ireland, as a peripheral dependent economy, is in a particularly weak position (Bell, 1995: 86).

Some argue that the internationalisation of markets and regulatory structures has led to a ‘hollowing out’ of the nation state, as key powers and functions are transferred to supranational institutions (Jessop, 1993; Preston, 2001: 177). However,
Jessop maintains that he does not intend to suggest that the nation state is in demise (Jessop and Sum, 2006: 115). Indeed, the nation state is still an important economic and political entity. One might conclude, therefore, in line with Waters, that while the state is by no means powerless, its sovereignty and its potency have been diluted (1995: 221). As we will see, this was to have a significant impact on public service broadcasting in Europe. To fully understand this impact, however, it is necessary to look at how internationalisation of the economy facilitated the creation of a global media oligopoly.

**Global Media Industries**

Alongside internationalisation of the general economy, the media industries expanded on a global scale during the 1980s and 1990s. Enabled by favourable regulations and advances in technology, a flurry of consolidation led to the creation of a global media oligopoly (McChesney, 1999: 78 – 79). As a result, most of the major media industry segments are now considered ‘highly concentrated’ (Croteau and Hoynes, 2007: 37). These trends reflected those seen in the general economy, but were also a result of factors that were specific to the media industries.

Media products, by virtue of their distinguishing qualities, lend themselves well to expansion. First, media content products are nonexcludable and nondepletatable public goods (Chan-Olmsted and Chang, 2003: 217). This means that consumption of the media product by one individual does not interfere with its availability to another but adds to the scale economies in production. The marginal costs are low, meaning that, once the product, for example a music record, has been made once, it costs very little to make that product available to more people. Therefore, because of the economies of scale involved, there is a huge incentive to increase audience size (Doyle, 2002: 61).
Media companies will also tend to expand because of the high-risk nature of media products (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 18). In the film, print, music and television industries, companies must invest a huge amount of capital without any guarantee of success\textsuperscript{32}. One way to overcome this uncertainty is to invest across a wide number of products and sectors. As long as the sales are high enough, one hit can compensate for the other loss-making products. In television, risk may be spread across the schedule, with more popular programmes offsetting those with smaller audiences (Doyle, 2002: 64).

The advantages that may be gained through economies of scope will also encourage expansion. Hoskins et al. state that ‘economies of scope exist if the total cost of producing two (or more) products within the same firm is less than producing them separately in two (or more) nonrelated firms’ (2004: 100). There are significant economies of scope involved in the media industries. They can be achieved, Doyle explains, ‘whenever savings can be made by exploiting the same content or intellectual property across more than one form of output’ (2002: 63). For example, the soundtrack for a film might be sold separately as a CD, or a television programme might be sold again on DVD.

Advances in digital technology have made it much easier to exploit content across a range of media. Once all media content is produced, stored and distributed using the same digital data, the barriers between different media forms – film, music, television, and so on – break down. This is known as ‘technological convergence’ (Croteau and Hoynes, 2007: 34). For users, it means that a film, say, may be accessed via the Internet or an iPod or a mobile phone. For producers, it means the same content can be easily re-packaged in a variety of forms. For example, once a

\textsuperscript{32} Of course, it is now possible for producers to create and distribute a product on a relatively limited budget, using home digital video technology and the Internet, but this is not cultural production on an industrial scale.
television programme has been produced using digital video technology, it is very easy to distribute it via the Internet or on DVD. The economies of scope involved encourage media companies to expand into other product markets. Therefore, as Croteau and Hoynes argue, ‘convergence of media products has meant that media businesses have also converged’ (2007: 34).

In order to exploit these economic and technological advantages of media products, media companies will seek to expand, either into different regional markets, geographic diversification, or into new product markets, product diversification (see Chan-Olmsted and Byeng-Hee, 2003). During the 1980s and 1990s a spate of mergers took place. Companies bought other companies in the same sector in order to gain greater control of the supply chain; this is known as vertical integration. Other mergers involved integration with companies in a different sector altogether, referred to as horizontal integration (Mosco, 2009: 159 – 160). In addition, large corporations from non-media sectors invested in the media industries (Hesmonhalgh, 2005: 60).

All this activity resulted in an intensely concentrated global media industry (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 39). Williams has commented that the global media system is now controlled by six powerful conglomerates (in New Internationalist, April, 2001). Many of these are controlled by companies from non-media sectors, including for example banking. These companies are keen to ensure that they are not constrained by strict regulation, traditionally a feature of the media sector in Europe (Dyson and Humphreys, 1990: 19).

At the same time as firms are integrating to create large corporations, small firms, which are linked in with the larger, more permanent organisations, are also emerging. The flexible specialisation (FS) model devised by Piore and Sabel (1984), describes networks of small flexible firms that can react quickly to market demands. Miller et al. argue that Hollywood provides the ‘exemplar’ of FS (2005: 14). While
Thompson and McHugh are sceptical of the generalisability of the FS model (2002: 153; 168), flexibility certainly exists in the media industries. In 1994 Barnatt and Starkey identified the emergence of a network of independent flexible television production companies in the UK (1994: 259). Yet, while there is evidence of flexible networks, large broadcast organisations still exist.

Just as internationalisation of the general economy was the result of favourable regulation, so the global media market was enabled by pro-market policies. International trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) imposed free market policies that enabled transnational corporations (TNCs) to move freely around the world (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 31). In Europe, the EU implemented its own pro-market policies and agreements, including the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty. These initiatives led to ‘re-regulation’ of the broadcast sector (McChesney, 2001).

Re-regulation of Broadcasting

We have seen how the compulsion to absorb excess capital drove companies to expand into new markets and led to the creation of a powerful global media industry. It also manifested itself in the pressure to privatise broadcasting in Europe (Garnham, 1986: 225). Public service broadcasting had originally grown out of a fear of commercialism. Now, however, there was support for introducing commercial competition. A number of factors contributed to this drive towards re-regulation of the broadcast sector.

The post-Fordist economy was based on neoclassical, or neoliberal economics, which promotes the sovereignty of the individual and the notion of choice (Caporaso 33 http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/treaties_singleact_en.htm http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/economic_and_monetary_affairs/institutional_and_economic_framework/treaties_maastricht_en.htm [Accessed August 2009]
and Levine, 1992: 79 – 80). In this environment, the monopoly public broadcast system was seen as outdated and there was a call for greater plurality of content. It is worth noting that this logic is contested. Seaton argues that in a broadcast system which is based on the sales of audiences to advertisers, the ideology of choice is ‘absurd’: The introduction of more competitors will reduce advertising revenues both by spreading them between a greater number of channels and by splitting potential audiences into even smaller groups. As the main incentive will remain the attraction of the largest audience possible, the competing channels, less constrained by regulation to produce a variety of programmes, will tend to show more of the same or similar programmes. (Seaton, 1997: 313)

Despite this argument against introducing competition, the political Right made the case that ‘media pluralism would be best served by abolishing public-service monopolies in favour of the ‘free market’’ (Humphreys, 1996: 131). Similar arguments are still made today34.

Aside from the economic argument for choice, socio-cultural change created a climate that was favourable to the abolition of the public service monopoly. In the 1960s and 1970s there was greater liberalism and permissiveness, and less deference to tradition and authority (Humphreys, 1996: 131). Public broadcasting came to be seen as paternalistic, elitist and out of step with audiences’ needs (Prehn and Jehnsen, 1993: 218). The concept of catering for a homogenous national public became increasingly problematic and there was a recognition that broadcasting should cater to a ‘number of publics with increasingly fragmented characteristics, interests and tastes’ (Richeri, 2004: 180).

Technology also provided practical justification for deregulation of broadcasting. When broadcasting was first developed, the relative scarcity of

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34 In August 2009, James Murdoch, chief executive of News Corporation gave the keynote address at the Edinburgh International Television Festival, in which he argued that the BBC’s dominance of the online news sector threatens plurality of news provision. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/video/2009/aug/29/james-murdoch-edinburgh-festival-mactaggart [Accessed September 2009]
frequencies had created a monopoly (Humphreys, 1996: 113). Now, however, technological developments meant that it was possible to have a number of channels and therefore the scarcity rationale for government intervention was no longer valid (Dyson and Humphreys, 1990: 21). Advances in technology also solved at least one form of market failure, because cable and satellite broadcasters could use encryption technology to charge directly for their product (Doyle, 2002: 76 – 77). This made broadcasting more attractive to the commercial sector and undermined the need for state patronage.

The advertising sector played a key role in implementing commercial broadcasting (Tunstall, 1977: 56). As companies expanded worldwide, advertising agencies followed their clients into new markets to sell their products, who then sought ‘the seizure of the media’ (Schiller, 1978: 11). Herman and McChesney describe how the advertising agencies and their corporate partners, seeing the economic potential of commercial broadcasting, ‘clamoured for creation of commercial broadcasting to replace the existing public service systems’ (1997: 15). Moreover, in the new free market economy, Herman and McChesney argue that commercial media provided ideological reinforcement for neo-liberalism, ‘promoting the virtues of commercialism and the market loudly and incessantly through their profit-driven and advertising-supported enterprises and programming’ (1997: 37). Advertising and commercial media therefore play a supportive role in the creation of a market economy.

The calls for putting an end to the public service monopoly were facilitated by a political sector that was already disposed to market-based regulation. The public service model had arisen out of a mistrust of the market; now though, commercialism was no longer feared or demonised (McQuail, 1998: 112). Indeed there were voices arguing that market conditions could actually achieve social goals better than a monopoly broadcasting system (Richeri, 2004: 181). The global recession of the 1970s also
sparked a move away from state provision of services. Writing about Finland, Lowe and Alm note that ‘economic hardship encouraged the political market to embrace deregulation and open market forces because criticism of the Nordic welfare state contrasts inefficiency in the public sector with efficiency in the private’ (1997: 172).

As outlined above, neoliberal economics dominated national and international political institutions during the 1980s and 1990s (Preston, 2001: 175; Humphreys, 1996: 161). The US led the way with free market policies while Dyson and Humphreys argue that the UK acted as a ‘Trojan horse’ for American ideas in Western Europe (1990: 7). At the regional level, the European Union (EU) supported an open market and its policies were driven to a great extent by private, transnational economics (Sussman, 2003: 114). Murdock and Golding identify an ambivalent position in relation to communications policy within the EU; they argue, ‘it is widely acknowledged as central to Europe’s future position in the global economic order’ and ‘it is also seen as key to constructing a new symbolic sphere’ (2000: 117 – 118). In spite of the cultural symbolic significance of media, EU audiovisual policy has been driven by economic rather than cultural concerns.

The European Commission claimed jurisdiction over broadcasting by arguing that since it was an activity carried out for remuneration, it ‘fell within the scope of the Commission’s powers’ (Collins, 1994: 55). In doing so, the Commission has disavowed all cultural aspects of broadcasting and regulated it as an economic concern like any other. Dyson and Humphreys argue that it has been ‘subsumed in a wider consideration of the future information economy’ (1990: 21). Collins argues:

It is an odd feature of Community history that policies to do with competition and market structures have been more important than have overt and explicit broadcasting and audio-visual policies in shaping the audio-visual and broadcasting sectors in the European Community (1994: 144).
As a result, although the EU supports the right of Member States to maintain a public service broadcasting system, its own policies support commercial broadcasting. The main instrument for establishing a commercial broadcasting market in Europe was the Television without Frontiers Directive.

In line with the EU’s economic goals, the Television without Frontiers (TWF) Directive was designed to create a common European audiovisual market. In the 1980s the EU was concerned with creating a powerful Europe-wide media industry that could compete with the US media system. Humphreys states that from the 1980s the European Commission, out of concern about the future competitiveness of Europe’s audiovisual and electronics industries vis-à-vis US and Japanese competition, ‘lent its considerable weight to the argument for a liberalisation of Europe’s internal market’ (1996: 174). First drafted in 1989, the Directive removed barriers to trade between EU member states, laid down common rules, introduced quotas to boost independent production and established commercial broadcasting across the region35. These measures were then implemented at national level across the EU.

The rate and exact character of commercialisation varied from country to country throughout Europe (Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 15). For example, Britain was the first country to liberalise its telecommunications sector (Dyson and Humphreys, 1990: 25). It introduced radical measures to create market conditions in its media industries (Murdock and Golding, 2000; Crissel, 1997: 235). Thus, as McChesney argues, when examining any national media system, it is necessary to consider local factors and variances as well as global influences (2003: 28). However, Humphreys argues that the internationalisation of media markets has had a homogenising effect on regulation (1996: 159). With the roll-back of the Keynesian Welfare State and the

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breaking down of national trade barriers, national governments have less autonomy and this means that ‘the scope for distinctive national regulatory structures is now measurably weakened’ (Humphreys, 1996: 159).

Officially, the EU respects the rights of individual states to determine the type of media system in their country. For example, the Amsterdam Protocol, signed in 1997, allows member states to determine for themselves the means of funding public service institutions36. In practice, however, governments are constrained because they must work within the parameters set by the Commission. Collins argues that the liberal policy nexus has eroded both the accustomed privileges of European public service broadcasters and national sovereignty over broadcasting (1994: 162). EU member states are obliged to permit the free movement of goods and services. It was inevitable, therefore, that once the EU decided to establish a European broadcasting market, Ireland would have to follow suit.

Compared with other European countries, the break-up of the public service monopoly came relatively late to Ireland. When radio broadcasting was first introduced in the 1920s, it was established as a public monopoly to be funded through a mixture of commercial and public revenue. Television arrived in 1961 and a second channel was launched in 1978. As noted in chapter one, although the monopoly lasted until the late 1990s, RTÉ was competing with channels from abroad during this time (Hazelkorn, 1995: 101; Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997: 119). Channels from the UK and elsewhere were available to households across the country, either over the air (due to signal spill-over) or via cable, MMDS and satellite. Thus, even before the Irish system had officially been deregulated, Humphreys notes that RTÉ was ‘thoroughly inundated by English language satellite TV’ (1996: 190).

In the 1980s, against the backdrop of the introduction of the impending Television without Frontiers Directive, the Irish government began to consider deregulation. The discussions that surrounded the issue at the time focused mainly on economic issues and the creation of a media industry; as Flynn argues, ‘significantly improving the range and quality of broadcasting in Ireland was at best only an afterthought – the needs of commerce and of industrial development appear to have been at least as significant’ (2002: 163; see also Bell, 1995: 75). It was argued that an extra television service would boost the independent production sector, although there were doubts over whether the Irish advertising market could sustain a third television channel (Flynn, 2002: 165). There was, however, a stronger case for establishing commercial radio. Pirate radio was already well established, indicating a demand for more radio services (Horgan, 2001: 150).

In 1988, the Irish government introduced the Radio and Television Act, which provided for radio services at community, regional and national level and for a national television service. The local radio sector grew into a successful industry and by 2002 there were twenty four licensed independent local radio stations (Truetzschler, 2004: 119). However, the licensee for the national television service, Windmill lane Consortium, had difficulties attracting investors due to uncertainty over advertising revenue (Hazelkorn, 1995: 100). Eventually it secured investment from CanWest, a Canadian-based media company with global interests and the station, known as TV3, was launched in 1998. The arrival of TV3 completed the process of integrating RTÉ into an international commercial broadcasting system.

The Irish broadcast environment was already quite competitive at this point due to the availability of cable and satellite services in many areas. However TV3’s arrival

37 The Act also established a regulator for the private sector, the Independent Radio and Television Commission (IRTC).
posed a serious threat to RTÉ, since it directly targeted the Irish audience and was available across the country. RTÉ had always relied on commercial revenue, but now it had to compete for advertising. In the monopoly era, Humphreys argues, ‘reliance on supplementary advertising was not allowed to ‘marketise’ the broadcasting system’ (1996: 120). However, once a broadcaster has to compete for advertising their modus operandi must change. Rod Allen, former controller of development at LWT explains:

As soon as (the) monopoly goes, … then a commercial broadcasting company … has to change its agenda and programmes simply become, as they are in classic commercial broadcasting economics, the currency whereby the sales people buy the audiences which they sell on to advertisers. (Allen and Miller, 1994: 29)

This view is echoed by Michael Grade of Channel 4, who stated ‘once you’ve got competition for revenue, that’s the end of public service broadcasting’ (Kenny in The Irish Times, January 25, 1989, cited in Flynn, 2002: 170). Hence, once TV3 arrived, RTÉ had to become much more focused on its competition.

**Public Service Broadcasting in a Market System**

The growth of the global media industry, and the extension of corporate reach into new sectors, have transformed broadcasting in Europe from an activity that was once relatively insulated from commercial pressures to one that is now integrated into the market system. This system is driven by profit motivation and pursuit of economic efficiency. There are sound social and democratic reasons why broadcasting should not be part of a market system. Public service broadcasting was developed to protect it from market pressures. Yet, today public service broadcasting operates in an environment that is dominated by commercial logics and practices. This presents a number of problems for public service broadcasters.

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38 As noted above, some UK channels had already been selling advertising space to Irish businesses on a limited basis before TV3 began operating, using opt-outs (which involves splitting the broadcast signal for different regions).
Immediate challenges include falling audience share. The huge growth in the number of channels has led inevitably to a loss of audience share, although public broadcasters have managed to hold their own (Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 66). McQuail points out that in countries across Europe, the majority of the audience still watches the public channels and argues that ‘there has been no true ‘break-up’ of the ‘mass audience’” (1998: 125). Steemers, meanwhile, argues that audiences ‘will continue to want the set menus of trusted generalist channels in addition to the side dishes of niche content’ (1998: 104). Nevertheless, in most European countries public broadcasters’ audience share has dropped since the early 1990s39.

This is a major concern for European public broadcasters, not least because, as Hujanen points out, audience share is now ‘considered critical for political legitimation’ (2000: 76). In order to justify receipt of the licence fee, public broadcasters are under pressure to prove they are serving the audience, and increasingly this is being measured in terms of audience ratings (Flynn, 2002: 173). The fall in audience share is also a matter of concern for commercially funded public broadcasters because it threatens advertising revenue. Moreover, public broadcasters face the challenge of competing with channels that have a commercial motivation and programming strategy. They must continue to fulfil their public service remit, while competing with channels that have relatively few programme restrictions (Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 66).

Operating in a global commercial market, public broadcasters also have to contend with rising costs. The increase in channels and the extension of transmission hours has increased demand for programming and this has pushed up acquisition costs, particularly in the areas of sport and films (Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 16). The independent production quota set by the TWF Directive exacerbated this problem; until

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2001, RTÉ’s quota was calculated as a portion of the station’s total programme budget and this was subject to ‘rampant inflation in the global television market’ (Corcoran, 2004: 104). Public broadcasters face a particular difficulty in the area of sport rights. If they try to compete with better resourced competitors, they run the risk of diverting valuable resources from other programme areas... However, if they fail to provide sufficient coverage of cherished sports such as football, they undermine their commitment to fulfil a broad programme remit; and this in turn may undermine the public support which forms the basis of public service broadcasting’s principle funding source, the licence fee. (Steemers, 1998: 102)

The global programme marketplace creates a dilemma for public broadcasters because although they are supposed to be insulated from market pressures, they are expected to compete with commercial organisations for rights (McQuail, 1998: 115). In more recent years, public broadcasters have also had to bear the cost of switching over from analogue to digital broadcasting (Iosifidis, 2007: 73).

Competing with commercial services and rising costs are pressing issues for public service broadcasters. Yet the broader, more challenging issue is that the role of public service broadcasting is undermined in the new television environment. Since re-regulation began, the broad-ranging remit and funding model of public service broadcasting has come under close scrutiny (Coppens and Saëys, 2006: 265 – 267). Some have argued that public broadcasters’ role should be reduced to fulfilling ‘those tasks that are not interesting from a commercial point of view’ (Coppens and Saëys, 2006: 263). This could be interpreted as an attempt by the commercial sector to increase its share of the market by attempting to restrict the public service remit.

Commercial interests are also critical of public spending, arguing that the licence fee gives public broadcasters an unfair competitive advantage (Papathanassopoulos, 2002: 71). During the 1990s, a number of complaints were made

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40 Under the Broadcasting Act, 2001 (and the subsequent Broadcasting Act, 2009), the amount to be spent on independent productions was changed from a percentage of the programme budget to a set amount, which should rise in line with the consumer price index.
to the European Commission regarding abuse of state aid and distortion of the market by public broadcasters (Hulten and Siune, 1998: 34). In response to such challenges the European Union had to intervene to delineate ‘the boundaries of public television more rigorously’ (Richeri, 2004: 186). While the 1997 Amsterdam Protocol acknowledged the importance of public service broadcasting for the ‘democratic, social and cultural needs of each society’, it required Member States to explicitly define the public service remit and to ensure that public funding did not affect competition. Then, in 2001 the European Commission called for a more precise definition of the public service remit and for greater transparency in the allocation of public funding (Coppens and Saeys, 2006: 266). The effect of these interventions is that although there is support for public service broadcasting within the European Union, public broadcasters are much more restricted in their spending of public money; this effectively undermines the broad-ranging public service remit.

Alongside this attack on public funding and the public service remit have come accusations of inefficiency. Public broadcast institutions had gained a reputation for being ‘overstaffed, costly and bureaucratic’ (Ytreberg, 2002: 292). While this argument was not entirely unjustified, at least in RTÉ’s case, it should be considered in the context of the wider neoliberal political climate. Public broadcasters were now subject to demands for greater economic efficiency and accountability (Coppens and Saeys, 2006: 273 – 280). This reflects a broader political move to ‘reform’ the public sector (Born, 2004: 214; see also Alvesson and Thompson, 2005: 493).

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41 In 1999 TV3 complained that the Irish government was failing to monitor RTÉ’s use of licence fee revenue. Private broadcasters in other countries lodged similar complaints (Coppens and Saeys, 2006: 266).

In Pursuit of ‘Efficiency’

The tumultuous events of the 1970s created an entirely new political economic regime, based on flexibility and laissez-faire, neoliberal policies. It gave rise to new modes of organisation in business, which marked a departure from the Fordist system. Whereas Fordism had been characterised by a hierarchical system of control, strict division of labour and standardised production, the new era ushered in flexible working practices and organisational structures. This altered the traditional bureaucratic structure of organisations and created a new kind of autonomous worker, producing the need for new forms of management and control.

This new political and economic landscape system also created more integrated international markets and opened up new sectors of production, including broadcasting. As public service broadcasting has been incorporated into a market environment, Lowe and Alm argue that it has undergone a process of value transformation, whereby norms, standards and practices have changed (1997: 187). As McQuail argues, public broadcasters are expected to ‘behave according to a commercial logic’ (1998: 115). In pursuit of competitiveness and economic efficiency, demanded by regulators and essential for survival, public broadcasters have adopted the flexible working practices and organisational structures seen in the general economy.

The evolution of scheduling from an informal practice to a management tool is the key manifestation of these changes. It has emerged as an instrument of control in the de-integrated, more flexible public broadcast organisation, managing budgets, workers and strategy. The next chapter will situate this transformation within a deeper theoretical discussion of organisational change.
Chapter Three: Scheduling and Rationalisation - A Theoretical Framework

In the last chapter, we saw how a shift in the political economic landscape brought about a new kind of economy, based on neoliberal, laissez-faire regulation, open, flexible markets and product differentiation. This contributed to commercialisation of the broadcast sector and created an environment in which public broadcasters are under pressure to operate according to a commercial logic and at the same time fulfil their public service remit. But how exactly were these developments experienced at the organisational level? What changes, if any, did they effect on work and management practices and, in particular, on scheduling?

In order to understand the role of scheduling in RTÉ, a theoretical framework is required that will situate it within the broader organisational structure. Max Weber’s theory of rationalisation provides such a framework; it allows for an analysis of the organisational changes which RTÉ has undertaken in response to environmental conditions, and in particular the central role of scheduling in this process. It provides a means for understanding the effects of imposing a commercial logic on a public broadcast organisation. However, according to some commentators Weber’s theory of rationalisation and model of bureaucracy are not relevant in the current socio-economic context. Therefore, there are a number of issues which need to be resolved before the model can be usefully applied to scheduling in contemporary public broadcast organisations.

For some, the shift from a Fordist regime to a laissez-faire, flexible economy indicates that the bureaucratic mode of organisation has disappeared. The argument goes that, with more diverse consumer demand and product differentiation, a rise in service industries and the emergence of the autonomous, reflexive worker, the old, rigid bureaucratic structures are rendered outmoded and inefficient. Therefore, it is argued,
Max Weber’s bureaucracy model is no longer a useful analytical tool to understand organisations (see Josserand, Teo and Clegg, 2006: 55; Höpfl, 2006: 9; Briand and Bellemare, 2006: 66).

Against these arguments, this chapter will assert that while there have been significant changes in the political economic environment and in organisational structures and practices Weber’s model is still a relevant and valuable analytical tool. While organisations and their socio-economic environment have changed, the essential characteristics of the rational system are maintained and actually strengthened in contemporary organisations. When it comes to public service broadcasting, the chapter will argue that, in response to environmental changes in the media sector organisations are actually becoming more rational, taking greater efforts to increase control, calculability and predictability of outcomes. Scheduling is at the heart of that process.

**Weber and Rationalisation**

Max Weber was a German sociologist, born in 1864. Originally a scholar of law, Weber’s interests spanned the fields of economics, politics and sociology. His career was interrupted by illness and he died in 1920 at the age of fifty six. In spite of this, Weber is credited with providing a fundamental contribution to the modern theoretical social sciences and to organisational theory (Parsons, 1947: 7; Fincham and Rhodes, 1992: 226; Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005: 501). His work represented an attempt to explain the experience of the modern, Western world. According to Albrow, ‘the overall thrust of Weber’s work was to explain why people act as they do within the structures of meaning in which they find themselves’ (1992: 320). At the core of Weber’s work was the concept of rationalisation, or rational action, which Höpfl describes as the ‘defining theme’ of modernity (2006: 16). This theme runs throughout Weber’s work, whether he is discussing the economy, political administration or law.
Rationalisation may be described as the process by which rationality, or rational action, comes to govern all social life. Its key features were ‘the increasing depersonalization of social relations, particularly in work, the increasing importance of specialization for modern life, and the concomitant intellectualization of realms of knowledge, especially culture, scientific and religious life’ (Clegg, 1994: 52). The rise of rational action ultimately shaped modern Western society and its institutions, ‘the market, technology, law, the state’ (Clegg, 1994: 52). Weber saw rational, goal-oriented behaviour ‘as the central dynamic of western capitalist societies’ (Fincham and Rhodes, 1992: 229). Thus, for Weber, the process of rationalisation defined modernity.

Weber did not identify rationalisation in any one social sphere, for example the economy, as the single causal factor in the spread of rationality.43 Nevertheless, he identified two major trends which contributed to rationalisation of society: the rise of the money economy and intellectualisation. Weber argued that with the introduction of money, people began to apply a quantitative reasoning to all their activities: ‘everywhere it has been money which was the propagator of calculation’ (Weber, 1978: 107). That is, individuals treated all decision-making as a calculation, or weighing up of means and ends. Eventually this ‘money rationality’ permeated all social life (Morrison, 1995: 219).

‘Intellectualization’ was also a key factor in the rationalisation of society (Weber, 1948: 139). Weber argued that with scientific progress, rigorous method and logic were emphasised as the only tools necessary to understand the world. People could study the world and make decisions based on evidence. Weber explains:

Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the

savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This is above all what intellectualization means. (Weber, 1948: 139)

Thus intellectualisation, and the rise of the money economy, led to a situation where individuals approached all decisions as a weighing up of means and ends, costs and benefits.

Weber argued that disenchantment, the process whereby science and empirical knowledge leads to the rejection of religious beliefs and superstitions, was a condition of modernity (1948: 149). He recognised this as a double-edged sword. Calculation increases the capacity for rational thought and the commitment to base decisions on evidence rather than blindly following traditions or customs. However, Weber also argued that a ‘corollary’ of rationalisation was the experience of living with uncertainty because it brings with it a sense that the world is without meaning (Smart, 1999: 26). Brubaker observed that disenchantment ‘divests the world not only… of obstacles to instrumentally rational action but also of its meaning’ (Brubaker, 1984: 80). Thus rationality eradicated the values and beliefs that people had previously relied on to give meaning to their lives. This was the basis of Weber’s ‘cultural pessimism’, his belief that “rationalization of the world” would ‘produce for modernity an “iron cage of bondage” (Clegg, 1994: 50).

Rational Action

As part of his social enquiry project, Weber attempted to understand the subjective meaning of social action, that is, in terms of the meaning a person attaches to an action. He categorized social action into four ideal types: instrumentally rational

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44 Weber defines social action as action that ‘takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby orientated in its course’ (1978: 4). The methodological approach of attempting to understand social action in terms of its subjective meaning for the actor is known as Verstehen (Parkin, 2002: 19)
action, value-rational action, traditional action and affectual action. In general, Weber argued, action is ‘governed by impulse or habit’ and he classified action of this sort into two types: traditional and affectual (or emotional) (1978: 21). Here, behaviour is unreflective and reactive, determined by either emotions or custom (Weber, 1978: 25). However, Weber argued that with growing intellectualisation, individuals increasingly engaged in rational action over traditional or affectual action. With rational action the subjective meaning of the act is ‘brought clearly into consciousness’ (1978: 22). This means that, rather than blindly following tradition or acting out of impulse, the individual considers the meaning of the act and has worked through his reasons for behaving in a particular way.

Rational action refers to behaviour that is purposive. That is, it is oriented towards achieving goals (as distinct from Habermas’ concept of rational communicative action, where the aim is to reach understanding through discussion (1984: 275)). Rational action consists of ‘the methodical attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of adequate means’ (Weber, 1948: 293). It goes beyond behaviour based on tradition or custom, or simply because of the emotional state of the actor. Instead it entails logical contemplation of the available means to a given end.

Weber distinguished between two categories of rational action, one where the decision is based purely on a logical assessment of ‘worldly conditions’ and the other where behaviour is influenced by some underlying value or set of principles. Value-rational action (wertrational) is determined by some guiding set of values. That is, an individual will choose to act in a particular way because they believe in the value ‘for

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45 Ideal types were a ‘methodological instrument’ (Whimster, 2001: 4). Weber argued that ideal types should be ‘considered merely border cases which are of special and indispensible analytical value, and bracket historical reality which almost always appears in mixed forms’ (Weber, 1978: 1002). That is, ideal types rarely occur in reality, but are to be used as a benchmark to compare and analyse real-life examples.
its own sake’ of that behaviour (Weber, 1978: 25). For example, a person may choose to abstain from food because they believe in the religious value of that act. Weber also points out that the individual will engage in this action, ‘independently of the prospects of success’, that is, regardless of the outcome (1978: 25). Value-rational action appears to be similar to traditional or affective behaviour, but Weber distinguishes it because it involves ‘self-conscious’ deliberation of the act and the values governing it (1978: 25).

Instrumentally rational action (zweckrational), or formal rationality, is defined as ‘when the ends, the means and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed’ (Weber, 1978: 26). Hence, Brubaker argues that formal rationality refers primarily to the calculability of means and procedures (1984: 36). The greater the degree of calculability the more it is possible to weigh up the relative merits of means, ends and secondary consequences. It also demands that the individual is not influenced by any guiding values, religious beliefs or superstitions, but only by the evidence to hand. As Weber puts it, action is ‘determined by the expectations as to the behaviour of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as “conditions” or “means” for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends’ (1978: 24). Thus, the individual has a definite aim and will consider, through an assessment of empirical evidence, or ‘worldly conditions’, the various ways to achieve that goal as well as the consequences of each course of action (Weber, 1948: 339).

Instrumental rationality meant that people were no longer constrained by religious values, traditions or custom. This provided many benefits in modern society. Intellectualisation and science provided the ‘tools for thought’ by which people could study the world. On the basis of that scientific knowledge they could assess the consequences of their action and make rational choices (Weber, 1948: 150). The use of scientific tools to devise means also ensured ‘consistency of outcome’ (Morrison, 1995: 83).
Brubaker argued that all the facets of this rational approach, for example specialised knowledge, erosion of the magical, ‘further[s] in a general way the purposeful, calculated achievement of any and all substantive ends.’ (1984: 37, author’s emphasis).

**Economic Action**

Alongside social action, Weber characterised another form of action, economic action. As with social action, Weber’s analysis of economic action related to its subjective meaning for the actor (1978: 64). He defines economic action as ‘any peaceful exercise of an actor’s control over resources which is in the main impulse oriented towards economic ends’ (1978: 63). That is, any activity which is based on the provision of needs, or utilities (Weber, 1978: 64). It includes, but is not limited to the activity of a profit motivated business (Weber, 1978: 64). RTÉ, in providing programme services using its available resources, is engaged in economic action.

Weber made a distinction between economic action and economically oriented action. Economically oriented action refers to ‘action which, though primarily oriented to other ends, takes account, in the pursuit of them…of the consciously recognized necessity for economic prudence’ (1978: 64). Simon identifies this as the principle of efficiency, which ‘is characteristic of any activity that attempts rationally to maximise the attainment of certain ends with the use of scarce means’ (1976: 39). Since resources are generally always limited all organisations, including RTÉ, will tend to act with economic prudence in their activities.

Even when an individual faces a technical problem, which consists solely of choosing the best means to an end, they may still strive to achieve that task efficiently.

As long as action is purely “technical” in the present sense, it is oriented only to the selection of the means which, with equal quality, certainty and permanence of the result, are comparatively most “economical” of effort in the attainment of a given
end… Thus, in a question of whether to make a technically necessary part of a machine out of iron or platinum, a decision on technical grounds alone would, so long as the requisite quantities of both metals for their particular purpose were available, consider only which of the two would in this case best bring about the given result and would at the same time minimize the other comparable expenditure of resources, such as labour. (Weber, 1978: 66)

However, whereas technical problems are only concerned with the task at hand, economic action takes account of other considerations and is concerned with the overall satisfaction of wants. Continuing with the metals example, Weber explains ‘once consideration is extended to take account of the relative scarcity of iron and platinum in relation to their potential uses’ the action is economic (1978: 66). So as Brubaker explains, where the actor has a clearly defined end, he ‘adopts a technical point of view, and calculation is limited to the weighing of alternative means to a fixed and given end’ (1984: 56). On the other hand, where the actor has a number of possible alternative ends in mind ‘he adopts what Weber calls an economic point of view, and calculation extends to the weighing of alternative ends and unintended but foreseeable secondary consequences as well as means’ (Brubaker, 1984: 56).

The concept of technical rationality is echoed in the ‘one best way’ logic that dominates organisations. This concept underpins ‘the pursuit of the supposedly objective, supposedly obvious and given, goal of increasing efficiency’ (Jackson and Carter, 2000: 215). However, few problems can be solved with a purely technical approach. In daily life, as in politics, business and other social spheres, there is seldom a single fixed objective and choices are rarely as simple as finding the best technical means to an end. Thus as Brubaker remarks, ‘Weber explicitly contrasts the formal rationality of money accounting with what he calls the substantive rationality of economic action, the latter an inherently evaluative concept’ (1984: 11). The concept of economically oriented action and the distinction between technical and economic problems highlights the fact that, in order to make the best use of limited resources,
choices must be made about which goals to pursue and the consequences of various
courses of action.

Holten and Turner argue that the conceptual distinction between technical action
and economic action allows Weber to highlight a broader concern regarding the
‘allocation of resources between a variety of ends’ (1990: 51). As a public service
broadcaster that relies on advertising revenue RTÉ must maintain commercial viability
and fulfil its public service mandate. These needs are often consistent, but not always;
for example the obligation to serve minority audience groups is not likely to earn
significant advertising revenue. Moreover, RTÉ is bound by the principle of universal
service, which means that it has to cater for the whole of society and provide a broad-
ranging programme service. Thus RTÉ has to achieve a variety of objectives that are
often contradictory. Consequently, actors within the organisation have to balance the
organisation’s resources between a variety of ends, choosing which audience groups to
serve and what programme areas to invest in. Such choices cannot be made in a strictly
instrumental, value-free fashion.

**The impossibility of value-free action**

Action is said to be more rational the less it is influenced by values. This is because as
Weber argues, ‘the more unconditionally the actor devotes himself to this value for its
own sake… the less he is influenced by considerations of the consequences of his
action’ (1978: 26). However, Weber also acknowledged that this does not work in
practice. Since, more often than not, action does not consist of a strictly technical
calculation of *the* best way to achieve a given objective, choices have to be made. The
end goal may not be fixed; there may be more than one goal or task to complete, or
there may be a number of possible courses of action which will each lead to different
consequences. Such choices can only be made with reference to some guiding value
principle.

Where an individual has a choice about which aims to pursue they can only
make this decision based on some ulterior criterion; as Weber puts it ‘choice between
alternative and conflicting ends may well be determined in a value-rational manner’
(1978: 26). There must be some decisive factor for choosing one over another.
Furthermore, even if it is possible to achieve all goals, a decision still has to be made
about how to prioritise them. Again, this involves some reference to ulterior values
because otherwise there is no way to judge which one is more important than the other.

On the other hand, the actor may, instead of deciding between alternative and
conflicting ends in terms of a rational orientation to a system of values, simply take
them as subjective wants and arrange them in a scale of consciously assessed relative
urgency. He may then orient his action to this scale in such a way that they are
satisfied as far as possible in order of urgency… (Weber, 1978: 26)

Furthermore, more often than not there are a number of possible ways to achieve a
particular goal. Each way will achieve the objective, so how is the individual to decide
which one to choose?

The answer is that he must consider the secondary consequences of each. This
requires that other criteria be applied because, as Brubaker argues, ‘there is no objective
way of assessing the “value” of the secondary consequences’ (1984: 57). For example a
gardener may decide between two ways of sowing plants, one will achieve the result
quickly and the other neatly. Each approach will achieve the end goal of sowing the
plants, but in choosing the gardener must decide whether she values speed or aesthetics.
Therefore, even relatively straightforward tasks or goals cannot be approached in a
purely instrumental fashion; they require some relation to values. In daily life
individuals and organisations, including RTÉ, must constantly assess which goals and
objectives to prioritise and weigh up the relative merits of particular courses of action.
These decisions must be based on some ulterior value or criterion.
Weber pointed out that instrumentally rational action almost always requires some relation to values. However, he also argued that value-rational action brought its own problems. For example, the individual who fasts will do so because it is in keeping with his religious values, even though he could eventually end up starving to death. So, the action may be rational to the person on religious grounds, but when the consequences are considered it may seem irrational. Likewise, the gardener who devotes himself to aesthetics may spend so long planting neat rows of lettuce seeds that he does not get time to plant anything else that day. This would seem completely irrational to someone who favours speed.

This example suggests that a person can only act in accordance with one set of values. This arises out of a clash between the different value systems of the various ‘departments of life’, or ‘social spheres’ (Weber, 1930: 36). Weber argued that each of the social spheres – political, legal, economic, intellectual and religious – operates according to a particular value system. A value sphere is ‘a distinct realm of activity which has its own inherent dignity, and in which certain values, norms and obligations are immanent’ (Brubaker, 1984: 69). Brubaker argues that the clash between value spheres ‘arises out of differences in the inner structure and logic of different forms of action’ (1984: 73). Because of the inherent differences between alternative value spheres, an individual who acts in accordance with one set of values will find that his actions conflict with those of another.

For example, Weber argued that the religious sphere is at odds with the logic and values of the economic sphere. He argued that that this was due to the impersonal nature of money, which conflicts with the ‘religious ethic of brotherliness’ (1948: 331). As discussed in the previous chapter, this clash is also evident when public broadcast organisations face criticism for inefficiency. Such judgements are based economic or commercial criteria; inefficient is taken to mean economically inefficient.
Brubaker argues that the conflict between value spheres is ‘irreconcilable’ (1984: 62). Yet, in daily life one encounters different social spheres and must learn to deal with this. RTÉ also has to contend with competing values spheres: legal, economic, social. It is a public service organisation that operates in a commercial market system. Its funding model brings these competing values into sharp relief; it is required by law to provide a public service yet it is also expected to operate as a quasi-commercial broadcaster. In his discussion on the Protestant Ethic, Weber argued that the Protestant psychology overcame the tension between the religious ethic and the ethics of the modern world by justifying work as serving God’s will (1948: 332). However, Weber believed that even if one manages to reconcile the different value spheres, they are always, in principle, in conflict. As we saw earlier, by taking an instrumental approach, the gardener is able to achieve speed and aesthetics but only by sacrificing both to some extent; neither can be satisfied completely.

The Public Service Rationality

The discussion of competing value spheres raises the question – what is the substantive rationality of public service broadcasting? This is a difficult question to answer, since public service broadcasting is different in each country, depending on the social, political and economic context. Moreover, it is constrained by a variety of competing interests and pressures. Yet, all public service broadcasting systems rest on some core values or ideals (see Hujanen and Lowe, 2003: 20 – 21 and Bardoel and Lowe, 2007: 11 for a synthesis of discussions on the public service broadcasting ethic). These include universal service, supporting the democratic process and assisting social and cultural development.

The ideal of universal service is based on the principle that broadcasting is for everyone and is owned by everyone. From this flow rules on equal access to
broadcasting and public funding (whether through licence fees or some other mechanism). Supporting the democratic process entails providing quality news and information. It also depends on representation of a plurality of viewpoints (Bardoel and Lowe, 2007: 11).

Assisting social and cultural development has always been an important element of public service broadcasting, although it has been rearticulated to reflect contemporary social conditions. For example, as Jauert and Lowe outline, in the early days of public service broadcasting, the cultural mission was defined in terms of nurturing national cultures (2003: 15). However, Karppinen notes that in the 1970s and 80s a “pluralistic consensus” emerged in media and cultural policy and representation of the multiplicity of social experiences and identities became a priority (2006: 56). This new socio-political climate gave rise to criticisms of public service broadcasting as outdated and paternalistic, as noted in chapter two. In response, the public service mission was redefined. Thus, in 1960, RTÉ was charged with ‘preserving and developing the national culture’. In 2009, it is required to ‘ensure that the programmes reflect the varied elements which make up the culture of the people of the whole island of Ireland, and have special regard for the elements which distinguish that culture and in particular for the Irish language’.

Arising out of these principles, public service broadcasting missions share a commitment to universality of appeal; provision for minorities; distance from vested interests; provision of a wide of range of informative, educational and entertaining content; and supporting cultural expression (Tracey, 1998: 26; Hujanen and Lowe, 2003: 20 - 21). Tracey refers to this last element in terms of creating a broadcast system that encourages competition in good programming rather than competition for numbers.

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As outlined in the introduction, this study focuses on two aspects of the public service mission that are directly affected by scheduling practices: creativity and diversity. Creativity is vital for cultural expression and, therefore, a prerequisite to assisting cultural development. Diversity of political viewpoints, cultural identities and programme types is essential in fulfilling the ultimate goals of universal service, supporting democracy and assisting social and cultural development. Creativity and diversity are the focus of this study because they are directly affected by scheduling practices and moreover, as we will see, by the growing tension between culture and commerce in the public broadcast sector.

The ‘Paradox of Rationality’

The dilemmas and contradictions that arise between instrumentally rational and value-rational action, between different value systems, and between the ideal types and the reality, have led some writers to refer to the paradox of rationalisation (Schluchter, 1979: 11) and the irrationality of rationality (Brubaker, 1984: 22; Clegg, 1994: 70; Albrow, 1987: 181). However, although it appears as though there are many contradictions in the concept of rational action, in the end it seems to be a question of balance.

Instrumentally rational action, or formal rationality, means that the individual approaches a problem with a cold, detached eye. He is not driven by any particular set of values, although he is able to apply value judgements in choosing which objectives to pursue and in assessing the relative merits of possible courses of action. This suggests that for action to be rational, it must not be over-determined by values, yet neither should values be ignored. Thus, as Brubaker puts it, formal and substantive rationality
are in ‘perpetual tension’ (1984: 36). This tension, or balance, prevents either formal or substantive rationality from dominating. For this reason Collins regards Weber’s theory as a ‘conflict theory’ (1986: 97).

Thinking about RTÉ, then, it is possible to say that while it is important to act according to the values, or principles, of public service broadcasting, it also has to consider the consequences of its actions. For example, RTÉ could invest in expensive original programming to reflect Irish life and culture, but the organisation might eventually go broke. However, by balancing value-led action with an instrumental, calculated approach, RTÉ might be able to have the best of both worlds.

It seems however that Weber was pessimistic about whether this balance between formal and substantive rationality can be maintained. An instrumental approach ensures that action is based on a logical consideration of means, ends and secondary consequences. Ultimately, though, this means forsaking values because rational action demands that one is not influenced by any ulterior set of values or beliefs. Therefore, Weber argued that ‘the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’” (1948: 155).

Having looked at the general concept of rational action and having considered the relationship between formal and substantive rationality, it is now time to look at Weber’s model of bureaucracy. This model represents the epitome of formal rationality applied to organisations, the ideal type. It is of critical relevance to this study; it will help us to explore the consequences of applying a formal rational logic to scheduling practices in RTÉ and examine the possible effect on the organisation’s ultimate goals and values. First though, a brief note on Weber’s use of the ideal type.
Ideal Types

Ideal types are theoretical constructions, used as a heuristic device to understand social reality. They formed an important part of Weber’s methodological approach. He argued that the function of the ideal type ‘is the comparison with empirical reality in order to establish its divergencies or similarities’ (Weber, 1949: 43). That is, ideal types could act as a benchmark, against which actual cases in reality might be measured and understood. Used in this way, ideal types allow one to examine the variations between the model and the reality and understand the reasons behind such variations (Parkin, 2002: 29).

Ideal types are therefore not supposed to reflect empirical reality exactly, although they are based on actual phenomena. Weber writes that the aim of such classification is ‘to formulate in conceptually pure form certain sociologically important types to which actual action is more or less closely approximated’ (1978: 26). Ideal types distil the object of study down to its essential features. As a consequence, Parkin points out, ideal types will tend to emphasise certain features while playing down ‘atypical features’ (2002: 35). This is necessary in order to generalise, for the purposes of analysis. That is not to say that such idiosyncrasies do not occur in reality. Of course they do, and one of the benefits of the ideal type is that it draws attention to those atypical features. The challenge then is to uncover how the actual case differs from the theoretical model and why.

Weber used ideal types throughout his writing. When he wrote about social action, he distinguished between four ideal types (affective, traditional behaviour, formal rational action and substantively rational action) (1978: 25 – 26). Yet Weber stressed that ‘it would be unusual to find concrete cases of action…which were oriented only in one way or another’ (1978: 26). In fact, as we saw, even at a conceptual level, action can never be purely instrumental or rational and always requires some reference
to values (Weber, 1978: 26). Therefore the ideal type is simply intended to aid explanation.

Weber’s central thesis was that modern society was defined by the way in which rationality, or rational action, came to govern all social life. He described how the process of rationalisation influenced the various departments of social life, economics, politics, science, and so on. For example in the economic sphere, Weber argued that rationalisation had created capitalism. Yet the form of capitalism he described was not identical to the system which would be found in reality. Weber’s model describes the kind of economic system that would exist if it were driven only by formal rationality, even though in practice this would never happen.

The reason it would never happen is because, as discussed earlier, action will always be influenced by values and moreover, there will always be competing value systems at work. As Eldridge comments, ‘once we have an image of society in which there are competing rationalities entailing with different values and interests… then we can appreciate why Weber’s ideal type of capitalism, in terms of its formal rationality, was not realized in practice’ (1994: 81). Rationalisation in one social sphere is prevented from advancing to its fullest extent because there are competing rationalities, or value systems, in the other social spheres. As discussed above, RTÉ operates in a market system and is part funded by commercial revenue; it is therefore far from the perfect model of public service broadcasting. Indeed, as mentioned above, it is difficult to speak of a perfect public service model because public service systems are constrained by financial, political and social pressures. Nevertheless, the ideal type helps us to understand the empirical reality.
Bureaucracy

As referred to above, rationalisation is the process by which rational action came to dominate all areas of social life, including organisations. Along with the modern capitalist economy, Weber identified bureaucracy as another ‘facet of the overall social process of rationalization’ (Albrow, 1992: 317). He analysed organisations within his broader socio-historical study of rationalisation and he saw the emergence of bureaucracy as one aspect of that wider historical process (Gajduschek, 2003: 709). The model of bureaucracy represented the most rational form of organisation – an ideal type.

While the model was a theoretical construct, it was based on an actual historical period47.

For Weber, the structure and social reality of modern economic organizations and administrative systems, including bureaucracy, emerged out of specific historical processes relating not only to markets, trade and technology, but also to political and legal structures, religion, and socio-cultural ideas and institutions. (Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005: 503)

Weber argued that the bureaucratic system arose because modern society necessitated a highly rational form of administration (1978: 972). Key functions of the modern state, such as social welfare and security, required a centralized administrative system that could manage a large amount of information and carry out tasks quickly and efficiently. The system of formal law required a rational means of application (Gajduschek, 2003: 709). The capitalist market also required ‘precision, steadiness, and, above all, speed of operations’ (Weber, 1978: 974). Weber argued that the bureaucracy was an instrument, ‘which can be put at the disposal of quite varied interests, purely political as well as purely economic, or any other sort’ (1978: 990). Thus, in modern society, state organisations, armies, private capitalist enterprises, educational institutions and religious orders could all be organised along bureaucratic lines (Weber, 1978: 223).

47 Weber compared earlier political systems from throughout history, including the Roman Empire, with the form of administration in Germany at the time (Höpfl, 2006: 9).
Weber’s concept of bureaucracy represented the perfect example, or ideal type, of rational organisation. It is a highly efficient administrative system, capable of managing complex tasks. Kamenka describes bureaucracy as ‘a centrally directed, systematically organised and hierarchically structured staff devoted to the regular, routine and efficient carrying out of large-scale administrative tasks’ (1989: 157; see also Merton, 1968: 250; Höpfl, 2006: 10 – 11). Weber concluded that it was technically superior to any other form of organization: ‘precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction, and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration’ (1978: 973).

So, what was it about bureaucracy that made it so superior? If formal rationality is based on consideration of means, ends and consequences, based on an empirical assessment and without the influence of emotions, personality or recourse to values, Weber’s bureaucracy model represents the essence of formal rationality in administrative systems. It is based on the use of scientific, technical assessment of means, ends and consequences and the elimination of personality and emotions.

Fincham and Rhodes argue that bureaucratic organisation ‘provided the basis for operations to be calculable’, a fundamental aspect of rational action (1992: 230). In Weber’s words, ‘a system of economic activity will be called “formally” rational to the degree in which the provision for needs… is capable of being expressed in numerical, calculable terms, and is so expressed (1979: 85). In an organisation then, any mechanism that allows for precise calculation improves the basis for rational action. This includes accounting systems and any procedure that enables inputs and outputs, costs and benefits to be valued. It also includes rules and techniques which guarantee consistency of action since these too ensure predictability and hence calculability.
Weber outlined the bureaucratic model by describing a set of principles and characteristics (1978: 956 – 958; 217 – 220). Each contributes to the elimination of emotions and values from decision-making and thereby furthers the capacity for precise calculation of technically efficient means to ends. Thus, each element is an expression of formal rationality. First, bureaucratic organisation is based on ‘official jurisdictional areas’. These are roles or jobs that have been clearly defined. Duties and activities are managed through a system of rules (Weber, 1978: 956 – 958). Rules regularise and formalise activity. This creates consistency of behaviour, essential in a bureaucracy; as Merton describes it: ‘if a bureaucracy is to operate successfully, it must attain a high degree of reliability of behaviour, an unusual degree of conformity with prescribed patterns of action’ (1968: 252). Consistency of behaviour ‘makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results’ (Weber, 1978: 223). For example, management can predict how long it will take to complete a task, how many members of staff are required, and so on.

In a bureaucracy, great emphasis is given to specialised technical expertise. Methods and procedures are means to an end that have been ‘consciously and systematically’ devised (Weber, 1978: 65). These techniques, as Weber describes them, are based ‘in scientific knowledge’ (Weber, 1978: 65). Knowledge of these techniques, as well as the rules that govern the organisation, requires training and ‘only a person who has adequate technical training’ will be considered qualified to fulfil an office (Weber, 1978: 218). The emphasis on specialised expertise can lead to a technocratic attitude within the organisation, whereby those personnel who do not possess specialist knowledge are disregarded (Brubaker, 1984: 22).

Files are an integral part of a bureaucracy: ‘administrative acts, decisions, and rules are formulated and recorded in writing’ (Weber, 1978: 219). Clearly defined procedures provide consistency of behaviour across the organisation, which enhances
predictability and calculability. In this sense, Weber’s model reflects Taylor’s one best way system (Gaj dus chek, 2003: 702). Files ensure that once techniques and rules are worked out, they are followed by all members of staff. Files also represent the codification of knowledge, that is, the transformation of knowledge ‘into “information” which can be easily transmitted through information infrastructures’ (Neef, Siesfeld and Cefola, 1998: 117). Training in a field of specialisation involves learning this codified knowledge.

Instrumental or formally rational action is determined only by a consideration of empirical evidence and is not influenced by emotions, beliefs or values. The elimination of personal considerations and emotion allows for a logical assessment of means, ends and consequences. Bureaucratic administration offers such objectivity, that is, it provides for the ‘discharge of business according to calculable rules and “without regard for persons’” (Weber, 1978: 975). Weber argues that bureaucracy works best when it ‘succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation’ (1978: 975). It is based on the principle of: “sine ira et studio”, without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm (Weber, 1948: 334). The strict division between the office and one’s private life is an important feature in this regard (Weber, 1978: 957).

The principle of impersonality also means that people are bound by rules rather than by loyalty to any particular individual. It is important that individual personalities exert no influence so that the organisation can carry on regardless of the persons involved (Weber, 1978: 957; 975). In a bureaucratic organisation subordinates obey because they accept the validity of the system and its rules, and the legitimate right of those in authority to govern. This type of authority is described as rational legal
authority because people accept the system on ‘rational grounds’ (1978: 215). It is therefore ‘the most solid grounds for domination’ (Courpasson, 2000: 143). Because obedience is based on rational belief in the rightness of the rules, it is ‘independent of the personal qualities of leaders and so outlasts individuals’ (Fincham and Rhodes, 1992: 368).

Finally, a hierarchical authority structure, whereby higher officers manage subordinates, is a fundamental component of Weber’s model (Weber, 1978: 956 – 957). Through the hierarchical structure it is possible ‘to monitor behaviour, establish rules and procedures and provide better information and control’ (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 37). Therefore, within this model, the hierarchical structure is central to maintaining the other principles. Weber maintained that the hierarchical structure of control, particularly the monocratic system (where control is from one individual at the top of the organisation) is ‘capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings’ (1978: 223).

Weber described his ideal type of bureaucracy as ‘superior to any other form [of administration] in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability (1978: 223). However, he was also critical of the ‘human consequences’ of bureaucratic administration (Greenwood and Lawrence, 2005: 494). Just as he argued that rationalisation would eventually strip the world of its values, bureaucracy, as a rational institution would produce the same effect. Clegg writes, ‘in Weber’s view bureaucracy is to be regarded almost as if it were a scientific creation that has turned and devoured its human creators’ (1994: 51). Bureaucracy is a self-maintaining apparatus and, once established ‘is among those social structures which are the hardest

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48 This is contrasted with traditional authority, where acceptance of domination is based on a belief in the sanctity of traditions, and charismatic authority, where people obey because they are devoted to the particular individual in power (Weber, 1978: 215).
to destroy’ (Weber, 1978: 987). Chaos would result if the system were to break down and so, even if people are unhappy with the bureaucratic structure, they are powerless to change it once it is fully established. Any hope of doing so would be ‘utopian’ (Weber, 1978: 988). Despite Weber’s reservations about the negative consequences of rationalisation, the field of organisational studies was strongly influenced by his work, in particular the bureaucracy model.

The Influence of Weber’s Model of Bureaucracy on Organisational Theory

Clegg points out that Weber had never intended his work to become the basis of organisational theory (1994: 48). Nevertheless because Weber’s model represented an ideal type administrative system, it had an enormous impact on organisational studies after WWI, when it became available outside Germany (Greenwood and Lawrence, 2005: 494; Clegg, 1994: 48). It was incorporated into a tradition of research that included classical administrative principles, scientific management, also known as Taylorism, and Fordism (see Watson, 1995: 243 – 244). This work was rationalist in orientation; Taylorism for example ‘sees the worker basically as an economic animal, a self-seeking non-social individual’ (Watson, 1987: 44). It is perhaps no surprise then, that Weber’s bureaucracy model was so attractive to these early writers. Taken at face value, bureaucracy represented a highly rational system capable of achieving maximum efficiency. It was adopted as a prescriptive model, as an example of the ideal efficient organisation (Perrow, 1991: 743).

However, although Weber is considered to be one of the founding fathers of organisational theory, his influence has waned over the years (Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005: 501; Clegg, 1994: 46). Some argued that bureaucracy was far from the efficient organisation it had been held to be (see Gajduschek, 2003: 703 – 708). Others pointed to the negative consequences of bureaucratic organisation, in particular its
dehumanising effects (Merton, 1968). Some critics have pointed out that the model does not reflect the reality; for example governance is not simply based on rational-legal authority (Courpasson, 2000: 142). More recently, it has been argued that organisations have been transformed to such an extent that bureaucracy is no longer a useful analytical framework (Courpasson and Reed, 2004: 7).

Some of these criticisms are well founded, while others are based on a narrow interpretation of Weber’s work (Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005: 505). Nevertheless, bureaucracy and rationalisation are still highly relevant to contemporary society. Moreover, Weber’s concepts have much to offer this study as they raise important questions about the consequences of rationalisation of scheduling practices for public service broadcasting. First though, it is necessary to review those criticisms of bureaucracy and where necessary to adapt the model to accommodate the analysis of contemporary organisations.

**Bureaucracy: A Dysfunctional Model?**

One strand of criticism of Weber’s model focuses on its ‘systemic dysfunctionality’, that is, whether it is relevant in the contemporary social context (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005: 486). As a result of huge social, technological and economic change, new forms of organisations have emerged. If organisations today are fundamentally different to the type that Weber described, this obviously casts doubt on the usefulness of the model. In addition, in the face of radical social change Weber’s entire body of work, which sought to understand the experience of modernity, may have to be reconsidered.

Weber hailed rationalisation as the central feature of modernity and bureaucracy as the ideal type administrative system best equipped to meet the needs of the modern nation state. However, intellectual and social developments, including globalisation and
postmodernism challenge Weber’s model (Ray and Reed, 1994: 2). Many commentators would argue that since society is no longer modern and the nation state is no longer a significant political economic entity, Weber’s work is outdated (Ray and Reed, 1994: 2).

Nevertheless, in spite of significant social change, modernity is still a useful description for the developed world, though perhaps the terms ‘late’ and ‘unfinished modernity’ might be more appropriate (Ray and Reed, 1994: 12). Furthermore, while globalisation has significantly reconfigured political and economic institutions around the world, the nation state is still a significant actor the majority of public administration still happens at a national level (Garnham, 1996: 372). Therefore these developments do not render rationalisation outdated or irrelevant to contemporary society. Of greater significance, however, is the emergence of new organisational structures and working practices.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a crisis in the global political economy in the 1970s led to a shift from a Fordist-Keynesian system to what is described variously as post-Fordism, post-industrialism or post-modernism (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005: 487). The post-Fordist period was characterised by an attempt to reduce fixed costs by creating greater flexibility in labour practices and production systems (Harvey, 1990: 147). This led to innovations in organisational structure, including de-integration of large firms and de-layering, where responsibility is devolved to small teams or outsourced, thus facilitating the removal of layers of management (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 155; Sennett, 2006: 48). Flexible work practices were also introduced, including a switch from fixed function to task-oriented labour, and contract-based employment. Whereas the Fordist mode of production was based on strict division of labour, today roles are more loosely defined (Bagguley, 1991: 157). Workers are multi-skilled and task-focused (Clegg, 1990: 181).
These shifts in organisational structures and working practices created a need for ‘less authoritarian styles of management’ (Alvesson, 2002: 7). In the post-Fordist economy, particularly in knowledge-based industries, workers are valued for their knowledge and are expected to use initiative. Sennett argues that workers are afforded ‘a certain measure of autonomy’ in order to deliver ‘quick, flexible results’ (2006: 52). Strict hierarchical control and fixed task labour are not conducive to this kind of working environment. Lash and Urry argue, ‘this kind of reflexive economic actor is no longer to such a great extent circumscribed by the constraints of “structure”, subject to the rules and resources of the shopfloor’ (1994: 122). Furthermore, in post-industrial societies the population is more prosperous, educated and sophisticated (Kamenka, 1989: 164). Therefore, new modes of control and governance were required.

The post-Fordist period thus saw the introduction of a raft of work and management practices. Proponents of the “post-bureaucratic” argument maintain that these trends indicate the emergence of a completely new kind of organisation (see McSweeney, 2006 for an overview of the literature).

Management theorists have pointed to new organizational forms departing from vertical command structures, and turning to horizontal collaborative models, in an attempt to make organizations more flexible and responsive to fluctuating environments, and to unleash workers initiative (Briand and Bellamare, 2006: 65). Hecksher argues that a ‘perception of the fundamental inadequacy of bureaucratic organization, its inability to combine innovation with discipline at the levels required by a modern economy’ has driven these structural changes (1994: 53)\(^{49}\). Thus champions of post-bureaucracy argue that bureaucracy has lost its usefulness, both practically and theoretically (see Höpfl, 2006: 8). However while there have been significant

\(^{49}\) Hecksher proposes a post-bureaucratic model that is based on: interactivity instead of one-way, top-down communication; consensus and persuasion instead of a command hierarchy, and guiding principles of behaviour instead of rules (1994: 24 – 28).
transformations, both within organisations and in the wider socio-economic context, as the next section will show, bureaucracy is still a useful and relevant model.

**In Defence of Weber**

While post-bureaucracy theorists may argue that bureaucracy is outdated and must be abandoned there a number of points that can be made in its defence. For a start, empirical evidence shows that bureaucratic organisation still persists. Public sector administration, for one, is still largely based on long-established bureaucratic structures (McSweeney, 2006: 25). Moreover, Alvesson and Thompson argue that the claims about the emergence of post-bureaucratic organisation are not supported sufficiently by empirical evidence (2005: 491). Heckscher and Procter acknowledge that the examples they provide of post-bureaucracy are isolated and have not become the dominant mode of organising across the economy (Heckscher, 1994: 53; Procter, 2005: 479).

Furthermore, where new organisational forms are evident, they do not necessarily represent a departure from the bureaucracy model (Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005: 516). Many of the features which are presented as evidence of a departure from bureaucracy in fact indicate a revised version, albeit one that is more open and transparent and appropriate for today’s market and workforce (Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005: 516). Indeed, in many cases they indicate an attempt to strengthen, not weaken, bureaucratisation.

As outlined above, hierarchical control is a core element of Weber’s bureaucracy model. Hence, the absence of a hierarchical command structure is taken as evidence of the end of bureaucracy (Briand and Bellamare, 2006: 65). In their case study of a Canadian public sector organisation, Briand and Bellamare found evidence of ‘characteristics usually attributed to post-bureaucratic organization’, including a reduction in levels of management (2006: 72). The hierarchical structure had been
replaced by a ‘centralized model of governance and a flexible, contingent co-ordination’ (2006: 77). Briand and Bellamare show that ‘the new structure is intended to favor rapid, low-cost adaption to a changing environment’ (Briand and Bellamare, 2006: 72).

This horizontal command structure has emerged in a number of decentralised, flexible organisations, suggesting that the hierarchical system of control is a thing of the past (see Sennett, 2006: 48; Procter, 2005; Walton, 2005: 588).

However, while the hierarchical structure may have been adapted, control is still achieved, although in different ways (Courpasson, 2000; Briand and Bellemare, 2006; Walton, 2005: 588; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). Across the economy, particularly the knowledge-intensive industries, organisations have had to implement flexible structures and establish different kinds of relationships with workers. Reflexivity and dialogue between workers and management is encouraged and responsibility is devolved. Yet even though the hierarchical structure has been flattened, as we will see now, management still maintain control by other means, including strategy, budget, information and information technology, and culture.

With a flattened organisational structure, where responsibility is devolved to workers within the organisations or to firms outside, management need some way to control. One of the ways to achieve is through costs. For example, in the New Flexible Firm Model workers are organised into teams or ‘cells’ and cost analysis is used to measure performance (Procter, 2005: 472). By analysing costs and performance for each cell, managers are able to make decisions about which cells should be maintained and which should be discontinued. For workers it means that, while they may not be directly supervised, their behaviour is regulated by the ‘threat of redundancy if productivity is low’ (Procter, 2005: 472). This system is dependent on flexible labour contracts.
Professionals demand a degree of autonomy and therefore require innovative forms of management. Courpasson observed the use of assignment letters to control professionals’ behaviour (2000: 152). These letters ‘objectivize the expected activities of individuals’; ‘then, professional elites can no longer produce their own rules, and moreover, they can easily be controlled through a number of very pragmatic and calculable indicators (number of trips abroad…’)’ (Courpasson, 2000: 153). These calculable measures act as an effective form of ‘disciplinary power’ (see Clegg, 1994: 158).

Strategy is also an important tool in exercising control in an organisation, where direct links between management and staff are weakened, and where roles and procedures are not so strictly defined. Once managers develop and communicate the organisation’s mission and strategy, this sets the parameters for activity. Workers can manage themselves because they are aware of the overall goals (see Bagguley, 1991: 161). Heckscher argues that sharing information about strategy with workers ‘enables individuals to break free of the boundaries of their “defined” jobs’ (1994: 26). Yet even though this mechanism encourages a degree of flexibility in terms of tasks and roles, it still ensures that all workers are ‘on message’, focused on achieving the overall goals.

Related to strategy, management of culture is another alternative means of control (Alvesson, 2002: 6 – 8; Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 191). A strong corporate culture can also ensure that all activity is in line with the organisation’s ultimate aims. This prevents procedures becoming ends in themselves rather than means to an end (Fincham and Rhodes, 1992: 406). Kärreman and Alvesson find that socio-ideological control, which addresses values, meanings, ideas and identities, is an important element of management in knowledge-intensive firms (2004: 171). In a decentralized, de-integrated organisation, corporate culture can act as a unifying force by fostering
common beliefs and values and a shared rationality (Fincham and Rhodes, 1992: 411 – 412).

It is important to note, however, that Kärreman and Alvesson identify socio-ideological control as just one layer of control. In their case study, they found that ‘technocratic controls’ work in tandem with socio-ideological control (2004: 164). So, formal control mechanisms, including hierarchy, defined career paths and standardised work procedures, are reinforced by ‘a shared and elaborate belief, meaning and value system’ (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004: 160). In turn, Egeberg argues that the structure ‘broadly defines the interests and goals that are to be pursued (2003: 2). Courpasson (2000) describes a similar dual control system in his ‘soft bureaucracy’ model. Formal structures, including defined offices, rules, techniques and procedures work with other forms of control to set the boundaries for action. Therefore, control is sustained by both formal and non-formal structures.

Thus, while new organisational structures have emerged, they are not actually any less bureaucratic or indeed more democratic (Jones, 1996: 107). As Courpasson argues, ‘even in horizontal, flat, individualistic and flexible organisations, domination is the core of managerial strategies’ (2000: 154). Sennett draws an analogy between the centralised system of organisational control and an MP3 player.

In an MP3 player, the laser in the central processing unit is boss. … Similarly, in a flexible organization, power becomes concentrated at the center; the institution’s central processing unit sets the tasks, judges results, expands and shrinks the firm. (Sennett, 2006: 51)

It is clear that, whether from top-down or centre-out, management maintain tight control over budgets, performance and outcomes.

Therefore, although organisations today may be structured differently than in Weber’s time they do not operate according to a radically new “organizing rationality or logic” (Courpasson and Reed, 2004: 7). Walton argues that such ‘innovations coexist
with a model of bureaucratic control’, adding, ‘reducing divisions of labour and
reorganizing workflows do not alter overall control of activities significantly’ (2005:
588). Calculability of costs and performance, control of behaviour, securing obedience,
and so on are just as important today as ever. Furthermore, while there is greater
flexibility in a task-focused organisation with regard to roles and procedures, the
concept of the office and hierarchy is still strong. CEOs may make their own coffee, but
secretaries do not make executive decisions.

In fact, while post-bureaucracy proponents may argue that organisational
changes indicate a break with bureaucracy, such adaptations may be necessary to allow
the core system to survive. So, cooperative work practices and participatory decision-
making introduce a degree of flexibility in response to environmental forces, ‘while
leaving mezzo-bureaucratic structures in place’ (Ray and Reed, 1994: 166). As we will
see, RTÉ has had to implement new practices and organisational structures, including
management through strategy and de-integration, yet it remains a bureaucracy.
Bureaucracy is therefore a flexible model that can accommodate variations in structure
and management-worker relationships. If bureaucratic organisations still exist, then
Weber’s model continues to be a valuable analytical tool. Why, then, has Weber’s
model been dismissed by so many? Weber’s ‘fall from grace’ in organisational theory
arises from a narrow interpretation of his work, as well as confusion surrounding the
ideal type (Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005).

**Interpreting the Ideal Type**

As with all ideal types, Weber’s bureaucracy model does not correspond with any actual
organisation or administrative system, although elements of bureaucratic administration
may be found in modern organisations to varying degrees. It helps us to describe the
reality, but does not match it exactly. For heuristic purposes, the ideal type bureaucracy
represented, in abstract form, the kind of organisation that would exist if it were to carry on purely on the basis of formal rationality. As Parkin notes, ‘Weber tended to highlight the positive functions of the system and ignore its dysfunctions’ (2002: 36); this ‘one-sided accentuation’ is part of Weber’s methodological approach (Weber, 1949: 90). It was therefore ‘intentionally rational’ (Albrow, 1992: 317).

It is also necessary to remember that although ideal types are conceptual models they are based on social reality. Weber based the ideal type bureaucracy on the public administration system of post-Bismarckian Germany. As a result, the features he described were of their time and place and would not necessarily be found in other administrative systems. For example, Höpfl points out that the feature of “monocratic rule” based on documentation was particular to the German system (2006: 15). In another time and place these features may not be found. Kamenka argues that some features in Weber’s ideal type may become ‘dysfunctional in changed social circumstances’ (1989: 164).

Kamenka’s point would appear to lend weight to the post-bureaucracy argument because it suggests that Weber’s ideal type is no longer suitable to describe contemporary organisations. However, this interpretation arises from the check-list interpretation of the model because it creates the impression that if one or two features are missing, for example the hierarchical structure, bureaucracy ceases to be relevant as an analytical tool. In fact, as Höpfl points out, Weber provided no criteria for deciding which elements should be included or excluded from the ideal type (2006: 15). Höpfl stresses that ‘an ideal type is not a check-list, but a theory’ or an ‘abstraction’ (2006: 15). Therefore, it is not appropriate to compare actual organisations against the ideal type by searching for a list of features.

So, if the ideal type bureaucracy is not defined by its structural features how can it be identified? Höpfl argues that what is missing from Weber’s model is some kind of
‘connective tissue’ to bind the features of the ideal type (2006: 18). This connective tissue may be found in the broader framework of rationalisation. Instead of looking for a particular set of elements, we should look for the organising logic behind them. Control, calculability, ‘uncertainty reduction’ (Gajduschek, 2003), value-free judgements – these are core elements of formal rationality and they are the guiding principles of rational organisations. With this connective tissue in place the features that Weber described can be understood as variables, or ‘tendencies’, some of which may be stronger in different organisations, while some may be missing (Clegg, 1994: 60). Bureaucracy is therefore a flexible model, ‘a many sided, evolving, diversified organizational device’ (du Gay, 2005: 3).

Ideal types are valuable analytical tools and are to be used as such. However, bureaucracy has been misappropriated in organisational theory and this has given rise to the misunderstanding and criticism of Weber’s work in this field. Research in the mid-twentieth century focused on ‘formal structures as constraining activities’ and drew heavily from Weber (Walton, 2005: 570; see also Clegg, 1994: 46). Rather than being used as an analytical tool, the ideal type was adopted as a model for ‘perfect practice’ (Clegg, 1990: 41). It was interpreted as a check-list of features rather than a theory (Höpfl, 2006: 15). Furthermore, it is argued that problems in translation led to misunderstanding of Weber’s arguments (Chalcraft, 1994: 29 – 32). In general, the model was taken out of the context of the broader rationalisation framework (Scott, 1998: 42).

Misinterpretation of Bureaucracy
The rationalism of those early writers may indicate why they accepted this one-sided reading and why they neglected the role of substantive rationality in organisations (Albrow, 1992: 317). Based on such a narrow, rationalist interpretation of Weber’s
model it makes sense that critics would have pointed to the dehumanising effects of bureaucracy. However, while the ideal type emphasises formal rationality, non-formal structures are also a constituent element of bureaucracy. For example, Weber maintained that rational legal authority is based on belief in the rightness of rules and the legitimacy of those in power to govern (1978: 215). Lounsbury and Carberry argue that domination needs to be understood as ‘the outcropping of the institutionalization of values and norms that stabilize and govern a wide range of social, economic, and political power (2005: 504). That is, it ‘relies on a shared belief system’ (Lounsbury and Carberry, 2005: 504). Furthermore, it is important to note that Weber’s concept of rational-legal authority was also an ideal type; in reality organisations may be based on a mixture of traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority (Fincham and Rhodes, 1992: 368).

Norms and values are affective, intangible factors but they are just as important as the formal structures to the functioning of the bureaucracy. However, because of the way in which the ideal type was adopted into organisational theory, Albrow argues that this side of the story was lost (1992: 317). Substantive rationality may not feature much in the ideal type bureaucracy. However, we know that formal and substantive rationality are always bound together. In fact, Weber’s entire project was concerned with the ‘cultural constitution’ of phenomena and the subjective meaning of social action (Clegg, 1994: 76; Parkin, 2002: 19; Albrow, 1992: 320). Therefore, while he downplayed the role of emotions and values in his bureaucracy model, elsewhere he makes it clear that these are significant. This highlights the need to situate Weber’s work on bureaucracy within his broader theoretical framework of rationalisation.

The criticism of bureaucracy as a dehumanising force may also have come about because Weber’s original text was misinterpreted. For example, Weber argued that bureaucracy works better the more it is ‘dehumanised’, and described workers as cogs
in a machine. However, what Weber was getting at was the need to operate in a consistent manner without the intervention of particular individuals. Albrow points out that his use of the word impersonal actually means ‘businesslike’.

The German word translated as impersonal in this context is ‘sachlich’ which means attending to the matter in hand’ or ‘businesslike’. … A good doctor in a consultation will be ‘sachlich’ but not impersonal. (Albrow, 1992: 318)

Similarly the metaphor of the iron cage of rationality is contested. The common interpretation as noted above is that of a prison, which suggests ‘a context in which existence is played out under restraint’ (Chalcraft, 1994: 30). However, other interpretations indicate something akin to snail’s shell, ‘which is part and parcel of their very existence’ (Chalcraft, 1994: 30). This is arguably still a constraining force, but no more than any other cultural influence. Therefore, Ray and Reed suggest that the concept of the iron cage has been ‘overstretched’ (1994: 4).

Furthermore, the iron cage as a prison metaphor assumes that the ideal type holds true in reality. It suggests that formal rationality dominates and that people are powerless against the bureaucratic structure. In fact, formal rationality is counterbalanced by substantive rationality; people disrupt the perfect order of formal rationality with their emotions and values. Moreover, Weber argued that rationality can liberate as well disenchant. Therefore, it can be argued that in an organisation formal rules and procedures provide structure for action, acting as guiding principles which are then interpreted on the ground\(^{50}\). However, structures can also constrain action; budgets, for example, limit the amount of time and resources available and this inevitably shapes the outcome.

With a better understanding of Weber’s methodological approach and of how ideal types should be interpreted, bureaucracy provides a valid and useful model for

\(^{50}\) Sennett argues that interpretative modulation is built into a bureaucratic pyramid and this prevents the iron cage effect (2006: 34).
understanding organisations in the contemporary world. The model can accommodate variation in organisational structure because the fundamental basis of bureaucracy is a formal rationality or logic, not defined structures and mechanisms. Moreover, once bureaucracy is understood within the broader context of rationalisation, this opens up the possibility of much richer analysis of rationality in organisations.

**Conclusion**

Weber’s theory of rationalisation is challenging and at times apparently contradictory and confusing. Yet it is also highly compelling and absolutely relevant in the current socio-economic environment. The discourse of rationalisation abounds as organisations, particularly in the public sector, seek to become more efficient (see Alvesson and Thompson, 2005: 488). The rise of scheduling as a management tool is a direct response to the demand for cost efficiency and accountability. Weber’s theoretical framework can help us to understand the impetus driving such developments and the possible effects. There are a few elements in particular that are worth highlighting, before moving on to examine the process of organisational change in RTÉ.

Formal rational action is theoretically value neutral; it is directed only by a rational consideration of means, ends and consequences and is not motivated by any underlying values or beliefs. Likewise bureaucracy, as a formally rational organisation, is supposedly value-neutral. Weber describes bureaucracy as ‘a precision instrument which can put itself at the disposal of quite varied interests’ (1978: 990). The features and organising logic of the formally rational organisation, emphasising consistency, calculability and control, are designed to contribute to the efficient attainment of given ends. This would suggest that RTÉ could apply the principles and structures of bureaucracy to provide public service broadcasting in a more organised, efficient and rational manner.
However, Weber also points to the consequences of ‘the specifically modern calculating attitude’ (1978: 86). Bureaucracy has its own ‘rationalized inner structure’ (Weber, 1978: 989). Therefore, there may be certain goals that cannot be fulfilled through formal means. The basic principles of bureaucracy – calculability, impersonality, consistency – may be inimical to certain endeavours. For example, rules and strictly defined procedures may inhibit the freedom necessary for creative activity. Thus, it is necessary to interrogate the consequences of rationalisation for RTÉ and public service broadcasting. In other words, it is necessary to scrutinise the suitability of the means to the ends.

The concept of economic action is also relevant here. RTÉ has to fulfil a range of responsibilities and objectives and must allocate its resources between these various ends. Hence, RTÉ management have to constantly make evaluative judgements, balancing their obligations as a public service broadcaster with the need to compete in a commercial market for advertising. The concept of economic action suggests that this can be achieved through scheduling management. With full control over programme output, management can ensure that all needs are fulfilled in the schedule.

However, as discussed above, even when taking such a rational approach there must be reference to a single guiding set of values. Otherwise, how can one choose between alternative ends (Weber, 1978: 26)? If different values systems will always be in conflict, RTÉ cannot balance its public service and commercial obligations. Instead, either public service or commercial values will dominate scheduling practices and ultimately destroy the other.

The theoretical framework of rationalisation therefore poses a conundrum. According to Weber’s analysis, public service and commercial rationalities are always going to conflict with each other. Yet, different value systems are imposed on RTÉ by virtue of its dual funding model and its position in a commercial market system. Can
RTÉ manage to balance these different values and objectives by taking a rational economic approach to scheduling? Or is there a fundamental conflict between commercial and public service logics, which cannot be overcome? The theory can, of course, only take us so far. To understand how these concepts relate to RTÉ it is necessary to take a closer look at the structures and practices in the organisation. The next chapter will begin that examination by charting the rise of scheduling as a management tool in the context of wider organisational change.
Chapter Four: Inside RTÉ - A History of Rationalisation

The last chapter showed that in spite of significant change in the wider socio-economic environment, rationalisation and bureaucratic control continue to define organisations today. In fact, it appears that organisations are attempting to become more rational, with the overall aim of improving efficiency. This chapter will show how political, financial and competitive pressures have compelled RTÉ to seek greater control and efficiency, and how this has resulted in the adoption of scheduling as a management tool.

Organisations exist within a wider social context and are shaped by environmental forces. These forces, including economic and political factors (for example market conditions and the regulatory system), and the general social and cultural climate, influence everything from the organisation’s mandate to formal structures and everyday practices (see Scott, 1995: 114 – 132; Granovetter, 1985: 481). Gallagher argues that in media organisations ‘sources of external constraint’, such as political and commercial pressures, play a key role in the formation of routines and practices (1982: 154 – 162). Therefore, this chapter will analyse how those macro-level political and economic trends, which shaped the European broadcast environment have affected organisational structures and practices in RTÉ.

RTÉ was established in 1960 as a monopoly public service broadcaster\(^5\). From the beginning, the organisation was funded through a combination of licence fee receipts and advertising revenue. Thus RTÉ has always had to contend with the difficulties of balancing commercial viability with public service. The tension between these objectives has affected programming and scheduling decisions since the 1960s,

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\(^5\) The organisation was established through the Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960. It was originally known as Teilifís Éireann; the name was changed to Radio Teilifís Éireann in 1966 (Holt and Sheehan, 1997: 78)
although during the monopoly era this was far less significant than it is today (see Doolan et al., 1969: 328 – 330; also Broadcasting Review Committee, 1974: 44).

In addition to a legacy of conflict regarding its dual funding status, RTÉ was also well used to criticism over its management of economic resources. For example the 1974 Broadcasting Review Committee noted concern over RTÉ’s high levels of staff and suggested there was a need for control and review procedures to ‘ensure economy and efficiency’ (1974: 38). However, it was really only in the 1980s, when the broader ideological climate had shifted, that public sector organisations, including RTÉ, came under scrutiny (see Bell and Meehan, 1988: 80). As support for neo-liberal, market based regulation grew, so too did hostility towards the public sector. As Hujanen argues, ‘the standard accusation was that public service broadcasters were economically inefficient and were wasting public resources’ (2000: 75). Thus the process of restructuring that took place in RTÉ throughout the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s reflected a wider trend towards rationalisation in the general economy and particularly in the public sector.

Public Service Broadcasting & Free Market Politics: The Stokes Kennedy Crowley Report

As discussed in chapter two, a crisis in the Fordist-Keynesian economy sparked a raft of changes in organisational structures and working practices. These were taken in an effort to increase flexibility, now seen as a key factor for success in the post-industrial economy. Rigid, bureaucratic structures were considered unsuitable for the production of niche, information-based products in a rapidly changing, global market, particularly in the services and media industries. With the general commercial economy moving in this direction, the traditional bureaucratic structure of the public sector came to be seen as outmoded and inefficient. In this context, RTÉ came under fire.
Although the free market ideology was not quite as potent in Ireland as in the UK (see Holt and Sheehan, 1997: 80), it would still have a significant impact on the Irish government’s policy on broadcasting. Moreover, given Ireland’s position as a dependent economy, Ireland was subject to regulatory capture and had little choice but to follow international policy in relaxing labour laws and deregulating markets (Bell, 1995). It was in this context that in 1985, the Irish government commissioned financial consultants Stokes Kennedy Crowley (SKC) to examine RTÉ. This had been prompted by a row between the government and the RTÉ Authority earlier that year over the appointment of a new Director General (The Irish Times, May 3, 1985). It also anticipated the arrival of satellite television and long wave radio (Walsh in The Irish Times, March 2, 1985). Yet the general concern that instigated the report, expressed by the Taoiseach (prime minister) at the time, related to perceived shortcomings in efficiency and productivity (The Irish Times, May 3, 1985).

SKC had already consulted for the BBC and Channel 4; not surprisingly then, Bell and Meehan note, their conclusions and recommendations for RTÉ echoed those reports, advocating ‘free market remedies for the problems of public service’ (1989: 106). The use of financial accountancy firms, who applied an economic rationality in their assessment of the public broadcaster’s performance, would become common practice in Ireland and elsewhere (Born, 2004: 224)\(^\text{52}\). The comprehensive report made a wide range of proposals, including ‘a radical shift in financing, labour structures and programming regime within the state broadcaster, and the creation of an independent commercial production sector’ (Hazelkorn, 1996: 36). Hazelkorn described the proposed strategy as one of a ‘managed privatization of RTÉ’ (1996: 36). Many of these proposals were aimed at achieving the kind of flexibility that was now so valued in the

\(^\text{52}\) Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2001
wider economy. Management practices which had, up until the 1980s, been regarded as efficient now had to be revised (see Davis and Scase, 2000: 130).

The SKC report acknowledged that there was a strong public service ethos among management and staff in the organisation. However, it was critical of the lack of concern, at all levels of the organisation, for economic issues (1985: 21). It referred to a slowness to ‘accept that, if revenue is limited, so also must expenditure be kept below revenue to meet day-to-day expenditure’ (SKC, 1985: 21). It argued that there appeared to be an attitude among staff and management that the State should hand out money without due regard for accountability and value for money (SKC, 1985: 21). This insistence that there was a need for all personnel to concern themselves with financial issues was anathema to the notion of ‘creative space’, the idea that creative workers should be insulated from economic concerns (see Eikhof and Hauschild, 2007: 523). It was also a radical departure from the model found in the BBC, characterised by relatively autonomous production departments (Burns, 1977; Davis and Scase, 2000: 56).

The consultants also criticised work and management practices in the organisation. One example given in the report was the union rule that stagehands were not allowed to use hammers, which created a need for carpenters (SKC, 1985: 160). The negative attitude towards trade unions reflected the ideology of the post-Fordist era. In fact, Born argues that one of the key aims of restructuring the British broadcasting industry was to reduce the power of the unions through the casualisation of labour (2004: 180). The report also referred to failures in management, in relation to use of resources. For example, it noted that due to a lack of forward planning, studios and editing suites, including support staff, could lay idle (SKC, 1985: 33). It proposed the introduction of a “market contestability” model, similar to the BBC Producer Choice
system, whereby internal facilities departments would compete with the private sector (Bell and Meehan, 1988: 80).

To its credit the report’s main criticisms and recommendations relate to the need to focus resources on programming, albeit the proposals were justified on commercial grounds. It stated, ‘the TAM ratings show a good response to home produced programmes, and advertisers are therefore interested in advertising during and adjacent to such programmes output’ (SKC, 1985: 32). At that time home programming made up just thirty five per cent of output (SKC, 1985: 46). This was due to funding shortages, arising from the government’s refusal to grant a licence fee increase (Bell and Meehan, 1988: 78). Therefore the consultants advocated an increased investment in home programming as a strategy for survival.

One of the reasons cited for the poor performance in relation to home programming was a lack of strategic planning. The report noted that although targets had already been set for levels of domestic production in the schedule, these had not been met.

There does not appear to have been any attempt to break down these global programme objectives into targets for individual managers and action plans have not been developed to aid management achieve the objectives. These deficiencies, we believe, are due in part to the failure of the Authority and the Office of the Director-General to develop proper corporate objectives and plans (SKC, 1985: 32).

The problem, according to the consultants was twofold: first, senior management were not developing strategic goals and second, there was no structure in place to ensure that these goals were implemented. What was being criticised, in essence, was the lack of a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure which prevented communication of strategic goals from management to production departments and any kind of accountability to ensure the goals were achieved.
To direct the organisation’s focus towards programmes, improve control and increase cost efficiency, the report proposed separating RTÉ’s scheduling function from its programme making activities. The intention was to give the scheduling department greater power within the organisation. The report also recommended developing an independent production sector in Ireland (see Bell and Meehan, 1988: 80). This reflected the trend towards de-integration (Thompson and McHugh, 2002: 155). Together, these measures would allow ‘the Channel Controller to select those programmes which provide the best value for money, regardless of source’ (SKC, 1985: 38). This formed the basis of scheduling management and it is interesting to note that the strategy was proposed as far back as 1985. This is consistent with Søndergaard’s (2002) argument that the introduction of scheduling as a management tool was a phased process.

Following the publication of the SKC report, a number of its recommendations were implemented. The level of domestic production in the schedule improved (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997: 113). The introduction of new technologies facilitated reduction in total staff numbers and redeployment, although it initially caused conflict between unions and management (Hazelkorn, 1996: 33). In addition, non-permanent labour contracts began to be introduced (Hazelkorn, 1996: 36). This reflected developments in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. Born argues that ‘one of the most striking developments in the broadcasting industry in the eighties and early nineties was the casualisation of employment, evident in the drift away from permanent staff jobs and towards a reliance on short term contracts and freelancing’ (2004: 180). However, change, where it did happen, was slow, in part due to difficult industrial relations between management and staff53. Many of the recommendations of the SKC report

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53 A report on relations between management and staff found that ‘traditionally within RTÉ there was a confrontational approach to industrial relations issues. There would be minimal negotiations between
were not implemented. For example, the report had advised the introduction of a deal-based advertising sales system, which would have improved commercial income, but this did not happen\textsuperscript{54}.

Meanwhile, RTÉ was operating under increasingly difficult political and economic circumstances. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s the Irish government refused to grant RTÉ a licence fee increase and consequently, between 1986 and 1995, the proportion of public funding relative to commercial income fell from 46 per cent to 38 per cent (Holt and Sheehan, 1997: 80)\textsuperscript{55}. In 1990, following the introduction of commercial radio and television, the Minister responsible for broadcasting, Ray Burke (FF)\textsuperscript{56} capped the amount of advertising revenue RTÉ could earn. Flynn argues that these events had ‘clandestine motivations’, that is, the desire by government to weaken RTÉ’s position (2002: 163)\textsuperscript{57}.

The cap was reversed in 1993, but in the meantime it had devastating consequences. The loss of revenue forced RTÉ to implement staff cuts, curtail its programme output after midnight and reduce spend on independent productions by 15 per cent, from 3.1m in 1990 to 2.5m in 1991 (Truetzschler, 1991: 33). It also led Irish advertisers to divert to British outlets because the reduced availability of advertising space drove up the cost (Truetzschler, 1991: 33).

\textsuperscript{54} At this time, RTÉ operated a pre-empt system of selling advertising. The pre-empt method was based on an auction system, whereby clients bid to advertise in their preferred slot. Bidding closed at certain time before broadcast and the highest bidder got to advertise in that slot. The system meant that highly sought after slots earned significant revenue, but less desirable ones were not valuable. For RTÉ, while the pre-empt system required less skills and administration, it devalued their advertising revenue. Under the deal-based system, RTÉ undertakes to deliver x number of audience exposures and they decide which slots to place the advertisements in, resulting in more efficient use of advertising space.

\textsuperscript{55} Bell and Meehan note that restricting public funding to RTÉ allowed the government ‘to bring the station to heel politically’ (1988: 78)

\textsuperscript{56} Member of Fianna Fáil parliamentary party

\textsuperscript{57} It is now known that Ray Burke received payments from one of the directors of the new commercial radio service, Century Radio, in return for preferential treatment for the station (Horgan, 2001: 153).
Creating a Market: the Television without Frontiers Directive

In 1989, the Television without Frontiers (TWF) Directive established the independent productions quota, which required all broadcasters in Europe to devote a percentage of their programme budget to works by independent producers58. It was aimed at creating an audiovisual production market in Europe. This would require structural change, as RTÉ now had to de-integrate and outsource production to firms outside the organisation. As discussed in chapter two, de-integration is a central feature of post-Fordist media organisations, which has two important advantages. First, it provides organisational flexibility, which allows the company to ‘respond speedily and appropriately to market signals’ (Hill, Martin and Harris, 2000: 564). Second, it allows the organisation to cut overhead costs by reducing the number of managerial and administrative staff (Hill, Martin and Harris, 2000: 565). As Hujanen notes in relation to YLE, commissioning from independents was seen, ‘both by politicians and the company itself as a measure to increase the cost-effectiveness and flexibility of production’ (2002: 97).

De-integration moved RTÉ further towards a publisher-broadcaster model. A publisher-broadcaster ‘package[s] and transmit[s] broadcasting commissioned from outside suppliers’ (Küng, 2008: 184). Channel 4 in the UK and TG4 in Ireland are notable examples. Küng argues that the publisher-broadcaster model ‘is popular because it allows organisations to offer a broad span of programming and respond quickly to consumer tastes, at a much lower fixed cost base than integrated factory producers’ (2008: 183). Given the significant financial pressures RTÉ was under at the

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58 The Directive was implemented in Ireland through the 1993 Act, which required RTÉ to spend £5m in 1994, with the amount to increase year on year until 1999 when the amount was specified as twenty per cent of the programme budget (S. 4, Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Act, 1993). Available at: http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1993/en/act/pub/0015/sec0004.html#zza15y1993s4 [Accessed February 2010]
time, de-integration offered significant economic benefits. However, as Saundry argues in relation to the UK, the development of an independent sector had ‘little to do with its perceived superior efficiency attributes and instead can be largely attributed to regulatory compulsion’, namely the TWF Directive (1998: 157).

While RTÉ did not move to outsource entirely from the independent sector, the shift towards this model had the effect of separating the broadcast function from the production of programmes (Hujanen, 2002: 92). As noted earlier, the 1985 SKC report had already suggested that the Channel Controller needed to have more power to decide the content of the schedule. The separation of scheduling from production and the availability of alternative sources of programmes strengthened the Channel Controller’s position in this regard. Thus, as Hujanen argues, this resulted in a ‘power shift…in favour of the schedule’ (2002: 92; see also Søndergaard, 2002: 8).

The TWF quota kick-started an independent production industry in Ireland; Bell and Meehan note that much of the finance for these Irish independent production companies came from RTÉ, in the form of redundancy packages (1989: 107). To ensure transparency of accounting RTÉ established the Independent Productions Unit (IPU) in 1993, which would operate as a separate department within the Television Division. The IPU had its own staff, including commissioning editors, and presented separate accounts. Outsourcing to independent companies should have led to a corresponding reduction in staff and fixed costs. However, by 1999 staff numbers still totalled almost 2200 and payroll costs accounted for over fifty per cent of annual running costs (McManus in *The Irish Times*, June 13, 2000)\(^59\). The Chairman of the RTÉ Authority, Paddy Wright argued at the time that this was due to a resistance by staff and unions to “agree that there is a problem” (cited in McManus in *The Irish Times*, June 13, 2000).

\(^{59}\) RTÉ Annual Report, 2003, P. 77
The TWF Directive also abolished public service monopolies and established a commercial broadcast sector across Europe. As a result, during the 1990s, the Irish broadcast landscape became increasingly competitive, with the expansion of multi-channel television via cable, MMDS and satellite services and the arrival of domestic channels. This posed a serious threat to audience share. Moreover, given that the licence fee accounted for just 38 per cent of annual income for 1995 and therefore RTÉ was heavily dependent on advertising revenue, it also represented a serious financial threat (Holt and Sheehan, 1997: 80). The increase in competition led to a drop in audience share, which would eventually lead to changes in programming (see Hannigan in The Irish Times, December 1 1997; see also Neil in The Mirror, August 4 1997).

In this environment, RTÉ and Irish advertisers sought more detailed information about audiences to allow them to target specific demographic groups. So, in 1995 RTÉ awarded the contract to provide television ratings to international media marketing company Nielsen60. Nielsen could provide ‘a more accurate, representative survey of the viewing preferences of the Irish television audience’ than the previous TAM ratings system (Linehan in The Irish Times, September 7, 1996). The awarding of the contract indicates the importance RTÉ now attached to ratings and advertising revenue in an increasingly competitive environment.

By the late 1990s, as competition intensified, RTÉ was also experiencing continuing financial difficulties. Although the 1985 SKC report had made a number of proposals to improve efficiencies, the changes that had been introduced were seen as insufficient (see Hazelkorn, 1996: 30). Meanwhile, public funding was stagnant; RTÉ had been granted a licence fee increase in 1996, but this had been absorbed by programming commitments to the new Irish language channel, Teilifís na Gaeilge

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(Corcoran, 2004: 99 – 101). The organisation was now operating at a loss, although this was offset for a time by extraordinary revenue, from the disposal of RTÉ’s share in Cablelink, a cable distribution company, and video sales of Riverdance. In addition, the proportion of programmes produced in the independent sector was increasing and this would necessarily require restructuring and staff cuts (see RTÉ, 1998: 9).

RTÉ’s circumstances were not unique; elsewhere in Europe, public broadcast organisations were facing growing scrutiny and criticism in relation to public spending. This led many to engage in ‘reform’ and embrace the ethos and practices of the flexible market economy (Ytreberg, 2002: 292 – 293). A notable example was the Producer Choice system that was introduced to the BBC in the mid-1990s. This was an attempt to create market conditions within the organisation and reflected the prevailing pressure on public broadcasters to adopt commercial logics and practices. Harris and Wegg-Prosser argue that within the BBC there was a need to ‘shake off bureaucratic excesses of the past and redeem itself as a worthy recipient of public funding’ (2007: 291).

Once More towards Efficiency: the 1998 Review of RTÉ’s Structures and Operations

The international trend towards transformation of public broadcasters, coupled with the challenges of increasing competition and the organisation’s internal financial difficulties, led RTÉ to embark on another review in 1998. This time the review was carried out by an internal project team, composed of representatives from management and staff. Corcoran, an academic and then Director General of RTÉ, argued that this meant that the ‘quality of analysis was far better than what could be produced by

61 Renamed TG4 in 1999
62 Riverdance was a hugely successful dance show, which originated from a seven-minute intermission performance in the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest.
external consultants’ and that staff supported the findings and recommendations (2004: 108). The report, entitled *Review of RTÉ’s Structures and Operations*, echoed the outlook of the SKC report; emphasising economic efficiency and greater control by management over programming. It argued that ‘organisation structures do not support a clear business focus or a cost-effective operation’ (RTÉ, 1998: 4). It also stated that one of the key aims of the proposed changes was to ‘direct greater proportions of expenditure into programme making activities’ (RTÉ, 1998: 29).

Within the Television department, the review proposed a number of key changes. First, that it should reorganise into a discrete department that would take responsibility for all costs and revenue relating to delivery of the television service (RTÉ, 1998: 42). Re-organising the Television Division as a separate unit, to be responsible for all costs and revenue, was to encourage a business focus, which the report argued was lacking in the organisation (RTÉ, 1998: 3). Prior to this RTÉ was divided into output divisions (Radio and Television) and other ancillary departments, including finance, audience research, legal affairs, and so on (RTÉ, 1998: Appendix I). This structure meant that the Television Division was only responsible for providing programmes and had no responsibility for creating revenue. As discussed in chapter two, ring-fencing production from the rest of the organisation might seem irrational in a commercial factory setting, but it is logical in an organisation dedicated to cultural production in order to limit the influence of commercial logics (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007: 523). Nevertheless, the 1998 review sought to integrate the production and finance departments, arguing that the proposed structure would give the television department greater control over resources (RTÉ, 1998: 42).

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63 It is noteworthy that over ten years after the 1985 SKC Report, the 1998 review acknowledged that some of its key recommendations ‘were never progressed’ (1998: 17). This highlights the fact that while there may have been a general shift towards market-based regulation and practices, there are often many countervailing forces, such as organisational legacies and industrial relations issues, at work.
In relation to control of programming costs, the review acknowledged that since the 1985 report RTÉ had ‘significantly invested in its planning and total programme costing systems’ (RTÉ, 1998: 43). These systems improved calculability of costs, by allowing direct comparisons between internal and external production, and facilitating planning of resources. However, the review called for further improvements in the area of scheduling and planning; it concluded that ‘current programme scheduling and production planning processes are ineffective and cause inefficient use of resources’ (RTÉ, 1998: 43). It suggested the need for ‘programme transmission plans’; these ‘should set the objectives of each programme slot in terms of content, target audience, target costs, minutes required’ (RTÉ, 1998: 46).

These programme transmission plans would provide the basis for administration through files, a core feature of Weber’s bureaucracy model (1978: 957). They would also enhance calculability, by quantifying the value of slots, in terms of audience ratings, and relating this with the production budget, and strengthen management control over production. Hence, these measures reflect a desire to impose rational structures within the organisation, through the establishment of a formal scheduling management system.

The review also argued that RTÉ needed to strengthen its commercial revenue. The ‘pre-empt’ advertising sales method, which the SKC had recommended should be abolished back in 1985, was still in place. Now however, with the imminent arrival of TV3, there was a pressing need to compete more aggressively for advertising revenue. The 1998 review again called for the introduction of deal-based sales, noting that this would require improved sales and marketing skills and IT infrastructure (RTÉ, 1998:

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64 This was the auction system that allowed clients to bid to advertise in their preferred slot. It was thought to depress advertising revenue.
It also recommended moving at least one channel to twenty-four hour transmission to boost revenue (RTÉ, 1998: 163 – 164).

To strengthen the advertising sales function, the review concluded that the sales and programme output departments needed to work closely together and this relationship should be formalised (RTÉ, 1998: 162). It stated that sales needed to have better access to scheduling information, which it could use in negotiations with clients (RTÉ, 1998: 163). This was a significant organisational shift; where before Sales was an ancillary department, secondary to the programme output department, now it would work alongside it. Creating a stronger relationship between sales and programme output departments would help to integrate business and programming strategy and enhance the business focus within the organisation.

Finally, the review advised that a Television Directorate be established, which would be composed of representatives from across the department (RTÉ, 1998: 40). This group would take control of ‘programme strategy; programme schedules; acquisitions; all programme commissions (internal and external); television sales targets; and expenditure budgets’ (RTÉ, 1998: 46). The aim was to strengthen strategic planning and moreover, to integrate the department’s ‘programming and business strategy’ (RTÉ, 1998: 40). This would be achieved by bringing all the various interests together as a group to develop and implement strategy.

The proposals outlined were all aimed at improving cost control and strategic planning. The proposed measures also strengthened the scheduling/programme planning function, by giving management, through the Television Directorate, greater control over programming and allowing strategic goals to drive programme output. The move towards schedule-based planning and resource management at this time mirrored developments in other European public broadcasters and reflects the phased nature of the process that Søndergaard identifies (2002: 7).
Public Service Broadcasting in the Spotlight: The Forum on Broadcasting

The 1998 Review gave rise to the Transformation Agreement, a three-year plan to reduce the organisation’s cost-base and cut staff numbers by 330 (RTÉ, 2001: 5)\textsuperscript{65}. However, by the early 2000s RTÉ was operating at a loss and was now under intense public and political scrutiny in relation to its cost efficiency and accountability. Public broadcasters across Europe were also under scrutiny. The complaints brought to the European Commission in relation to licence fee spending were significant instances\textsuperscript{66}. In this climate, there was an ever-growing demand for PSBs to operate ‘economically, efficiently and effectively’ (Born, 2004: 214).

In 2001 RTÉ applied for a licence fee increase of £50, claiming that it was facing rising costs and was overly-reliant on commercial revenue (RTÉ, 2001: 5; see also Taylor in The Irish Times, September 11, 1999). That year, RTÉ’s operating deficit amounted to €40m (RTÉ Annual Report, 2001: 5). However the Minister responsible for Broadcasting, Síle de Valera (FF), granted an increase of just £14.50. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), the consultants who had recommended the limited increase, argued that ‘any extra could not be justified, particularly given the unacceptably high cost base of the national broadcaster’ (McManus in The Irish Times, March 27, 2002).

Following this refusal, Minister de Valera established the Forum on Broadcasting, an \textit{ad hoc} commission, established to consider the future of Irish public service broadcasting. Some critics argued that this was a political move, designed to defer the decision on a licence fee increase (see O’Toole in The Irish Times, August 31, 2001).

\textsuperscript{65} The Director of Public Affairs at the time, Kevin Healy, acknowledged that these measures had a ‘political as well as a practical dimension’: “Before we go looking for additional public money, we want to say we've addressed inefficiencies in our organisation.” (The Irish Times, January 4, 2000).

\textsuperscript{66} TV3 and a number of other broadcasters in Europe complained that their Member State was failing to monitor the national public broadcaster’s spending of the licence fee.
2002). Nevertheless, it was the first time since the 1970s that there had been any meaningful political consideration of the role of broadcasting in Ireland. The Forum was composed of figures from the corporate sector and experts in broadcasting and took submissions from interested parties and stakeholders. It was asked to consider a number of questions relating to the regulation and organisation of public service broadcasting and the future role of RTÉ in that context.

The Forum was established in the context of RTÉ’s serious financial difficulties and hostile criticism regarding its public spending (O’Connor in *The Irish Times*, March 11, 2002). Indeed, one of the questions the Forum was asked to consider was whether in fact RTÉ should continue to operate as a publicly funded broadcaster. In its findings, the Forum reaffirmed support for RTÉ, concluding that it should continue as a public broadcast organisation\(^67\). It stressed the need for independence from commercial and political interests (O’Toole in *The Irish Times*, August 31, 2002). To that end, although it was precluded from discussing the level of the licence fee, the Forum did recommend index linking, to ensure ‘that the value of the new licence fee will not be eroded’\(^68\). This was a first in Irish broadcasting policy, a measure that would help to protect RTÉ’s independence from individual governments.

However, the Forum advised that any licence fee increases should be subject to fulfilment of its programming commitments and financial accountability. These initiatives were in line with European trends; as outlined in chapter two, public broadcasters across Europe are now much more strictly regulated in terms of their activities and funding and are monitored according to Key Performance Indicators (see Coppens and Saeys, 2006: 265). As Coppens and Saeys note, the legal basis for public

\(^{67}\) For a discussion of the Forum, as an illustration of debates surrounding public service broadcasting in Europe, see Coppens and Saeys, 2006

\(^{68}\) Department submission to the Minister regarding the findings of the Forum on Broadcasting (2002: 22)
broadcasting has historically been kept rather vague; ‘tasks were not fleshed out in very specific terms, but described as general principles’ (2006: 269). Today, though, the European Commission requires Member States to monitor and assess public broadcasters’ performance in terms of specific tasks.

Such accountability measures reflected a general shift towards governance in the EU (Scott and Trubek, 2002: 1). As McQuail describes it, the central meaning of governance ‘is one of steering or guidance, according to agreed principles or ground rules, with voluntary compliance by the main media participants’ (2007: 17). Legislation forms part of the overall framework, but there is increased emphasis on other mechanisms of accountability (McQuail, 2007: 17). In the broadcast sector, these include a range of quantitative and qualitative performance criteria.

There are a number of advantages to the governance model: it allows for input from stakeholders, maintains independence between government and media service providers and provides a more flexible framework for regulation (Scott and Trubek, 2002). However, Born argues that measuring performance according to Key Performance Indicators imposed the processes of financial management on public service broadcasting (2004: 252). Moreover, she argues that they run the risk of elevating accountability to an end in itself at the expense of providing a public broadcasting service (Born, 2004: 252).

Following the recommendations of the Forum on Broadcasting (and addressing the European Commission’s call for explicit clarification of the public service remit), RTÉ is now subject to a public service charter or statement69. Its stated purpose ‘is to provide an understanding to the people of Ireland of what is expected of RTÉ in return for the significant public funds provided to RTÉ from the proceeds of the television

69 The charter, published in 2004, was developed through consultation with interested parties and the general public. This reflects another key feature of governance, strengthening the relations between media service providers and the wider society (McQuail, 2007: 18).
licence fee’ (Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, 2004). The charter sets out a range of requirements in terms of programming and accountability, in addition to its statutory obligations as laid down in legislation. Based on this charter, RTÉ produces an annual statement of financial, corporate and programming commitments and its performance is measured against these commitments70. Thus, some elements are imposed by the regulator, through consultation, and some are self-imposed. These programming commitments were to have a significant influence on RTÉ’s programming strategy.

More Accountability: More Reform

While the Forum had shown support for RTÉ, it was clear that the organisation would have to make significant changes to justify its role and funding. As mentioned above, RTÉ was experiencing significant financial difficulties and facing sustained criticism from stakeholders. The government’s refusal to grant the full licence increase in 2001 indicated a breakdown of confidence in RTÉ (Corcoran, 2004: 110). At the time, the Minister stated that she would not entertain any more applications for an increase until she could be satisfied that ‘any additional monies will be spend (sic) on genuine improvements to the quality of services provided by RTÉ, and that the spend can be monitored effectively by the Authority’ (Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, press release, 2001). RTÉ was therefore going to have to address its costs and improve accountability in order prove itself worthy of any increases in public funding. It was, as Hellman puts it, a ‘dual problem of economy and legitimacy’ (1999:

So, while the Forum was completing its work, RTÉ engaged consultants Logical Strategy and KPMG to carry out yet another examination of its structures and practices.

The consultants’ report outlined the causes of RTÉ’s financial difficulties and then proposed a number of structural changes, designed to defend and increase revenues and improve efficiency ‘without cutting quantity and quality’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 21). Acknowledging the need for legitimacy, the consultants argued that RTÉ ‘should be in a position to demonstrate that it is ‘getting its house in order’’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 65). The process was, as Briand and Bellemare put it, as much about demonstrating efficiency as a desire to actually achieve it (2006: 71).

This was a common strategy among public service broadcasters and across the public sector in general. Harris and Wegg-Prosser argue that discussions around the introduction of Producer Choice at the BBC were pervaded ‘by managerial rhetorics of transformation’ (2007: 297). Post-bureaucratic tendencies came from the ‘emergence of the perception of the bureaucratic form as inefficient’ (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004: 170; Alvesson and Thompson, 2005: 488). As a result, public sector organisations began to embrace flexible organisational structures and practices seen in the general economy. Briand and Bellemare’s study of a Canadian public sector organisation found that management reduced staff numbers, initiated flexible labour contracts, merged departments, collapsed layers of management and introduced performance indicators (2006: 71).

Reflecting the general trend towards flexibility (as discussed in chapter two), the consultants’ main concern was that RTÉ operated an inflexible cost base. They stated, ‘RTÉ’s high fixed costs create inflexibility and an inability to make the rapid change that is critical in the environment in which RTÉ now finds itself’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 18). To address this, one of the proposals entailed limiting in-house production to key programme areas, including news and sports and long running shows, such as the
soap opera *Fair City* and the chat show, *The Late Late Show*. They argued that this would allow a reduction in the number of permanent staff and thereby enable RTÉ to spend less when commercial revenue is low (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 41; 119). From a transaction-cost perspective, this is an efficient approach; for long-running productions like soap operas, using permanent staff on long contracts lends to economies of scale and therefore it makes sense to keep such productions in-house (Saundry, 1998: 155).

Arguably, the most significant proposal in the report was to restructure the organisation into integrated business divisions. This echoed the proposal made in the 1998 Transformation Plan. Under the old structure, commercial and support divisions, such as sales and marketing and finance operated alongside but separately from the output departments, Television, Radio and News (see fig. 1). Under the new structure, all activities relating to ‘output provision, creating costs and generating revenues’ for each of the major types of output, would now take place in one department (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 45) (see fig. 2). As a result, activities such as Human Resources, Sales and Marketing, and Finance were devolved to each division. The stated aims of the restructuring were to improve accountability and responsibility for costs and performance, improve revenue and strengthen output (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 45 – 46).

In terms of improving output, the consultants argued that ‘combining all relevant resources under a single business division should maximise output and enable additional revenue to be reinvested in programming’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 45). It was also argued that the business model would improve revenue by creating ‘closer links between programming and commercial operations’ and aligning their objectives (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 45). In contrast to the old structure, where production departments were deliberately separated from revenue earning departments, this
proposed structure sought to bring them closer together. This focus on improving commercial income reflects the trend in the public sector towards revenue-driven financing (Briand and Bellemare, 2006: 72). Now, RTÉ would be expected to match its operational expenses to income to prevent losses.

The business division model was also intended to lead to greater cost efficiency and ensure ‘full accountability and responsibility’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 45). This would be achieved by linking output and revenue-related activities thus requiring management and staff to think of the department as a business that has to pay for itself (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 45). Each division would have a managing director, who would take responsibility for all decisions. The ‘business model’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 20) represented the most explicit attempt to inculcate the organisation with commercial logics and practices.

On the basis of the consultants’ recommendations RTÉ reorganised into six distinct divisions known as Integrated Business Divisions (IBD)\(^{71}\). As this historical account of RTÉ has shown, the adoption of the IBD structure and scheduling management was the culmination of a series of organisational changes since the 1980s. Indeed, many of the recommendations made by the consultants Logical and KPMG in 2002 reiterated those of earlier reports. They all criticised the lack of efficiency and accountability, and emphasised the need to focus resources on programmes. Furthermore, the Division structure and the positioning of scheduling as the central management tool, which came out of the 2002 report, had already been foreshadowed in the 1998 review. Yet, implementing these structural changes was a gradual process, which involved delicate industrial relations. Corcoran, a former Director-General, writes of ‘a long and difficult process of change by staff consent’ (2004: 110).

\(^{71}\) RTÉ also ‘targeted’ a reduction of between 110 and 150 permanent staff positions (RTÉ Annual Report, 2003: 55)
Restructuring into IBDs took place over 2002 and 2003 (RTÉ Annual Report, 2002: 4). This action established RTÉ Television as a separate business with the explicit intention of imposing an economic, quasi-commercial rationality on the organisation. It incorporated and gave formal structure to the values and practices now demanded of public broadcasters in the contemporary media environment. It also, and this was central to the overall process of rationalisation, fulfilled the final phase in the implementation of scheduling as a management tool (Søndergaard, 2002: 8).

Scheduling as a Management Tool

At this time, other public broadcast organisations around Europe were moving to give ‘primacy’ to the schedule (Abercrombie, 1996: 133; see also Harris and Wegg-Prosser, 2007: 295; Hujanen, 2002: 104). The dramatic increase in competition that followed deregulation meant that public broadcasters now had to work much harder to attract and hold on to audiences. This was vital for public and political support in an environment where performance was increasingly measured by ratings and was also essential for those broadcasters that depended on advertising revenue. Therefore public broadcasters had to pay much more attention to scheduling and programming strategies (Ytreberg, 2000: 26). Furthermore, under pressure to justify their existence and, crucially, funding in an increasingly hostile ideological climate, public broadcasters had to prioritise cost-efficiency and accountability (Ytreberg, 2002: 292). Restructuring the organisation to position scheduling at the centre addresses all these concerns.

The role of scheduling as an administrative tool and control mechanism also reflects changes in organisational structures and practices seen in the wider economy. As we saw in chapter three, as new organisational structures have emerged, the strict hierarchical system of control through rules and procedures has been supplanted by control through culture, budgets and strategy (Procter, 2005; Bagguley, 1991: 161; Alvesson, 2002: 6 – 8). This is necessary for two reasons. First de-integration means
that production takes place outside the organisation and therefore management do not
have direct access to workers. Second, in the knowledge economy, in particular the
culture industries, autonomous, reflexive workers do not respond well to traditional
forms of control (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005: 493).

These organisational trends are particularly relevant in broadcasting. Traditional
hierarchical control is not an appropriate way to manage creative work (Küng, 2008:
152; Davis and Scase, 2000: 20; Amabile, 1998: 81). Whereas before this was resolved
by giving production departments relative freedom, external pressures for accountability
and cost efficiency mean this is no longer regarded as acceptable. Nor is it practical;
most production takes place in independent firms and is therefore beyond the direct
control of managers in RTÉ. Management seek greater control over programming and
costs and scheduling offers this control. As Søndergaard argues, scheduling
management developed out of a ‘need to conduct strategic planning and rational
resource management in a time when the money available for public service
broadcasting is limited’ (2002: 6).

**Strategic Planning**

Küng-Shankleman notes that in the BBC, ‘overt strategy-making of a positivist, rational
type’ only became a priority in the 1990s, when the broadcast sector became more
challenging: ‘because for decades its environment was basically benign, its income
generous and secure, and its mission clearly bounded, the BBC had had little need for
“corporate strategy’” (2000: 165). In the new environment, however, public
broadcasters have to be much more strategic. This might involve, for example, investing
more heavily in certain types of programmes to attract higher audience share or to
strengthen its reputation. As Ytreberg argues, ‘with a battle being waged for dominance
particularly in prime-time, it became imperative for the old broadcasters to channel
resources into strategically funded programming and scheduling initiatives’ (2002: 293). Strategic planning is also important in an era of accountability, where public broadcasters have to make commitments relating to delivery of certain types of programmes, serving particular audiences, and so on.

In order to fulfil these strategic competitive and policy objectives, management need to plan the schedule in advance, rather than waiting to see what programmes come from the programme-makers. That is, the needs of the schedule must drive production from the beginning. Separation of the scheduling function from production activities, which happened in RTÉ with the IPU, was an important step in this regard because it placed scheduling in a hierarchical position over production. As Born argues of the BBC

Whereas in the previous vertically integrated BBC, channels and production departments sat side by side in Television and Radio and cooperated in planning the output, now a streamlined commissioning apparatus based in Broadcast and backed by a team of market analysts and strategists would determine channel strategies and schedules, to be filled by Production as required. The strategy and planning apparatuses had grown from the early nineties; the restructuring sanctioned and enhanced their power. (Born, 2004: 132)

As Born points out, while the separation of the scheduling/broadcast function from production in the 1990s was significant, the real turning point was the restructuring that positioned scheduling as the central management tool. Hujanen argues that the new scheduling system ensures ‘closer integration between strategy and action’ (2002: 70). Since scheduling ‘integrates the overall management of the channels with planning and commissioning functions’ (Hujanen, 2002: 73), it ensures a flow-through from strategic planning to programme output. In fact, it creates a complete loop because planning incorporates analysis of ratings and audience research (Hujanen, 2002: 71 – 72).

In RTÉ, two key organisational changes took place following the reorganisation into business divisions which transformed scheduling into a management tool: the formation of the Programme Strategy Group (PSG) and the implementation of an
administrative management system known as Scheduling-Based-Budgeting and Planning System (SBBP). The PSG plays a crucial role in planning schedules. This group comprises key figures from the Division, including production, scheduling and sales. It is responsible for the overall strategic direction of the schedule and decides on the content of each slot. Once these decisions are made, they are communicated to producers via commissioning editors. Producers then make programmes ‘to order’. Management thereby maintain control over outcomes because they have pre-defined the type of programmes they want for the schedule.

Resource Management

The other key change, the establishment of the SBBP system, offered the advantage of facilitating management of resources and thereby improving cost-efficiency. The SBBP system links production activities to the planned schedule, allowing management to plan and track spending. Once the schedule plan has been drawn up, budgets are allocated accordingly for each slot and programmes are then produced, commissioned or acquired. As Søndergaard describes it,

The important thing…is that scheduling now becomes the centre for the entire programming process, and that the practical tool used in order to manage this process is the allocation of money from broadcasting (scheduling) to programme production departments. (Søndergaard, 2002: 8)

Linking the budget to the schedule has a number of benefits. It prevents waste because only programmes that the schedule requires are produced, commissioned or purchased. It strengthens the strategic planning function because money is only spent on programmes that fulfil specific, defined organisational objectives. Moreover, resources can be focused on specific strategic priorities, by giving some slots a bigger budget than others.
Conclusion

As stated above, the IBD structure was intended to foster a business culture within the organisation. Scheduling management has been the channel for commercial logics and practices in public broadcasting. Abercrombie argues that ‘the practices of scheduling represent the intrusion of market principles into the programming decisions of British television broadcasters’ (1996: 133). Ytreberg also contends that the implementation of scheduling management has played a crucial role in the process of ‘marketization’ (2002: 293). He argues that once the needs of the schedule drive production, ‘the schedule then in principle becomes a product of supply and demand; with the scheduler in the role of customer’ (2002: 293).

The system therefore created an internal market. Hujanen argues that ‘economic rationality applied as cost effectiveness is the guiding principle of internal market systems like Producer Choice in the BBC and ‘Management by Schedule’ in YLE (2002: 102). Thus, scheduling management has imposed an economic rationality, based on market principles and practices, on to public service broadcasters.

The scheduling management system represents a revised version of bureaucracy, wherein the schedule acts as a form of control over resources and as a means of integrating strategy and action. Everything now revolves around the schedule. It is the nexus between all activities within the division, linking revenue generating activities, resource management and production. To use Sennett’s analogy, it is the ‘institution’s central processing unit’, which sets the tasks and judges results (2006: 51). While, this new organisational structure is very different to the form of bureaucracy that previously existed in RTÉ, it is very definitely still a bureaucracy. In fact, the implementation of the integrated structure and particularly SBBP represents an attempt to further rationalise the organisation by improving control and imposing a formal, economic rationality onto scheduling and production practices. In chapter six, we will see how
this has influenced the logics and practices of senior management and the culture of the organisation in general. First, though, it is important to understand how these environmental and organisational changes have shaped programme output.
Chapter Five: Rationalising the Schedules - Analysis of RTÉ Programme Output, 1990 – 2005

So far, this dissertation has discussed how profound political and economic changes in the global economy affected the European broadcast sector, bringing an end to the public service monopoly and ushering in new organisational structures and commercial logics and practices. But the ultimate concern must be the effect that all this has on the end product. Therefore this chapter examines how these macro political and economic trends, which have positioned scheduling as the centre of power in broadcast organisations, have affected programme output?

It is important to remember that although the Irish sector was only deregulated in the 1990s, RTÉ has always had to balance commercial and public service demands. Indeed, more competition has not necessarily meant a decline in investment in programmes. For example, as we will see, in 1990, even before domestic competition arrived, programme output was rather limited due to economic constraints, while in 2005 RTÉ had more resources to invest in domestic productions, including drama and current affairs. What has changed, however, is that RTÉ has adopted a rationalised, economic approach to the negotiation of these competing demands and constraints. This is reflected in scheduling practices and finally in programme output.

There are differing theories on the effects of commercialisation on the programme policies of public service broadcasters. The convergence hypothesis assumes that public broadcasters have responded to competition by offering more entertainment programming, and thereby becoming similar to their commercial rivals (Hellman and Sauri, 1994: 48 – 49; see also Meier, 2003: 338). Meier notes that although the original convergence hypothesis ‘predicts a mutual convergence of PSBs
and CBs, it has mainly been employed to make accusations of self-commercialization and the sell-out of traditional PSB values’ (2003: 338).

A contrasting view is that both commercial and public broadcasters have maintained their distinctive character. In respect of public broadcasters, Hellman and Sauri refer to this as a hypothesis of constancy and cite the continued provision of a mixed programme service, including a high level of informative content, as evidence (1994: 50). Indeed, public broadcasters might focus specifically on providing informative programming, to distinguish themselves from commercial competitors. Meier argues that there are ‘strong market incentives to offer this type of programme profile’ (2003: 358). As van der Wurff points out, a strategy of differentiation enables broadcasters to ‘carve out their own market segment’ in an environment dominated by commercial broadcasters (2004: 220). This is not just an effective competitive strategy, however; it is also politically motivated. Focusing on informative content distinguishes public broadcasters from commercial services, helping them to deflect criticism and secure political support (Meier, 2003: 346 – 347).

Yet, as Iosifidis et al. note, public broadcasters in Europe have had to balance this demand for distinctiveness with the need to be popular; otherwise they risk ‘alienating a large portion of the audience, thereby undermining support for public funding’, not to mention the potential loss of advertising revenue (2005: 23). Consequently, it has been found that while some public broadcasters have maintained a high level of ‘distinctive’ content, there has also been an increase in more popular programme types (Meier, 2003; Hellman and Sauri, 1994; Hellman, 2001). So, what

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72 Van der Wurff points out that such a strategy enhances diversity in the system overall, since each channel offers a different types of content (2004: 220).

73 As discussed in chapter four, since deregulation the role and funding of public service broadcasting has come under scrutiny. This is reflected in complaints made in relation to abuse of the licence fee and calls for the role of public broadcasting to be reduced to a market failure model (see Jakubovicz, 2006: 96 – 97). Such scrutiny led the implementation of measures to clearly define the public service remit and ensure greater accountability in relation to the public spending (Coppens and Saeys, 2006).
exactly has happened in Ireland? Have commercial pressures forced RTÉ to include more popular genres or to focus on types of programmes that are not provided by the commercial sector\textsuperscript{74}.

This study considers these hypotheses through an examination of the programme output provided by RTÉ during a period of fundamental change in the Irish broadcast landscape. The analysis is based on a week from the autumn schedules for the years 1990, 1999 and 2005, providing snapshots of key moments in the period of transition from monopoly to full competition\textsuperscript{75}. Following Hellman’s (1999) approach, it goes beyond quantitative analysis of programme types to understand, not just what kinds of programmes are available, but where and how they appear in the schedule. As we will see, RTÉ’s programme output cannot be explained simply as the outcome of a strategy of differentiation or convergence. Rather it is the product of a complex negotiation of competitive, political and economic pressures. This has resulted in the emergence of a peculiar rationalised approach to scheduling, aimed at maximising commercial revenue while also defending its reputation as a quality public service broadcaster.

**Range and Structure of Programme Output**

Diversity, that is, the level of choice available to viewers, is a foundational principle of media policy (Karppinen, 2006: 53). It refers to heterogeneity and can be applied to a range of parameters, including programme genres, viewpoints and formats, outlets and ownership (McQuail, 1992: 155 – 181). Diversity of programme types has been an issue of particular concern in media and television studies, both in Europe and the US (see McQuail, 1992; Tracey, 1998). Various studies have examined how systemic changes, namely the abolition of the public service monopoly and the introduction of extra

\textsuperscript{74} Foster refers to this as a core service model (1992: 50)

\textsuperscript{75} For a detailed discussion of methodology, see Appendix I
channels, have affected levels of programme diversity (Ishikawa et al., 1996; Hellman and Sauri, 1994; van der Wurff, 2004; de Bens and de Smaele, 2001).

All diversity studies involving quantitative analysis carry the risk of reducing programme output to simple categories of content (for example, news or lifestyle) form (documentary, fiction, sitcom) or purpose (inform, entertain or educate)\textsuperscript{76}. Such categories are often necessarily crude and not sufficiently descriptive to capture the complexity of programme form and content. Furthermore, as a test of fulfilment of the public service remit, such studies are also somewhat limited. Meier reminds us that public service values ‘resist easy quantification and objective evaluation’ (2003: 347).

Yet, in spite of these limitations, quantitative analysis has its uses. For example, public broadcasters are expected to provide more content of ‘marginal’ interest; this could be tested by measuring the range of programme types over time. Moreover, the schedule acts as a prism, through which one may identify the various pressures and limitations that shape programming decisions. Hence, analysing the composition of programme output over time can yield valuable insights into the changing policies and practices of public service broadcasters.

\textsuperscript{76} For examples of typologies see de Bens and de Smaele (2001), Ishikawa et al. (1996) and Léon (2007). Bakke argues that even the EBU classification, employed in this study, which offers ‘an extensive set of tools’ for analysing content is still limited with respect to qualitative analysis of programmes (2000: 172). For a discussion of the limitations and difficulties associated with programme coding see Litman and Hasegawa in Ishikawa et al., 1996: 207; Ishikawa et al., 1996: 255.
Figure 1: Structure of Programme Output 1990 - 2005, All Day, RTÉ1 and RTÉ2
Figure one shows the changing structure, or composition, of programme output across a number of programme categories from 1990 to 2005. It is interesting to note, first of all, that in spite of enormous environmental change, the same programme categories which dominated in 1990 were also the most prominent in 2005. Throughout the fifteen year period, the main programme categories (in terms of number of minutes) were ‘News’, ‘Popular Drama’, ‘Films’ and ‘Children’s’\(^77\). Furthermore, when all programme categories are grouped under umbrella headings of factual/informative, entertainment and children’s, the picture also appears quite stable (see figure two)\(^78\). This reflects the ‘slow, glacial movement’ of broadcasting (Scannell, 1988: 15).

However, on closer inspection, a number of trends become apparent. Figure one shows a fall in ‘Leisure/Personal Interest’, ‘Arts & Media’, ‘Music’, and ‘Quizzes and Game Shows’\(^79\). In interpreting these trends, it is important to consider the influence of social and cultural change (see Bruun, 2006: 146). However, factors such as trends in

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\(^{77}\) For a justification of time as the unit of analysis see Appendix I.

\(^{78}\) Groupings are based on an interpretation of the EBU classification system. Available at: http://www.ebu.ch/metadata/cs/escort24/tech_escort2-4.pdf [Accessed April 2011].

\(^{79}\) Leisure/personal interest includes programmes on DIY/Home, Cookery, Gardening, Tourist, Travel, Motoring, Health, Keep Fit, Fashion, Photography, Painting, Arts and Crafts. Arts & Media refers to programmes about the arts, theatre, television, as opposed to a screening of a theatrical performance, for example, a review programme. The music category includes programmes featuring music performances, either live or recorded, for example the chart music show, *Top of the Pops* (tx RTÉ1, 7pm, Thursday, 1990), or the one-off concert, *The Pointer Sisters ... Up All Night*, (tx RTÉ2, 8.30pm, Wednesday, 1990).
the programme market, competition, and changes in scheduling practices are also critical.

Meanwhile ‘Popular Drama’, ‘Soap Opera’ and ‘Films’ all increased. This rise in popular fiction might suggest a convergence towards commercial services. However, within serious drama, the analysis shows that after disappearing completely in 1999, it reappeared in 2005. Furthermore, in 1990 this category comprised imported shows, mainly British and Australian period dramas, whereas in 2005, the category includes an Irish produced, critically acclaimed drama *Pure Mule*, which aired on RTÉ2 in prime time. Since domestic production costs considerably more, this finding suggests that RTÉ made a strategic decision to prioritise serious drama in 2005.

Figure one also shows that current affairs and humanities (which includes programmes on literature, languages and history), and more marginal genres, including religious programming, remained rather constant. None of these programme categories makes up a very large proportion of broadcasting time, but the fact that they are consistently present suggests RTÉ has not abandoned its commitment to this type of content. Furthermore, the analysis shows a rise in ‘Daily News’, ‘Social and Political’ and ‘Sciences’. These findings contradict the hypothesis that commercial competition will drive public broadcasters towards more entertainment-based content. Rather, they would tend to confirm Hellman and Sauri’s premise that public service broadcasters will continue to supply a wide range of programmes, including informative content (1994: 50 – 51).

These global figures raise some interesting questions. While programme output was weighted towards films, drama and news in terms of number of minutes, RTÉ

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80 Total number of minutes, serious drama, 1990: 450; comprised of Australian (115 minutes) and UK (335 minutes). In 2005 serious drama accounted for 120 minutes of broadcast time, which included the first screening of the series *Pure Mule* and a repeat of the previous week’s episode.

81 Topics in this category include Political, Social, Economic, Agricultural/ Farming, Irish life/ culture
continued to provide a wide range of programme categories throughout the fifteen year period\textsuperscript{82}. Furthermore, contrary to the convergence hypothesis, the analysis shows that RTÉ increased its level of informative/ factual programming, including news, science and social/ political programmes. At the same time, though, popular genres such as films, drama and soap opera rose. Hence, these figures do not conclusively point towards convergence or differentiation. Therefore a more detailed analysis is required, beginning with an investigation of programme output in prime time. Prime time (also referred to as peak viewing time) is a crucial part of the schedule, since this is when most viewers are available\textsuperscript{83}. For that reason, prime time output can be interpreted as an expression of the broadcaster’s strategic priorities (see Léon, 2007: 88). Therefore, in trying to understand how RTÉ responded to commercial pressures and how it has attempted to balance these with its public service obligations, it is essential to focus on peak viewing hours.

\textsuperscript{82} This is consistent with Aslama \textit{et al.}, who found that across its range of digital channels, the Finnish broadcaster YLE provided a high level of news, current affairs, education, culture and science programmes (2004: 157). This was in marked contrast to the entertainment-led output of the commercial channels (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{83} This is due to social and mobility factors: as Hellman points out, ‘the special role of prime time results from the time-use patterns of the audience, which strongly concentrates television viewing on the few evening hours’ (1999: 408).
Figure 3: Structure of Programme Output 1990 - 2005, Prime Time, RTÉ1 and RTÉ2
Structure of Programme Output in Prime Time

For a public broadcaster, prime time is the optimum occasion to reach citizens and fulfil its remit. However, peak viewing time is also the most lucrative period in terms of advertising revenue. Therefore, prime time is when the tension between commercial demands and public service obligations is likely to be most acute. There is clearly a potential conflict between the commercial logic of targeting particular audience groups of interest to advertisers and serving the whole population. Furthermore, because the viewing figures for prime time significantly affect the overall audience figures, maintaining a strong audience share during this time period is vital for political and public support. Again this can undermine the public service responsibility to serve marginal interests. As such, analysing prime time can reveal how RTÉ reacted to commercial pressures. Moreover, comparing prime time with the rest of the day will show whether RTÉ adopted different strategies and practices at different times of the day. This will provide a richer understanding of the various factors that influence scheduling decisions. The hours included in the analysis of prime time are from 6pm to 11.30pm, following RTÉ’s own definition.

If commercial pressures are greatest during prime time, one could expect, following the convergence hypothesis, to see a rise in entertainment programmes in this part of the schedule. We will begin then by looking at the trends in popular drama, films and comedy in prime time. Figure three shows that popular drama features heavily in prime time in 1990 and then falls off in 1999 and 2005. Furthermore, the amount of peak viewing time dedicated to films increases significantly in 1999, then drops in


85 For the purposes of data collection and coding, all programmes that started at or after 6pm and before 11.30pm were included in prime time. As a result, some programmes that run beyond prime time may be included. A more detailed justification of the definition of peak viewing hours may be found in Appendix I.
2005. Likewise, the category of comedy, including sitcoms, also rises sharply in 1999 and falls in 2005. The decline in these categories indicates that by 2005, they had ceased to be central to RTÉ’s programming strategy. Yet, over the whole day, the amount of popular drama and films rose in 2005. To explain these trends, it is necessary to take account not just of competitive pressures, but also policy, economic and cultural shifts in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The reduction in these categories can be explained by the fact that they are mainly composed of imported programme material. Due to resource limitations RTÉ has always depended on imported programming to supplement domestic production (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997: 113). This reflected the general trend in Europe throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However in 1985, the Stokes Kennedy Crowley (SKC) report recommended that RTÉ provide more home programming. It argued that this would improve advertising revenue since the ratings indicated a demand for local programming (SKC, 1985: 32). Later, the introduction of quotas under the Television without Frontiers (TWF) Directive meant that broadcasters now had to reduce their dependence on cheaper imports from the US and other markets. Consequently, from the late 1980s and early 1990s, broadcasters began to increase the level of home production in prime time.

Programmes produced locally are more likely to reflect the interests of viewers and ‘their cultural environment’ (La Porte Alfaro et al., 2001: 60). As such, they are seen as a core element of any public broadcaster’s programme remit. However, in this case it is clear that commercial incentives and legal obligations compelled RTÉ to

86 The high level of American film and series on European television screens in the 1970s and 80s gave rise to concerns about the ‘Dallasification’ of content (de Bens and de Smaele, 2001: 51).

87 It has been widely recognised for some time now that audiences prefer home produced shows and, where a local alternative exists, they will opt for it over an imported show (de Bens et al., 1992: 81).

88 The Directive was first drafted in 1989 and enacted in Irish legislation in the Broadcasting Act, 1990 and Broadcasting Authority (Amendment) Act, 1993. The quotas were specifically designed to boost production in Europe and reduce dependence on the US market.
increase its domestic output. The demand for more domestic production put a strain on resources. Therefore, RTÉ responded by providing cheaper home-grown programming, and between 1984 and 1994 managed to reduce imports from 65 to 50 per cent (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997: 113). This is evident in the 1990 schedule, which contained quite a high share of studio-based productions, including factual programming, quiz shows, chat shows, young people’s entertainment, plus the new RTÉ soap opera, *Fair City*, in prime time. However, RTÉ still relied on imports to pad out prime time. This comprised of drama, comedy and music on RTÉ1; and on RTÉ2 films and sitcoms, and some documentaries.

By 1999, there was a further increase in the level of home production in the schedule. This was partly due to the TWF quota, which had by now been fully transposed into Irish law (RTÉ, 1998: 9). It was also prompted by inflation of programme acquisition costs during the 1990s, a result of the multiplication of channels and an extension of broadcast hours, and the subsequent rise in demand. This drove broadcasters to reduce their dependence on the international market (Meier, 2003: 356). In addition, as referred to above, broadcasters by now recognised the audience’s appetite for local programming. Consequently on RTÉ1, the midweek, early peak hours were now mainly composed of Irish programmes.

On RTÉ2, on the other hand, imported programming still featured heavily in prime time. This reflects the channel’s position as the second channel, aimed mainly at a younger audience. By 1999 RTÉ was competing with the newly established TV3 for younger viewers and the analysis indicates that it opted for a strategy of convergence to

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89 On RTÉ1, imported popular and serious drama, comedy and music/ballet/dance accounted for 28% of prime time hours, with drama and comedy making up the vast majority of imports (95%). On RTÉ2, imported programming accounted for 60% of peak viewing time. Of this, documentaries (category: humanities) totalled 5%. Prime time: 6pm – 11.30pm, seven days.

90 Irish originated programming increased from 60% in 1990 to 75% in 1999 (7pm – 9pm, Monday to Friday, RTÉ1)
achieve this (Foley in *The Irish Times*, September 12, 1998)\(^91\). Prime time on RTÉ2 was heavily composed of a mix of films (640 minutes), popular drama (280 minutes) and comedy (590 minutes); in total they accounted for sixty per cent of peak viewing time; of that just fifty minutes, in the category of comedy, was Irish\(^92\). However, this line of attack led to criticism from the popular press and fuelled TV3’s 1999 complaint to the European Commission that RTÉ used its licence fee revenue to outbid its rivals for entertainment and sports programming (McGarry in *The Irish Times*, September 9, 1999)\(^93\). This backlash forced RTÉ to reconsider its convergence strategy.

The late 1990s and early 2000s was a turbulent period for RTÉ. The station was suffering financial losses and facing criticism in relation to public spending. Meantime, RTÉ2 was trailing behind TV3 in the ratings in prime time\(^94\). RTÉ now had to convince regulators and licence fee payers that it was providing a distinctive, value for money public service, while winning back viewers and improving commercial revenue. To achieve these objectives, RTÉ (along with fundamental organisational change) adopted a strategic, economic scheduling approach that would allow it to attract viewers, reduce costs and fulfil its public service remit. The main elements of this strategy were greater investment in home programming, but in certain strategic programme areas, and an increase in informative and educational content.

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\(^91\) The appointment of Andrew Burns as head of programme planning in 1998 was instrumental to this approach. Burns had previously worked in Border Television, an ITV network television company, and at UK Gold, a satellite television channel. His appointment indicates the organisation’s concern with attracting younger audiences in advance of the launch of TV3, Ireland’s commercial broadcaster. He made a number of changes to the second channel to make it more attractive to a youth audience, including themed nights, for example, “Princess Diana Weekend”, along with ‘bright graphics and brash news presentation’ (Foley in *The Irish Times*, September 12, 1998).

\(^92\) Total number of minutes of film, popular drama and comedy: 1510. Total minutes prime time (6 – 11.30pm), seven days: 2310.

\(^93\) RTÉ was often criticised in the press for its high dependence on imported American fiction on RTÉ2 (see for example, Ingle in *The Irish Times*, September 12, 1998).

2005 Schedule

As discussed in chapter four, by the early 2000s RTÉ recognised that it would have to be seen to provide a distinctive public service in return for public and political support. The 2002 Logical/ KPMG report advised that home produced material was vital in defending the organisation’s reputation as a quality public broadcaster and securing political support (2002: 42). Furthermore, in 2004, the public service charter was introduced. As a result, RTÉ committed to providing more domestic content across a range of genres. Investment in home programming was possible thanks to the recent licence fee increase (granted following the 2002 Forum on Broadcasting) and a boost in commercial revenue, and in 2004 thirteen new Irish series were included in the RTÉ schedules. This continued into 2005. However, in order to maximise return on that investment, RTÉ focused its resources for domestic production carefully into genres that would either maximise ratings or mark it out as a distinctive public service broadcaster. These included drama, news and current affairs, factual programming (arts, education, religious), entertainment and music.

The bulk of Irish programmes in the 2005 schedule were on RTÉ1, reflecting its position as the main channel: forty-five per cent of broadcast time on RTÉ1, compared to just over fourteen per cent on RTÉ2. These consisted of, in prime time, news and current affairs content; factual programming (represented in the categories social/political and leisure/personal interest); an arts review show; and in fiction, a medical

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95 The report also recommended moving to ‘Focused Production’ whereby all long-running productions (news, soap opera) and strategic programme areas (such as sport) would be retained in-house and the rest to be transferred to the independent sector, thus reducing fixed costs (2002: 43).

96 Interview with Director of TV IBD, Noel Curran (O’ Mahony in the Sunday Business Post, October 17, 2004; see also RTÉ Annual Report 2006: 91)


98 RTÉ1, 2005, All day (7 days) – IE: 4575 minutes; Imported: 5585; don’t know/discounted: 35. RTÉ2, 2005, All day (7 days) – IE: 1465; Imported:7310; don’t know/discounted: 1395
drama series and a soap opera (Appendix II: figure 14). In the social/political category, programmes included hour long documentaries on topical issues, such as *The Asylum*, about a mental health care institution in Ireland (*tx* Monday, 9.30pm) and half hour series, for example, *The Family*, a documentary series about family issues (*tx* Tuesday, 7pm). In addition to news and current affairs, these programmes reflect the interests of viewers and contribute to public debate and are thus an integral part of the broadcaster’s public service remit.

The choice to focus on news, current affairs, and social/political documentaries shows that RTÉ was keen to strengthen its reputation as a quality public service broadcaster and defend its right to public funding. This corresponds with Meier’s finding that the German public broadcaster, ZDF focused on information programmes to satisfy the expectations of political stakeholders and secure support (2003: 347). However, Meier points out that ZDF was also motivated by commercial incentives because information programmes appeal to its core audience who is, ‘on average, older, better educated...has a higher disposable income’ and who has a strong interest in political issues (2003: 353). In Ireland, it is recognised that audiences have an appetite for news, current affairs and serious heavy documentaries and therefore such programmes will achieve high viewing figures.

However, alongside current affairs and documentaries, the RTÉ1 schedule also contained more popular home produced content. A strip of Irish factual entertainment programmes appeared in the early peak hours on RTÉ1 in 2005 (*tx* 8.30pm, Monday to

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99 In 2002, the Director General Bob Collins identified drama, documentary and current affairs as key areas for development (along with educational and children’s programmes) (Irish Times, December 16, 2002).

100 See for example, interview with Steve Carson, Director or Programmes, RTÉ Television. Available at [http://www.iftn.ie/news/act1=record&only=1&aid=73&rid=4283413&tpl=archnews&force=1](http://www.iftn.ie/news/act1=record&only=1&aid=73&rid=4283413&tpl=archnews&force=1) [Accessed November 2010]
Friday)\textsuperscript{101}. The data shows that while there was a decline in the overall amount of leisure/ personal interest over the fifteen year period, the number of hours in prime time actually increased between 1990 and 2005. This is a clear indication of its strategic importance in the schedule (see figures one, three)\textsuperscript{102}.

Factual entertainment and lifestyle programming provide an effective scheduling solution in the contemporary broadcast environment. First, they are ‘a relatively cheap mode of programming’ (Brunsdon \textit{et al.}, 2001: 40). This is an important consideration, given the rise in demand for home produced content driven by the multiplication of channels and extension of hours. Yet they are also popular with audiences. As Brunsdon \textit{et al.} argue, factual entertainment ‘gives the documentary format a personal twist’; this gives it a wider appeal (2001: 40)\textsuperscript{103}. Furthermore, because it blends entertainment with information, it is a perfect solution for public service broadcasters in a competitive context.

Interestingly, Ellis (2000) argues that the rapid rise of factual entertainment in the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s was also a direct outcome of the rise of schedule-led production. The genre was invented after examining what the competition was offering in the early peak slots, which audience groups were available at that time, and what would appeal to those viewers (Ellis, 2000: 30 – 33). He writes, ‘a scheduling process, interpreting demographic data, produced the demand for a docu-tainment

\textsuperscript{101} These programmes included programmes on health, fashion, home and DIY and are accounted for in the leisure/ personal interest category (Appendix II: figure 14)

\textsuperscript{102} Although the categorisation used suggests that lifestyle programmes also featured in the 1990 schedule, in fact in most cases the format and style of the older programmes were very different. Brunsdon \textit{et al.} argue that in the newer forms, the didactic or educational element is ‘narratively subordinated to an instantaneous display of transformation’ (2001: 55). This is borne out in the evolution of the RTÉ’s fashion show, \textit{(Head to Toe, tx 1990 / Off the Rails, tx 2005)} which now features a makeover element.

\textsuperscript{103} Brunsdon \textit{et al.} argue that the rise of factual entertainment and the related loss of current affairs and sitcoms in the 8 – 9 slot should not necessarily be lamented as the ‘dumbing down’ of television; rather they suggest that it reflects wider social and televisual trends relating to a transformation of the public sphere (2001: 34).
series’, a form that was factual, soap-structured and with a feminine subject (2000: 32). The use of the soap opera narrative structure in this new format is testament to the success of ‘soaps’ in the UK and Ireland. Along with factual entertainment, soap opera now forms the backbone to the midweek, early peak hours, the most competitive part of the schedule.

Soap opera, in the British social realist tradition, has been popular with Irish audiences for many years, but has emerged as a key genre in broadcasting in recent years for economic and competitive reasons. First, soap opera’s long-running, serial narrative structure means it attracts a regular, loyal audience (Allen, 2004: 248)\(^{104}\). Therefore, it lends itself to the establishment of viewing habits, which is crucial in a competitive environment (Eastman et al., 1997: 13). A broadcaster can rely on soap opera to deliver consistent ratings over time. Furthermore, since each episode attracts a large audience, it acts as a ‘tent-pole’ around which the scheduler can ‘hang’ other programmes (Docherty, 1995: 127).

Soap opera is also vital for strengthening the identity of a channel. Hobson argues that the ‘frequency and permanency’ of soap opera means that it acts as an anchor point in the schedule for the audience (2003: 53). Broadcasters describe how soap opera ‘connects with their audience’ (Hobson, 2003: 41). Therefore, particularly in a multichannel environment, it is an important tool in branding the channel. This of course is beneficial from a competitive point of view. It is also hugely important for a public service broadcaster keen to establish a connection with its audience and secure public support. Moreover, as a form of drama soap opera provides a means, albeit limited, of representing Irish life and addressing social issues\(^{105}\).

\(^{104}\) While the typical viewer was traditionally considered to be female, usually a housewife, soap operas actually attract a more general audience (Buckingham 1987: 5).

\(^{105}\) See Brennan (2004) for a discussion of the structural constraints that limit the potential of soap opera to represent social and political issues.
The other crucial advantage of soap opera is that it is cheap to produce in comparison to other forms of drama. The economies of scale to be achieved in a long-running production, as opposed to a mini-series or a one-off production, lead to considerable cost efficiencies (see Saundry, 1998: 155). In addition, soap opera productions usually have lower production values than other forms of drama. As such, the cost per hour is lower than any other form of drama106. Thus, soap opera is an economical way to boost audience share, strengthen the station’s overall brand identity and fulfil a crucial element of the public service remit.

While soap opera is very cost-effective and consistently attracts large audiences, other forms of drama are more useful in garnering critical acclaim for the station107. Hence, RTÉ invested in a medical drama, *The Clinic* (tx Sunday, 9.30pm, 2005). The series was commissioned in 2003, when revenue was healthy and replaced *ER*, an American medical drama, in the Sunday night, 9.30pm slot108. The replacement of like with like reflects the schedule-led approach outlined above; it was clearly produced to cater for the same audience that watched *ER*. While the cost per hour of *The Clinic* is higher than soap opera, it works competitively and brings added prestige that soap opera tends not to attract.

So far, we have seen how RTÉ invested in news, current affairs and drama, factual entertainment and soap opera. All these genres occupied prominent positions in the schedule because they work competitively and fulfil some aspect of the public service remit. But what about those programmes that are not so popular? The analysis shows that RTÉ continued to provide some minority interest programming. However, it

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106 In the 1990s, the RTÉ production, *Fair City*, was one of the cheapest soap opera productions in Europe (RTÉ, 1998: Appendix III)

107 In September 2005, the period of analysis, *Fair City* was among the top twenty programmes on RTÉ1. Data available at www.medialive.ie [Accessed November 2010]

108 In November 2009, RTÉ announced it was cancelling the show due to falling ratings (O’Farrell in *The Irish Independent*, November 25, 2009)
managed to minimise the cost of that obligation by applying an economic approach to the production and scheduling of such programmes.

Arts programming is an important indicator of public service, but is not likely to attract large numbers. The analysis shows that RTÉ continued to produce arts programming throughout the fifteen year period. In 2005, RTÉ committed to providing 353 hours of factual programming, including arts, education and religious programmes\(^{109}\). However, by placing the show in a late night slot, when the available audience is small anyway and there is less competition from other channels, RTÉ minimises any loss of advertising revenue. Over the course of the period under analysis, arts programming has been steadily pushed out of prime time, from 10.10pm in 1990 (Arts Express, \(tx\) Tuesday, RTÉ1) to 10.40pm in 1999 (Imprint, \(tx\) Thursday, RTÉ1) to 11.15pm in 2005 (The View, \(tx\) Tuesday, RTÉ1) (Appendix II: figures 10, 12, 14)\(^{110}\). RTÉ also matched the production budget to the anticipated audience share through its choice of studio-based, panel discussion format, which is relatively inexpensive to produce. Matching the budget to the slot and to its anticipated audience share is a fundamental part of RTÉ’s rationalised scheduling practices, as we will see in the next chapter.

This example illustrates a rationalised, economic approach to public service broadcasting: RTÉ is fulfilling its remit, but in a way that limits costs and protects advertising revenue. There is a case to be made that this programme should be shown in peak hours, when more people are available to watch it. The fact that it does not shows that commercial and economic considerations are as important as public service obligations, if not more so. RTÉ is providing programmes that would probably not be

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\(^{110}\) RTÉ’s treatment of arts programming has been the subject of criticism in the press (The Irish Times, February 15, 1996; February 3, 2000)
found on a commercial service; however, it cannot ‘waste’ its peak viewing slots on programmes that are not likely to attract a large audience, nor is it willing to spend more on a programme than is warranted by its likely audience ratings. This example reflects trends elsewhere in Europe; Hulten and Siune report that ‘highbrow or traditional cultural programmes tend to be pushed outside prime time’ (1998: 29).

However, the inclusion of a six-part series of hour long documentaries on key figures in the Irish arts arena would appear to contradict this. Although it did not appear during the weeks analysed, the appearance of this type of series is worthy of note. *Arts Lives* has aired in spring since 2003; in spring 2005, it aired at 10.15pm, an hour earlier than *The View*. As mentioned above, arts programming was included in RTÉ’s programming commitments for 2005. Although the cost per hour would be considerably more than the studio based show, the investment and the earlier slot is a statement of public service intent from RTÉ. It is significant, though, that the series ran against a popular American drama series on RTÉ 2, *Desperate Housewives*. This suggests that RTÉ was careful to maximise advertising revenue on the second channel to offset the extra cost incurred and lost viewers on RTÉ1.

**RTÉ2**

A similar strategy of differentiation combined with a more commercial approach was also evident in the RTÉ2 schedule in 2005. Whereas in 1999, prime time on RTÉ2 was dominated by mainly American comedies, dramas and films, by 2005, prime time slots were devoted to nature and history documentaries (accounted for in the categories of sciences and humanities (Appendix II: figure 15). The category of sciences does not appear at all in the peak viewing hours of 1990 or 1999 and then fills 275 minutes of

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111 *Desperate Housewives* was the second most popular show on RTÉ2 in March 2005, while *Arts Lives* did not feature in the top twenty programmes on RTÉ1. Top Monthly Programmes, available at [www.medialive.ie](http://www.medialive.ie) [Accessed March 2011]
prime time in 2005. Similarly, the category of humanities is absent in 1999 and then makes up an hour of prime time in 2005. Although these categories makes up a relatively small proportion of programme output, compared to say comedy or soap opera, there was clearly a strategic decision to focus on them in prime time.

Like the arts series, such programmes may not achieve as big a share of the audience as more popular genres, but they help distinguish RTÉ as a quality public service broadcaster. Moreover, while this is politically advantageous, it is also an effective competitive strategy. Rather than trying to compete directly with more popular programmes on RTÉ1 and other mainstream channels, RTÉ chose to provide an alternative between 7 and 9pm; catering for ‘soap avoiders’ is a common strategy among broadcasters112 (see Melia in The Irish Independent, September 27, 2004). However, by relying mainly on acquired and archive material in this part of the schedule, RTÉ minimised its costs (Appendix II: figures 9, 15)113.

One interesting exception in RTÉ’s prime time offering is the science programme, Scope (tx RTÉ2, 7.30pm, Monday, 2005) (Appendix II: figure 15). This was an Irish produced educational programme aimed at young people, an exception in the 7 – 9pm day part which was heavily dominated by imported documentaries. Such a programme would not be expected to achieve a high audience share given that it was targeted at a specific audience group, and it was scheduled against soap opera on the main channel. On the basis of the budget/ slot logic, this programme would not warrant

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112 See for example the commissioning call from the UK broadcaster, Channel 5 http://about.five.tv/programme-production/commissioning/commissioning-teams/factual-entertainment [Accessed September 2010]

113 Programmes from the RTÉ archive (tx Wednesday 7.30pm – 9pm, RTÉ2, 2005) and acquired material account for 390 minutes and 90 minutes respectively, in total, 80 per cent of broadcast time from 7 – 9pm, Monday to Friday. In the mid-1990s, RTÉ began digitising its archive material. This is now regularly used in programmes, such as the history programme Reeling in the Years and Scannal. Using programmes from the archives is an innovative form of programme conservation; apart from ancillary costs related to digitising the material, these programmes are essentially free. The nature and history documentaries, on the other hand, are all acquired, which is cheap in comparison to producing or commissioning a programme. These shows are often ‘localised’ by adding voiceovers (see Iosifidis et al., 2005: 143).
the funding and the prime slot it was given. Perhaps RTÉ considered the investment a worthwhile commitment to its educational remit. In fact, *Scope* was funded by an external body, *Discover Science and Engineering* and did not require significant outlay from RTÉ\textsuperscript{114}. Therefore, whether acquired, archive or an original production, it is clear that RTÉ was careful to provide these programmes at low cost, thereby matching its investment to the likely audience share.

While catering for marginal interests with documentaries between 7 and 9pm, RTÉ\textsuperscript{2} also continued to target youth and young adult audiences with more popular genres. Having previously built the RTÉ\textsuperscript{2} schedule around popular imports, such as sitcoms, home programming was now an integral element of the channel’s strategy. The aim was to compete more aggressively for viewers by providing original programming that would strengthen the channel’s identity and make it stand out from its competitors (Oliver in *The Irish Times*, September 23, 2004)\textsuperscript{115}. Resources for domestic production were focused in popular formats, such as comedy (95 minutes), lifestyle and factual entertainment (60 minutes), sport (280 minutes) and a popular music show (60 minutes)\textsuperscript{116}. RTÉ was also careful to invest in genres that would build the channel’s reputation for quality domestic programming, including news (including a daily ten minute bulletin aimed at young people, \textit{tx} 5.20pm, Monday to Friday, RTÉ\textsuperscript{2}, 2005) and serious drama, a clear indication of a strategy of differentiation.

\textsuperscript{114} Discover Science and Engineering is an umbrella group founded in 2003 with the task of increasing interest in science among young people. The initiative was prompted by concern over grades in science and falling numbers of students taking up science subjects at third level. The television series, *Scope*, was a major part of the awareness programme. (see Circa group, 1998)

\textsuperscript{115} RTÉ rebranded and ‘repositioned’ the second channel, Network 2 as RTÉ\textsuperscript{2}. The stated aims of the exercise were to improving brand awareness by linking the second channel with the RTÉ brand, investing in new home programming and giving the channel a contemporary “look and feel” (PwC RTÉ Licence Fee Adjustment Review, 2004: 7; see also RTÉ Annual Report, 2004: 10).

\textsuperscript{116} The figure for sport includes a repeat of *The Premiership*, accounting for 90 minutes (\textit{tx} Saturday 1.55am, RTÉ\textsuperscript{2}, 2005).
The disappearance of serious drama in 1999, as noted above, suggests that competitive pressures had forced RTÉ to abandon challenging drama and lent weight to the convergence hypothesis. However, in 2005 RTÉ commissioned original drama for RTÉ2, as part of a revamp of the second channel which took place during 2004 (Oliver in *The Irish Times*, September 23, 2004). While this certainly represented a significant investment, it paid dividends, not just in terms of ratings, but also critical acclaim (Kernan in *The Irish Times*, November 7, 2005).

Local content therefore formed an integral part of RTÉ’s strategy by 2005. While home produced programmes are not necessarily synonymous with public service, they can and often are taken to mean the same thing. Therefore home production helps to bolster political support. Yet the analysis shows that RTÉ was careful to invest in home production into specific programme areas, either popular genres that would guarantee ratings or typical public service genres, which would add to its reputation as a quality public service broadcaster.

While there is clearly a strong focus on domestic production, imported programmes still form a significant part of the schedule on both channels. In 2005, over the whole day, imported programmes made up almost 55 per cent of broadcast time on RTÉ1, and almost 72 per cent on RTÉ2. La Porte Alfaro *et al.* found that Ireland had a higher than average dependence on US fiction in prime time compared with other European countries (2001: 62). Yet, this analysis found that, in prime time, the amount of popular drama and films (mainly consisting of acquired material) actually fell over

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117 *Pure Mule* was a six-part series featuring the lives of a group of young people in contemporary midlands Ireland, written by Eugene O’Brien, a playwright of some note. Resources for this programme were available because of an increase in public and commercial revenue since 2003 (RTÉ Annual Report 2006: 91; Oliver in *The Irish Times*, June 15 2006).


119 RTÉ1, 2005, All day (7 days) – IE: 4575 minutes; Imported: 5585; don’t know/ not included: 35. RTÉ2, 2005, All day (7 days) – IE: 1465; Imported:7310; don’t know/ not included: 1395
the fifteen year period, while the figure for all day rose. These findings reflect the conclusions of Iosifidis et al., who note that while US fiction may have lost some of its ‘peak-time appeal’, it ‘continues to dominate the fiction acquisitions of most Western European channels’ (2005: 138). This suggests that imports are used to pad out the schedule, which is inevitable since resources simply could not stretch to fill every slot with domestic production (Rixon, 2003: 56). This is not the only reason though.

Although the evidence shows that viewers generally prefer domestic production (La Porte Alfaro et al., 2001: 62) imported fiction can function competitively in the schedule. Iosifidis et al. note that popular US fiction can still deliver reliable audience ratings (2005: 138). The continued presence of some popular series and regular film slots in prime time on RTÉ1 (such as ‘The Big Big Movie’ slot, tx Wednesday 9.30pm) bears this out. On RTÉ2, the prime time programming strategy was based on a mixture of Irish productions (mainly in comedy, drama and news, but also music and sport) and recent imported popular drama series, sitcoms and films. The latest hit shows from the US ‘are used as important ‘must-see’ programmes in the schedule’ to help attract the target audience of young adults (Rixon, 2003: 55).

So far we have seen how the balance of programme categories changed between 1990 and 2005. Overall RTÉ maintained a reasonably consistent level of diversity over the fifteen year period. Indeed, one might conclude from the rise in informative programming in prime time, (in categories such as social/ political) that RTÉ was less ‘commercial’ in 2005 than in 1999 and its public service performance had improved. However, these figures only tell us one side of the story. The following section will argue that the emergence of rationalised scheduling strategies, which have come about as a direct result of commercial pressures, has actually diminished choice for the viewer.
Scheduling Strategies

Ytreberg argues that before the onset of commercial competition in Europe, scheduling was not nearly as scientific as in the United States, and was generally informed by public service principles of mix and balance (2000: 26)\textsuperscript{120}. Certain scheduling practices such as compatibility (providing programmes when the anticipated audience was available) and ‘hammocking’ (placing a weaker show between two stronger ones to boost its share) were in use. However, since the arrival of commercial competitors, public service broadcasters have had to work much harder to attract and hold on to audiences. This has led to the use of sophisticated scheduling techniques and practices to maximise share.

One strategy was to carve out a distinct audience profile for each channel. In 1990, the target audience for each channel was not so clearly defined. Although the RTÉ2 schedule certainly contained more children’s and youth oriented programmes, each channel aired a mixture of programme types that appealed to various audience groups. Children’s programmes appeared on both channels (\textit{Scratch Saturday}, \textit{tx} Saturday 9am, RTÉ1 and \textit{The Den}, \textit{tx} Monday to Friday, 3pm, RTÉ2) as did soap operas (\textit{Coronation Street}, \textit{tx} Wednesday, 7.30pm, RTÉ2 and \textit{Fair City}, \textit{tx} Tuesday, 7pm, RTÉ1) (Appendix II: figures 10, 11). Furthermore, the music programmes \textit{Top of the Pops} (\textit{tx} Thursday, 7pm) and \textit{Video File} (\textit{tx} Friday, 7.30pm), which would appeal to a younger audience, appeared on RTÉ1. Hence there was no obvious attempt to appeal to any particular section of the audience; rather each channel provided a variety of programmes, in keeping with the traditional character of public service channels.

\textsuperscript{120} In the United States, scheduling has been a highly developed element of the broadcasting business for many years, based on ‘principles of compatibility, habit formation [and] flow control’ (Eastman \textit{et al.}, 1997: 12). Hujanen argues that ‘the strategic importance of programming in the American television system is demonstrated by the fact that there is a vast professional literature available on the subject’ (2000: 71). The inclusion of programming as a subject on taught media studies programmes in the US also bears this out.
In a multi-channel environment, however, this mixed bag approach was not considered user-friendly. Eastman et al. argue that audiences ‘may find it confusing and wearying to sift through scores of options before settling on a program [sic]’ (1997: 14). In this situation, having a channel that is adapted to a particular target audience is much more user friendly because ‘people can choose an entire service – an overall pattern… rather than individual programmes’ (Eastman et al., 1997: 14). Hence by 1999, the character of programme output, and hence the target audience, of each channel was much more tightly defined.

The analysis shows there had been a ‘division of labour’ between the channels, in order to make the schedules more standardised and coherent (Hellman and Sauri, 1994: 57). For example, all children’s programming had been moved to RTÉ2 (Appendix II: figures 12, 13). This corresponds with Buckingham et al.’s finding that, in the UK, pre-school children’s programming has largely moved to the minority channels, Channel 4 and BBC2, and cable or satellite channels (Buckingham et al., 1999: 99). Furthermore, all soap operas were now found on RTÉ1, apart from the omnibus editions (tx Saturday 6.40pm – 8pm, 1999) (Appendix II: figure 12).

By 2005, the profile for each channel had been further refined. This followed a major branding exercise for the whole organisation, which included a name change and new programming for the second channel (Oliver in The Irish Times, August 11, 2004). RTÉ1 now appealed to mainstream interests, older people and families, with programmes such as soap opera, current affairs and chat shows, while RTÉ2 had a younger, more offbeat image with programmes for children, young adults and more marginal interests, for example nature documentaries. In addition, all sports programmes were now scheduled on RTÉ2. So, whereas in 1990 the schedules seemed to lack cohesion, by 2005 the output on each channel was much more consistent. The
changes show that there was a deliberate and strategic effort to give each channel a clear identity.\footnote{This is borne out by RTÉ’s semiometrie research, whereby programmes and channels are matched with personality types to enhance advertising and sponsorship opportunities. See \url{http://tvsales.rte.ie/downloads/Semiometrie2004.pdf} [Accessed September 2010]}

Reorganising programme output to appeal to particular audience groups was part of an overall strategy to standardise programme output (Hellman, 1999: 381 – 382). Hellman hypothesises that in a more competitive environment, the schedules are expected to become more standardised and this ‘should emerge as a tendency towards both horizontal and vertical scheduling’ (1999: 382). Vertical scheduling strategies include practices that maximise flow from one programme to the next while horizontal strategies ‘aim at enticing a viewer to tune in again the next day, or the next week’ (Hellman, 1999: 313).

**Vertical Scheduling Strategies**

The literature reviewed in chapter one indicated that the best way to ensure flow from one programme to the next is to schedule similar type programmes together in blocks (Ytreberg, 2002: 296; Webster, 2006: 333). There was some evidence of this practice, also known as ‘stacking’ (Perebinossoff, Gross and Gross, 2005: 228), prior to the arrival of commercial competition in the Irish sector but in recent years it has come to dominate the RTÉ schedules. In 1990, the RTÉ1 schedule contained a block of fiction programmes each afternoon (\textit{tx} 4pm to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday) and a stack of lifestyle programmes on Tuesday evening (\textit{tx} 7.30pm to 9pm) (Appendix II: figure 10)\footnote{The block was interrupted by a short programme because the US melodrama did not fill a full hour. This highlights the difficulty in implementing these kinds of scheduling practices when relying on imported programming.}. On RTÉ2 on Tuesday evening, one found a soap opera, followed by popular drama, comedy and more popular drama running from 7.30pm through to 10.30pm.
Stacking was more prevalent on RTÉ2 after 9pm, with a pattern of comedy followed by a film or a popular drama series (Appendix II: figure 11).

In general though, stacking was limited and there was still a good deal of variation in programme types each evening, especially in the early peak hours. On RTÉ1, in most parts of the day, programme output moved from one programme category to another. For example, on Monday evening between 7pm and 9pm, the schedule consisted of a quiz show, then an Irish traditional music show, followed by an imported drama series (tx 7pm to 9pm, Monday, RTÉ1, 1990) (Appendix II: figure 10). Likewise, on RTÉ2, most evenings were quite varied, with sports, music, history, current affairs, and business programmes interspersed throughout (Appendix II: figure 11). Even where similar programmes were programmed together, as in the case of Cursai and the news bulletin for example, the blocks were short (in this case, two similar programmes together) and therefore did not adversely affect diversity over the course of the evening (tx 7pm to 7.30pm, Monday to Friday, RTÉ2, 1990) (Appendix II: figure 11).

By 1999, however, the Irish broadcast landscape had become much more competitive, prompting a change of strategy. Writing about the situation in the US, Eastman et al. noted that rather than focusing on high ratings for individual programmes, public broadcasters adopted the strategy of ‘aiming for a high cumulative number of viewers’ (1997: 17). In Europe, intensifying channel competition led broadcasters to take greater efforts to keep viewers watching their channel for as long as possible (see Hujanen, 2000: 70). One way to achieve this is to improve flow from one programme to the next through vertical scheduling.

The colour coded representation indicates distinct blocks of programming in the 1999 schedules (Appendix II: figures 12, 13). For example, weekdays, mid-morning on RTÉ1 contained a block of popular drama followed by soap opera, lasting almost two
and a half hours (Appendix II: figure 12). Later in the afternoon there were two chat shows (one imported, one domestic) scheduled back to back, running to just under two and a half hours. After this block came more drama and soap opera, lasting between an hour and an hour and a half, depending on the day. Between 6am and 6pm, Monday to Friday, soap opera, popular drama and chat shows accounted for a total of 62 per cent or 66 per cent of broadcast time, depending on the day. These blocks were clearly aimed at housekeepers and this reflects the growing pressure on RTÉ to target specific audience groups desired by advertisers.

While there was a remarkable increase in stacking in daytime, prime time on RTÉ1 still contained a mixture of soap opera, history, arts, news, current affairs, and a variety of factual programmes and documentaries (Appendix II: figure 12). This indicates a two-pronged approach by RTÉ and suggests that different priorities and pressures are at play in daytime and prime time. In certain parts of the schedule, maximising flow appears to have been the main objective, while in others RTÉ is bound by its legal obligations to provide a broad range of programmes. Furthermore, terrestrial channels in Europe have traditionally been characterised by a broad mix of programmes and this continues to shape audience expectations and programming policy (see Ellis, 2000: 36).

RTÉ2, on the other hand, made more extensive use of stacking than RTÉ1 and as a result, there was less variety in prime time on the second channel in 1999 (Appendix II: figure 13). As discussed above, at this time RTÉ2 was attempting to compete directly with TV3 for younger audiences and this resulted in the emergence of programming and scheduling strategies more typical of commercial services.

123 Short news bulletins are aired throughout the day, which arguably break up these blocks. This is a good example of the limitations that public service obligations impose on the broadcaster. However, since the bulletins are quite short, usually around five minutes long, they do not disrupt the flow of programming considerably.
Throughout the day, programme output was organised in blocks according to different target audiences: children during the day, teenagers in the early evening and young adults in prime time. In prime time, the tactic was to prevent viewers from switching with stacks of popular programming, including films and popular drama and in particular comedy. There were also blocks of music programmes late at night (tx Wednesday, Friday, 1999).

By 2005, stacking was more prevalent, not just in daytime but now also in prime time. On RTÉ1, each week night in the early peak hours contained a block of soap opera and lifestyle programmes (7.30pm – 9pm, or 8pm – 9pm, on various evenings) (Appendix II: figure 14). So, whereas in 1999 the range of programmes between 7pm and 9pm was varied, by 2005 similar programmes were stacked together to encourage flow. While these genres have broad appeal, they are particularly popular with housekeepers. The increased prevalence of stacking to maximise the flow of housekeepers throughout the day indicates the strong commercial imperative to target this demographic group.

The importance RTÉ attached to this audience group is highlighted in the case of the afternoon chat show. In 1990 *Live at Three* catered for housekeepers and retired people. However, in 2005, the latest incarnation of the afternoon chat show was now directly aimed at a younger generation of affluent housekeepers; this was evident in the profile of the presenters, two thirty-something mothers, and the topics shown (see Kehoe in *The Sunday Business Post*, October 10, 2004). Hence, it appears that over the course of the fifteen year period, RTÉ has abandoned members of its audience in

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124 Top 20 Programmes 2009, Available at: medialive.ie [Accessed November 2010].

125 In September 2005, the demographic groups Housekeepers with Children and Housekeepers ABC1 were among the most valuable for RTÉ. RTÉ Television Sales: 2005 Cost Archive, Available at: http://tvsales.rte.ie/downloads/2005costarchive.pdf [Accessed November 2010]

126 *The Afternoon Show* was commissioned as part of a revamp of the RTÉ1 daytime schedule (O’Mahony in *The Sunday Business Post*, October 17, 2004).
favour of groups more attractive to advertisers. This highlights the effects of commercial pressures on public broadcasters’ ability to fulfil their remit.

RTÉ was also under pressure to attract children and young people, two commercially valuable audience groups\textsuperscript{127}. Hence, on RTÉ2 in 2005 the schedule contained blocks of over twelve hours of programmes for children and teenagers (Appendix II: figure 15). Young adults were also targeted; the comedy strand on Monday night, including a sitcom, comedy performance, and a panel satire show, was still in place, while on the other weekday evenings programming from 9pm consisted of comedy, followed by films and drama (Appendix II: figure 15)\textsuperscript{128}. However, as discussed earlier, evenings were now less heavily weighted towards comedy and drama. Instead between 7pm and 9pm, one found science and history programmes scheduled together (\textit{tx} Tuesday, Wednesday, 1999). There was also a block of programmes from the RTÉ archives, including factual programming in the Irish language and a documentary on ancient Irish crafts (\textit{tx} 7.30pm to 9pm, Wednesday, 1999).

This block of factual and educational programming on RTÉ2, and the stack of news, current affairs and documentaries on Monday and Tuesday evenings on RTÉ1, illustrates the point that a rise in vertical scheduling practices does not necessarily prove convergence between commercial and public service channels. In fact, it lends weight to Ytreberg’s plea that ‘the modern techniques of scheduling… be used to further principles of plurality and choice’ (2002: 295). However, since vertical scheduling strategies are based on placing similar programmes together, this practice reduces diversity. The analysis shows that vertical scheduling is on the rise and this raises concerns about the possibility of maintaining a broad mix of programme types on public


\textsuperscript{128}Other genres which aired between 9pm and 11.30pm included news, a travel show and reality TV; in total these accounted for just 25\% of broadcast time. A sports programme and a music review show began just before 11.30pm and are therefore not included in this calculation.
service channels. One way to preserve diversity would be to stack strands of different types of programmes on various nights across the week. However, this possibility is undermined by the emergence of horizontal scheduling strategies.

**Horizontal Scheduling Strategies**

In addition to maintaining flow throughout the day, it is also critical to bring viewers back day after day, week after week. Qualitative research has shown that audiences form daily and weekly viewing habits (see Gauntlett and Hill, 1999). Broadcasters will therefore try to establish regular viewing patterns at their channel using horizontal scheduling strategies. Hellman argues that the intention of these strategies, in particular stripping, ‘is to create a stable pattern for programming, repeating from week to week, or even from day to day’ (1999: 381). Stripping involves scheduling a show at the same time every day of the week or, usually, Monday to Friday\(^{129}\). These practices add consistency to the schedule and make it easier for viewers to remember when programmes are on.

Placing programmes in a regular slot is a long-established practice in public broadcasting (see Scannell, 1988: 25). In the RTÉ schedule in 1990, the news bulletins and the teen soap opera, *Home and Away* were stripped daily, providing structure to the schedule and acting as key marker points for the viewer (Appendix II: figures 10 and 11). The 6pm and 9pm news bulletins bookended the early peak viewing hours on RTÉ1, while on RTÉ2, the teen soap opera *Home and Away* marked the end of the children’s ‘mini-schedule’ (tx 6.30pm, Monday to Friday). These programmes were scheduled in these slots throughout the fifteen year period and are still there today. This is testament to the importance of stability in the schedules.

\(^{129}\) The weekday and weekend schedules are quite different in character, output and structure, therefore programmes are often stripped from Monday to Friday only; the exceptions are the news bulletins, which provide consistency across the whole week.
There were also some other instances of daily stripping in 1990. On RTÉ1, daytime, a popular drama (*tx* 4.30pm) was stripped across the week, and there were also two soap operas which aired at the same time each afternoon from Monday to Thursday (*tx* 4.05pm and 5.30pm). On RTÉ2, the children’s programmes, *Bosco* and *The Den* were scheduled in the same slot each day. Following *The Den*, the teenage entertainment show, *Jo Maxi*, the soap opera, *Home and Away*, and the Irish language programmes (*tx* 6pm and 7.30pm) were all stripped across the week.

Apart from these few key shows, however, the majority of programmes broadcast in 1990 were scheduled on a weekly basis. Even within *The Den*, which was shown daily, most of the programmes were scheduled on a weekly basis. This meant that there were many different programmes in the weekly schedule. Yet the overall structure of the schedules was still quite consistent and regular. This was made possible, Hellman argues (in reference to the Finnish schedules in the 1990s) ‘by providing certain kinds of programme categories at certain times of the day’ (1999: 408).

For example, at 12.30pm each day, the broadcast day on RTÉ1 would begin with a repeat of a programme shown during the previous week in prime time. These were Irish-made factual programmes including health, fashion and the arts. Then at 1.30pm, there was a different imported factual programme each day covering a variety of topics including cookery, health and art. At 2.30pm there was a different hour-long drama each day, usually a British production (Appendix II: figure 10). Therefore, the RTÉ1 daytime schedule in 1990 was quite standardised and the viewer would always know what to expect. Yet within that formulaic structure, there was still scope for variety. This degree of programme variety within a standardised structure points towards what Paterson refers to as ‘television’s consistent, repetitive plurality’, the medium’s knack of producing ‘always variety, always the same thing’ (1993: 145). By 1999, however, there was far less variety in the daytime schedule.
In a multi-channel environment, a standardised schedule becomes critical to ensure that viewers are able to remember the channel’s schedule amongst the competition. Thus, one can expect to find increased use of stripping in later years. Perebinossoff et al. point out that ‘nothing irritates and frustrates a viewer more than a lengthy search to locate the air time of their favorite [sic] series’ (2005: 232). Stripping helps because a viewer is more likely to remember a programme if it appears at the same time every day (Eastman et al., 1997: 14). Hence, there was a massive increase in the prevalence of stripping by 1999.

Wickham points out that the increase in stripping on terrestrial channels was partly influenced by the digital channels, where such practices were more commonly used (2007: 40). He suggests that these practices (and others facilitated by innovations in distribution and scheduling) ‘enable and encourage a culture based on instant gratifications and resolutions’ (2007: 40). As audiences became accustomed to daily stripping, the main terrestrial broadcasters adapted their scheduling practices to suit these new viewing patterns. The rise of stripping is also a consequence of the dynamics of the international programme market. When a network buys the rights for a series, it is for a limited amount of time. So, where a broadcaster buys an old series of, for example, *The Simpsons* (tx 6pm, Monday to Friday, 2005) or *Dallas* (tx 10.25, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday), daily stripping means the broadcaster gets the maximum use from the series within the rights period (Perebinossoff et al., 2005: 232).

The most remarkable increase in stripping occurred in daytime. Apart from a two-hour block between 8.30am and 10.30am, the 1999 RTÉ1 daytime schedule was composed predominantly of programmes stripped at the same time every day or a few days per week (Appendix II: figure 18). Between 6am and 6pm, Monday to Friday, programmes shown on a daily basis accounted for just over seventy per cent of
broadcast time\textsuperscript{130}. In addition, two soap operas, *Ros na Rún* and *Coronation Street*, air three days per week on various days. In 2005, programmes shown on a daily basis now accounted for eighty per cent of broadcasting time (Appendix II: figure 20). Moreover, from 9am onwards, programmes started at the exact same time every day, adding to the predictability of the schedule. On RTÉ2, there was also a striking increase in stripping of children’s and young people’s programmes, either on a daily basis or a number of times per week, from 59 per cent to 81 per cent\textsuperscript{131} (Appendix II: figure 15).

Stripping is a key factor in the prevalence of soap opera in the schedules. Soap opera can be produced on a more intensive basis and provide a number of episodes per week. It therefore lends itself well to the practice of stripping. For this reason, and because it is popular, relatively cheap, and useful for station branding, all soap opera serials in Ireland and the UK have increased their weekly output since the early 1990s (Hobson, 2003: 52; see also de Bens and de Smaele, 2001: 69). The consequence is that there is less room for other programmes in the schedule.

While there may be a competitive and economic imperative to strip programmes on daily basis, it is not always possible for a range of reasons. For example, RTÉ’s legal obligation to broadcast parliament proceedings every Wednesday morning disrupted the strip of *Dallas* episodes (*tx* 10.25am, RTÉ1, 2005). In addition, apart from soap opera, the majority of programmes in prime time are produced for weekly transmission (see Eastman et al. 1997: 14). This follows in the children’s ‘mini-schedule’, too, where there is a block in the late afternoon that seems approximate to a mini prime time, where new programmes are aired\textsuperscript{132}.

\textsuperscript{130} Note: coverage of the Rugby World Cup on Thursday (*tx* Thursday 4.45pm) is not taken into account in this calculation since it is a one-off screening and not typical.

\textsuperscript{131} Between 1999 and 2005, stripping had increased by 175 minutes, or from 59% to 81% of broadcast time. This includes programmes shown either on a daily basis or a number of times per week between 6am and 7pm on RTÉ2.

\textsuperscript{132} The term ‘mini-schedule’ is borrowed from Buckingham (1999: 85).
Daily stripping therefore tends to be less common in prime time, even in later years. Nonetheless, it appears there was a concerted effort to create a more standardised and predictable structure in prime time, by placing similar type programmes in the same time slot each day. Thus, the same practices used in daytime on RTÉ1 in 1990 are now applied to prime time. While the actual programme may vary, there is consistency of type. For example, in 2005 on RTÉ1, the viewer would know that between 8pm and 9pm, there will a soap opera followed by some sort of lifestyle show.

Similarly, RTÉ has established regular slots for films: Wednesday nights (tx 9.30pm, 1999 and 2005) and Saturday evenings (tx 6.40pm, 1999 and 6.30pm, 2005). Films present a challenge because they are single productions and therefore do not encourage regular viewing habits (Hellman, 1999: 407). However, establishing regular slots for films provides structure. Furthermore, all the films shown are consistent with the theme of the slot. So although the film changes from week to week, the viewer knows what to expect: a mainstream Hollywood film on Wednesday nights and a family movie on Saturday evening. Branding the slots (The Midweek Movie and The Big Big Movie) also makes them instantly identifiable in the television listings guides, helping to orient the viewer.

RTÉ2 also relied on branding in 2005 to make the schedules more memorable. All films on RTÉ2 were listed in the guide under the umbrella heading Screen Two; the nature, history and geography documentaries shown in the early peak hours were branded under Two Wild, Two Extreme, Two Civilisation, and RTÉ’s archive programmes were grouped under Take Two (tx various slots 7pm to 9pm, Monday to Friday). These brands house one-off documentaries and make them more easily identifiable to the viewer. Furthermore, in the case of Take Two, the brand gives the various programmes a theme and thereby adds consistency to the schedule (tx 8pm to 9pm, Wednesday, 2005, RTÉ2). Children’s and young people’s programmes are also
given titles, for example, the block of programmes aimed at teenagers was branded *TTV* 
(*tx 5.30pm to 7pm*). This serves to mark out certain parts of the day as ‘mini-schedules’ specifically aimed at core audience groups.

The emphasis on branded slots on RTÉ2 may be explained by the fact that it targets younger audiences who, as Ytreberg points out, are considered to be media literate, hence less susceptible to continuity strategies and more demanding of the overall design’ (2002: 298). Or it may be because the channel performs many functions and caters for a variety of audience groups. This could be confusing and therefore extra effort is needed to ensure that viewers are familiar with the schedule. Furthermore, branding helps to promote the content. It is perhaps no surprise that branding is used for the more marginal content because this is likely to need more promotion. It also publicises the fact that RTÉ is fulfilling its public service remit.

Finally, the analysis shows that in recent years RTÉ has become much more strategic in coordinating the schedules of the two channels. In earlier years, this does not appear to have been a priority. For example, in 1990 two soap operas were scheduled against each other, suggesting coordination was not a strict organising principle (*tx Friday 7pm*). However, coordination becomes necessary when the use of vertical scheduling strategies militates against diversity within each channel. In 2005, when a programme of more marginal interest was shown on one channel, a more popular show was available on the other. For example, on Monday night RTÉ1 aired the news, followed by a documentary about a psychiatric hospital in Ireland, followed by a current affairs panel discussion show. At the same time over on RTÉ2, the viewer could watch a strand of comedy programmes. Similarly, as discussed above, in the early peak hours RTÉ1 provides soaps while RTÉ2 shows nature and history programmes.

The analysis therefore shows that RTÉ has attempted to balance its public service and commercial obligations by coordinating the schedules of both channels. It is
clear that not only are the schedules coordinated to maximise choice, but there is also a deliberate attempt to balance popular programmes with less popular ones, such as educational content. Thus, coordination functions ‘not only as a means for providing viewers greater freedom of choice, but also as a contribution to achieving certain program [sic] policy goals’ (Edin, 1998: 272). It also serves to minimise loss of revenue by scheduling a popular show against one that is not likely to attract a large audience. This is very helpful for a public broadcaster that needs to maximise audience share and commercial revenue while still providing some diversity.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of the RTÉ television schedules confirms that as competition has increased, public broadcasters have had to work harder to make programme output more user friendly and ensure continuity of flow. This has involved standardising programme output through horizontal and vertical scheduling practices. It has also entailed streamlining programme output to strengthen the identity of each channel and make it more familiar and easily recognisable to the viewer. As a result, the range of programmes available in particular parts of the day is diminished. For example, in 1999 and 2005, the RTÉ1 daytime schedule was filled with blocks of soap operas and chat shows, most of which were stripped on a daily basis.

On the other hand, the analysis of programme output in 2005 showed an increase in the amount of key public service genres, that is, nature and history documentaries, on RTÉ2 in the early peak hours. RTÉ1 also maintained a high level of factual programming, specifically the categories of news, current affairs and social/political, in prime time. Thus one might conclude that RTÉ’s programme output was ‘healthier’ from a public service perspective in 2005 than in 1999. Therefore these
findings do not show conclusively that the arrival of TV3 caused RTÉ to imitate its commercial rivals, as the convergence hypothesis would suggest.

In fact, the analysis clearly shows that RTÉ has adopted a strategy of differentiation, which entails providing key public service genres, including news, current affairs and documentaries in prominent slots. This strategy was driven by the political difficulties RTÉ faced in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the resulting need to strengthen the organisation’s reputation as a quality public service broadcaster. It was also a direct outcome of the public service charter; RTÉ was now required to prove it was providing a distinctive, value for money service in return for public funding. Thus this strategy of differentiation was motivated by the organisational will to survive rather than a professional ethical responsibility to public service broadcasting (see Meier: 2003: 341).

While RTÉ recognised the need to provide distinctive public service content it was also under pressure to boost audience share, both to improve revenue and to secure political support. From a commercial perspective, RTÉ was particularly concerned with attracting core demographic groups: ABC1s, housekeepers and younger viewers. Furthermore, financial constraints meant that RTÉ had to exercise economic prudence by reducing waste and ensuring that any investment in programming yielded the best possible return.

Therefore, rather than adopting commercial logics and practices wholesale in response to competition, RTÉ has adopted a multifaceted, or ‘multiple selves’ approach. This refers to the manner in which broadcasters employ mixed strategies to fulfil the public service remit while, at the same time, aggressively defending their share of the market. The analysis shows that RTÉ used different strategies on each channel

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133 Jakubowicz uses the term ‘multiple selves to refer to a strategy of using one channel to fulfil the remit while ‘using others to defend their share of the market’ (2006: 112).
and at different times of the day. It also applied a rational strategic and economic approach in order to minimise costs and maximise advertising revenue while fulfilling its legal remit. This was evident in the decision to invest resources in home production in genres that are likely to attract large audiences; coordinating programme output across the two channels, and matching a programme’s budget to its anticipated audience share.

In many cases, it appears that RTÉ has successfully managed to balance its competing demands. Indeed it often appears that the two overlap. For example, standardising programme output is an effective competitive strategy and, it may be argued, it also serves the public by making the schedules more user friendly. It could be argued that the scheduling practices seen on RTÉ1, prime time, in 2005 provide an opportunity for diversity within a predictable format and it does indeed provide some degree of variety. For example, the 8.30pm slot offers a different series every night, though they all fall within the lifestyle/ transformation genre. Similarly, the Monday evening, 9.30pm slot includes a different documentary each week.

In addition, channel branding works by creating a clear programme profile and creating expectations for viewers. However, while this makes the schedules more easily identifiable, there is a risk that programmes that do not fit the channel’s profile will be excluded. In a study of the German public broadcaster, ZDF, Meier found that management developed ‘programme brands’ and the scheduling department then worked to exclude programmes that did not fit into the ‘branding strategy’ (2003: 341). Furthermore, if audiences are directed to particular channels and served only programmes that are deemed to suit their tastes, they will be less likely to encounter programmes that challenge their assumptions and expectations, arguably a very valuable function of diverse programme schedules. As Ytreberg notes, this kind of
policy marks a departure from ‘scheduling for a national collective of viewers’ (2002: 300).

The changes in programme output between 1990 and 2005 reveal a complex response to changing political, economic, market and social conditions. It cannot be characterised as a straightforward diminution of public service or a ‘race to the bottom’. At the same time, the emergence of competitive practices and the relegation of less popular programmes types to off peak slots raise questions about the true level of diversity available to audiences. The schedule analysis suggests that RTÉ has adopted a rationalised scheduling approach, in an attempt to negotiate, and where possible reconcile public service, commercial and economic demands. If this is the case, it points towards a more fundamental shift in the nature and practice of public service broadcasting. To investigate this fully, the next chapter goes beyond the end product, that is, the schedules, and studies the scheduling process itself.
Chapter Six: Negotiating Tensions in Public Service Broadcasting - A Qualitative Analysis of Scheduling in RTÉ Television

The last chapter discussed how programme output changed between 1990 and 2005, a critical period during which the Irish broadcast sector was transformed from a public service monopoly to a competitive market system. As we have seen, this prompted fundamental organisational restructuring and the implementation of scheduling as a strategic management tool. This chapter examines how those environmental and structural changes affected the attitudes and perceptions of individuals working in an organisation and what this might tell us about a more fundamental shift in values throughout the sector.

As argued in chapter three, although the iron cage metaphor may overstate the case, formal bureaucratic structures do constrain people and have a defining influence on those who work in an organisation (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004: 160). For example, Born argues that during the 1990s, the drive for efficiency and accountability in the BBC profoundly affected the attitudes and values of those working in the organisation: ‘the nature of bureaucracy changed through the introduction of new kinds of professional management, bringing with them new values’ (2004: 213). Financial discipline became a core value among management (Born, 2004: 224). Similarly, as this chapter will demonstrate, the integrated business division structure and the Schedule-Based-Budgeting and Planning (SBBP) system, which were introduced to bring about greater efficiency, accountability and competitiveness, have had a profound effect on the attitudes, perceptions and practices of management in RTÉ.

This chapter presents the accounts of seven individuals involved in scheduling, programming and production in RTÉ. Four of the respondents were working in senior management positions in RTÉ Television at the time the interviews were carried out.
Their responsibilities included sales, programmes (including in-house production and commissioning), acquisitions, schedule planning, and broadcast (this role includes promotions, press and publicity, marketing, and overall responsibility for schedule planning). Another had worked in a senior management position in scheduling in the mid-1990s, when competition was intensifying. Having spent many years working in RTÉ, in production, management and at the corporate level, yet now removed from the Television Division, this individual provided a valuable perspective on the process of change in the organisation. Two producers were also included, to offer an insight into how scheduling practices affect the production process. One had worked as a series producer of current affairs and factual programming during the 1980s and 1990s, before leaving the organisation in 2002. The second worked in the independent sector between 2000 and 2009.

The series of interviews was carried out over a two-month period in 2006. This was a particularly positive time in the organisation. The IBD structure had been implemented in 2002/2003 and was well established and the SBBP system had been introduced between 2004 and 2005. Financially, the organisation was in a strong position: RTÉ received a substantial licence fee increase in 2003, and due to the introduction of index-linking, public revenue had grown year on year since then (RTÉ, 2006: 91). Commercial revenue was also strong. The deal based advertising sales system had been implemented in 2002 and, after a wobble in the global advertising market (triggered by the events of September 11th 2001), commercial revenue had risen by approximately twenty thousand euro per year between 2003 and 2006 (RTÉ, 2006: 91). In terms of audience share, RTÉ was well ahead of its competitors at forty per cent,

up three per cent since 2003\textsuperscript{136}. Respondents were therefore understandably upbeat and their views should be considered in this context.

This is a limited, qualitative study, presenting the accounts of just a small number of individuals involved in scheduling and production in one public broadcast organisation. However, those individuals involved in scheduling are at the centre of decision-making in RTÉ; therefore their responses represent a mind-set that has a crucial bearing on the nature of public service broadcasting in Ireland. This chapter will show that the introduction of the integrated business structure and rationalised scheduling practices has brought about a shift in management’s attitudes and perceptions of what is efficient, appropriate and rational in the circumstances they operate in. The chapter will explore how management attempt to balance the organisation’s competing obligations. As we will see, whereas before various occupational groups within an organisation might have different attitudes and values (see Wallace \textit{et al.}, 1999: 552), the integrated business division (IBD) model and the Programme Strategy Group (PSG) has led to an alignment of rationalities among management personnel in RTÉ Television. That is, production and sales executives now share common values and objectives. This has resulted in a shift in how management approach their work and in how they conceive of public service broadcasting.

**Organisational Change**

A change in attitudes and values was at the heart of the restructuring process that took place in the early 2000s. The stated aims of the IBD model were to improve efficiency; boost revenue; increase accountability, and ‘create a leadership and corporate culture to drive change’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 21). Each division would operate as a

separate business and be responsible for all costs and revenue, in keeping with the trend in the public sector towards revenue-driven financing (Briand and Bellemare, 2006: 72). Therefore the explicit intention was to cultivate a cost-consciousness amongst management and staff.

The research indicates that structural change has indeed brought about a shift in attitudes among management at RTÉ. Until the implementation of the IBD structure, RTÉ was organised in such a way that a clear division was maintained between production and revenue generating activities. The managing director of the radio division explains, ‘in the past, we were only responsible for our costs. We just spent money. We’d a budget. You argued for a budget, you got it, you spent it and some other crowd called Sales sold the airtime’ (Int. C. Personal interview)\(^{137}\). As discussed in chapter two, this strategy of demarcating creative work from the management/administrative functions was considered the optimum way to organise cultural production (Davis and Scase, 2000: 74; Burns, 1977: 25). However, as economic, political and competitive pressures intensified, this approach came to be seen as increasingly untenable.

As discussed in chapter four, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, RTÉ was under intense political pressure in relation to its spending and performance. At the corporate level RTÉ management recognised that in order to justify its existence and funding, the organisation would have to be more cost efficient and accountable.

…we had to be persuasive … that we were an organisation that could give the public value for money. And to carry that argument we had to recognise that certain changes were required organisationally and we had to put them in place. (Int. C. Personal interview)

The integrated business model achieved this by bringing every part of the division’s activities, including spending, revenue generation, and production under the one roof.

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\(^{137}\) Int. C works at a senior management level in another major division within RTÉ. This individual worked in scheduling in the mid-1990s.
The key is integrated. So, everything that [the division] does – its output, its revenue, what it spends – the buck stops here, one place. It’s not dispersed; it’s not running around the organisation. (Int. C. Personal interview)

The model also improves control by placing ultimate responsibility with the managing director at the top; in this way it resembles a typical hierarchical, bureaucratic structure. This brought about a change in attitude at the top level. Where before the Head of Television was ultimately responsible for programmes, the integrated structure means the managing director also has to be concerned with financial viability and must pay attention to costs, revenue generation and competitiveness.

…I suppose, at its simplest, what I do here is run a business … and I have to make it pay for itself, through a combination of commercial revenue and public funding, and I have accountabilities for: the numbers of people who work in here; the costs associated with production; targets to earn revenue in every year… (Int. C. Personal interview)

Thus, the IBD structure imposed financial responsibility on managing directors. This also filtered down throughout the top management level of the Television Division, through the implementation of scheduling as a management tool.

In the Television Division, scheduling functions as the primary tool to achieve control, predictability, and cost-efficiency: key elements of bureaucratic organisation. As outlined in chapter four, the implementation of scheduling as a management tool means that now the schedule is devised first and programmes are then made to order. This gives management, via the SBBP system and the PSG, strategic, creative and budgetary control over programming. One of the key advantages of this system is that resources are focused on programme output, critical for cost efficiency and competitiveness. It ensures that all programmes that are produced, commissioned or acquired fulfil the strategic goals of the schedule, as decided by the PSG. Thus it integrates strategic planning with programme output. It also provides greater accountability and enhances calculability and predictability. In short, scheduling acts as the central instrument of rationalisation in the organisation.
Schedule Planning

In order to manage resources and achieve strategic goals through programme output, it is necessary to plan schedules in advance. In RTÉ, this function is carried out by the PSG. The PSG is responsible for a range of activities, from marketing to budgeting, but essentially, as one member of the group explains ‘the Programme Strategy Group is all about programmes and decisions for the schedule’ (Int. E. Personal interview)\(^{138}\). One member of the PSG describes it as ‘the most senior editorial group in the Division’ (Int. D. Personal interview)\(^{139}\). It is comprised of senior management personnel from across the Division, including Programmes, Acquisitions, Scheduling, Sales and Marketing\(^{140}\). Therefore, while it has ultimate responsibility for programmes, editorial decisions are taken by a group which has diverse objectives and priorities.

Rather than planning on a season by season basis, the PSG now prepares the schedules up to a year in advance.

…so we have a strategy group … and we work out what is the schedule going to look like – what are the programmes, what are the number of episodes; where will we have acquired; where will we have home produced; where do we need to put money in; where are we under-performing, and that will drive what gets commissioned… (Int. D. Personal interview)

Using the schedule as a framework, management can plan and budget for productions and acquisitions. The SBBP system ties all spending to the schedule, ensuring that only programmes that fit the needs of the schedule are produced or acquired. ‘No programme is commissioned these days without a schedule slot in mind…. Otherwise, you produce

\(^{138}\) Int. E works in a senior management position in the Programmes department of RTÉ Television.
\(^{139}\) Int. D has responsibility for schedule planning in RTÉ Television and is a member of the PSG.
\(^{140}\) The PSG members include: The Director of Broadcast and Acquisitions, the Director of Programmes, the assistant Director of Programmes, the Head of Scheduling, the Head of Sport and the Commercial Director. It is chaired by the Managing Director of the Television Division.
something and there’s no home for it’ (Int. B. Personal interview). This contributes to cost efficiency by preventing unnecessary expenditure on the development of programmes that have ‘little chance of getting on screen’ (Born, 2004: 256). It also allows for more targeted purchases.

The key factor when you’re buying programmes is that they’re actually bought for the schedule and that there’s a schedule slot in mind. … So, in any given year, we know… for example, I need 52 really strong movies for the mid-week movie slot on Wednesday night, I need 52 family movies for the family slot, I need younger skewing movies for Thursday on RTÉ 2, I need, you know, classic holiday matinees like the Sound of Music and Ben Hur for Christmas … I also need cheaper movies to balance the books in terms of matinees and late night. … So, you’re buying with the schedule in mind. (Int. B. Personal interview)

As this quotation shows, slots are predefined in terms of their content and target audience well in advance; the schedule then acts as a shopping list when the broadcaster goes to the markets.

A key part of the planning process is evaluation of past schedules. Hujanen argues that evaluation constitutes one of the key cycles of scheduling; it is closely linked with strategic planning ‘because of its importance in connecting past and future perspectives in the strategic process’ (2002: 79 – 80). Long-term planning and evaluation allows management to identify problem areas and develop strategies to address them. For example, at the time the interviews were carried out, Sunday evening had been identified as an area where RTÉ could improve audience share.

So…you’re looking at a Sunday night and you’re going ‘was that successful, yes we’ll keep that. Where were the gaps on Sunday night? Let’s look at the audience: where are we missing audience, what do we need to do, what kind of money do we need to spend in order to make that slot successful… (Int. E. Personal interview)

Audience measurement, that is, ratings data, is a key factor in evaluation and planning.

...so, for arguments sake, our Six One News: forty per cent of all individuals would typically watch, on average, the news and we would expect that Nationwide should hold on to twenty five to twenty eight per cent of that audience

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141 Int. B works in a senior management position in RTÉ Television with responsibility for broadcast (including schedule planning, promotions, press and publicity) and acquisitions.
at seven o’clock. You know, we have to take into account it’s up against *Emmerdale*, it’s up against RTÉ2 and a million other channels, but that’s what we think it can do’ (Int. D. Personal interview)

As Adams notes, a programme is judged on the basis of whether it has ‘improved or harmed the time slot it was given’ (1993: para. 26).

…all the programmes we make and commission, we actually look at an audience profile of those prior to them going out and we assess what we think those programmes will do and how they’ll perform…and if you’re expecting a programme to get a twenty per cent share and it ends up with a ten per cent share, whereas that is not the only criterion by which you would judge that programme, it is still a significant factor (Int. B. Personal interview)

These comments indicate that for RTÉ management, ratings are a key measure of a programme’s performance.

**Budget Control**

The schedule not only acts as a planning tool, it also works ‘as a measure of economic control and resource allocation’ (Hujanen, 2002: 102). In RTÉ, the mechanism for economic control is the SBBP system. Under this system, the budget and the schedule work ‘in tandem’ (Int. B. Personal interview) and all production, acquisitions and commissions are ‘based around the available budget’ (Int. F. Personal interview). This is equivalent to the system in YLE, where the scheduling cycles ‘move in close connection with the budgetary process’ (Hujanen, 2002: 81). The PSG draws up the proposed schedule up to a year well in advance, but this is continually revised in line with the available budget.

So you start off going for your dream schedule and basically you end up cutting back…. We gradually make those cuts according as the [Finance] Centre tells us what money is available or not. But then, should more money become available, because last year was a very good year for us financially, this year appears to be quite good as well, you then need to be able to go back to the programmes that you cut… And then that’s actually paralleled with what’s going on in the Commissioning areas… you need to go back and make sure that… the

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142 Int. F works in a senior management position in the Sales Division.
Commissioning Editor is in a position to commission or develop. So, it’s layers upon layers upon layers… (Int. E. Personal interview)

As this quotation shows, the system is flexible but is very much dependent on economic considerations. The finance department maintains tight control over spending on programmes. Before, the production department operated on its own, without outside interference, whereas now spending must be tied to revenue. As the same respondent explained, ‘programming before hasn’t necessarily been driven by finance; it’s been driven by editorial, you know, whereas now there’s a greater degree of accountability’ (Int. E. Personal interview). This is a function of the integrated business model and the emphasis on cost control and accountability.

The SBBP system is therefore a useful tool for monitoring and controlling spending. Yet it goes even further by matching the budget for a programme to its anticipated revenue. In this way it fulfils the core aim of the IBD model, that is, to foster a revenue-driven approach to financing. In implementing the integrated business structure, the consultants referred to a need to ‘align’ costs and revenue (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 20). The SBBP system allows for this level of calculability and economic control by linking the budget for a programme to the revenue it is likely to earn. It achieves this by valuing individual slots and programmes in terms of audience ratings.

Under the SBBP system a programme’s budget is calculated on the basis of its intended slot and how much investment is required to achieve the expected share for that slot. This approach, which may be described as budget/slot logic, has come to guide management’s attitudes towards investment in programmes. As one interviewee put it, ‘so, the money tends to chase the slot…. We know the value of the slot and how much we need to spend to get good numbers’ (Int. D. Personal interview). Commissioning editors are given a budget price for a slot, which they have to work around.

As such, audience ratings play a crucial role in calculating the budget for a
programme. Webster et al. argue that ratings are a useful instrument ‘in working through the costs and benefits of a programming decision’ (2006: 61). Under this system, the size and composition of the audience, and hence the potential revenue, is the basis for a programme’s budget, and not the subject matter. If a programme can attract a large audience, RTÉ may justify a big budget because the potential pay-off is significant.

So, a very obvious example is half six on Sundays, we know we can do really well there, with You’re a Star, Celebrity Jigs and Reels – did really well. …so, we are going to move money and concentrate as much possible to fill that slot with home production – big family entertainment shows – because we know we can compete there. (Int. D. Personal interview)

On the other hand, programmes that are not expected to achieve a high audience share will receive a budget to match. A clear example of this is the case of slots that compete against soap opera.

Soap opera is hugely popular in Ireland and as such the budget/slot logic dictates that RTÉ should not ‘waste’ money on programmes which are scheduled against it.

[There is] no point in trying to compete with the soaps, basically, ‘cos it’s just a complete waste of money because the audience just seem to love soaps, you know, so… you would not put money into a peak time, high-end entertainment programme that costs, because entertainment really costs, or drama, between eight and nine in the middle of the week because it just wouldn’t get the audience and it wouldn’t necessarily merit the money that you would spend on it, you know. (Int. E. Personal interview)

Economically, this is a rational approach, but it means that certain slots receive less investment than others. RTÉ is careful that programmes that are scheduled against more popular shows are produced at a low cost because they are unlikely to achieve a big audience share. As one respondent put it, ‘on RTÉ 2, we have mostly acquisitions between 7 and 9; that’s not ideal… but we can’t afford to put money into home production when you are up against a very, very strong RTÉ 1 schedule’ (Int. E. Personal interview). This respondent’s acknowledgment that ‘that’s not ideal’ highlights
the tension between the economic logic of using resources efficiently and the need to serve those audiences who do not watch soap opera.

The budget/slot logic has come to govern programme and budget planning. One respondent explained that some programmes may end up receiving a higher budget than originally planned, but if that happens, it will be moved to a slot worthy of that budget: ‘we’re really quite strategic and planned and we don’t normally deviate’ (Int. E. Personal interview). Likewise, if a show fails to achieve the anticipated share for a slot it may not be cancelled but could be moved to a different slot. One respondent told the story of how *Ear to the Ground*, a rural/farming affairs programme, was affected when a competitor scheduled an extra episode of a soap opera against it.

*Ear to the Ground* used to play at half eight on Mondays on [RTÉ] One versus *Friends*, when *Friends* was huge – two together, cleaned up. A Corrie [*Coronation Street*] turned up at half eight – changed everything. We moved *Friends* to nine and we stuck with *Ear to the Ground* against *Corrie* and – it’s expensive, it’s an expensive show – and it was getting the shit kicked out of it. So, we moved it to 7 o’ clock on Thursdays and it was doing okay and then it took a spike. So we realised, actually when the clocks go back the farmers become available. So, we now only commission it from when the clocks go back for 16 weeks, whereas we used to do something like 26 or 27. (Int. D. Personal interview)

This respondent justified the cut in episodes on the basis of mobility patterns, that is, the fact that farmers are finished work earlier in winter time. However, the main factor was the extra *Coronation Street* episode and RTÉ’s need to match a programme’s budget to audience share.

The budget/slot approach reflects the attempt to impose an economic rationality, whereby programme budgets are decided on the basis of a calculation of costs versus anticipated audience share. One respondent stated that his intention would be to eventually apply this logic to all scheduling decisions; however he explained, ‘the reality of it is it isn’t that easy’ (Int. E. Personal interview). At times there are other issues that must be taken into account, which prevent a straightforward matching of
budget to audience share. As the following cases show, scheduling decisions are the product of complex negotiation of economic, political, organisational, competitive and market factors (Meier, 2003: 344; see also Perebinossoff et al., 2005: 161).

If RTÉ applied a strictly commercial logic it could simply fill its slots with acquired programming, which is much cheaper than domestic production. However, as the former independent producer pointed out, if RTÉ were to do this it would not be fulfilling its remit: ‘they have to have home produced programmes’ (Int. E. Personal interview). Home produced programming is also vital from a competitive perspective, to boost audience share and build loyalty to the channel. Another respondent explained that home production is RTÉ’s unique asset and crucial to the station’s identity.

…what really makes us stand out from the crowd and makes us unique is the fact that we make Irish programming that isn’t on any other channel. If you watch an episode of, a rerun of *Friends*, okay, it may fill a hole in RTE 2’s schedule, it’s also filling a hole in Channel 4’s schedule and on E4’s schedule. Whereas, if you watch *Prime Time Investigates* or you watch *The Clinic*, it’s only on RTE 1. (Int. B. Personal interview)

RTÉ recognised the importance of home programming back in the mid-1990s, when satellite broadcasting began and competition began to intensify (Int. C. Personal interview).

…so the thing about complex competition came down to a very simple thing – what’s RTÉ’s distinctive skill? Making Irish programmes for Irish audiences, broadcasting Irish programmes for Irish audiences – that’s what we do. So, it all comes down to that. What do Irish advertisers want, what do international advertisers want? The attention of the Irish public! What gets that? Home production! You know, everything, all these roads lead to Rome. (Int. C. Personal interview)

Original Irish programming is therefore strategically important, to satisfy both commercial and public service demands. As such RTÉ is willing to spend more than

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143 *Prime Time Investigates* features special investigative reports into issues of public interest, such as crime or corruption.

144 Irish produced medical drama
might be necessary to achieve the target share for a slot. Beyond general investment in domestic production RTÉ also targets extra resources into particular programme areas.

*Prime Time*, RTÉ’s current affairs programme, has earned a reputation for its quality of journalism and is one of the station’s flagship programmes. Television critic Shane Hegarty comments, ‘for a broadcaster continually asked to defend the licence fee, *Prime Time* is now indispensable’ (*The Irish Times*, June 4, 2005). Because of the show’s strategic importance, *Prime Time* warrants a bigger budget than is strictly necessary for that slot.

You know the *Prime Time Investigates* that are on for the next four weeks? They’ll do good business, but they’re very expensive to make. Like, there’s one of them, I think, coming up that does lots of secret filming and that costs a fortune so, you know, economically, you’d say ‘well, put the money somewhere else’, but as I said that logic applies most of the time, but not all of the time. (Int. D. Personal interview)

Arts programming is another area where management are prepared to spend more than commercial logic would dictate.

Like, Tuesday night we had a Joe Duffy documentary on public art. Now, that would have cost a lot of money, probably about 150 grand, I’d say. But we know that programmes about public art, about art in general, don’t rate that highly, but it’s part of our overall offering to punters that we will do arts programming. So, the cost of that is probably very comparable to a programme that we play on a Monday at half nine, that will get twice the share. There is a budget for hour-long documentaries of certain quality, of a certain type. So, if you play it at half nine, different subject matter, that money will get you a 35% share, no problem. But if you put it into arts programming, and even stick Joe Duffy on it, it will get you a 19% share, ‘cos, the slot is later for a start, but the content doesn’t have the broad appeal. So, if it was Monday at half nine about gangsters, it will get double the audience, but it’s still the same money. (Int. D. Personal interview)

As discussed in chapter five, arts programming is included in RTÉ’s statement of commitments and therefore forms an important element of its public service. Consequently, it is an area of programming that warrants significant investment, even though it is not likely to achieve a very high audience share.

These comments indicate that RTÉ management recognise that a purely economic approach is not always appropriate, either for competitive or public service
reasons. Yet, it is also clear that while it may not always be possible to measure a programme in purely economic terms, management make a conscious calculation of its ‘invisible earnings’ (Murdock, 1993: 136). Extra spend may be justified if the programme attracts critical acclaim and/or fulfils the public service remit. The longer term benefits of political or public good-will that would accrue, even though this has no direct monetary value, make the investment worthwhile.

In the case of *Prime Time*, the show itself warrants extra investment because it is critical to the station’s reputation, while in the case of the arts documentary, it is an explicit element of their public service commitments. At other times, there may be ancillary reasons for overriding the budget/slot logic. One respondent gives the example of *Léargas*, an Irish language documentary series.

*Léargas* goes against *Corrie* (*Coronation Street*)… that’s expensive for that slot, it’s way above the odds for that slot, but, well, the next question is ‘well, why are you playing it there’. Because when we did play it at seven, it was dying on its arse. And we need to get the audience watching at seven so they’ll watch through to half seven, at half eight; you know… we can’t afford to lose, like, a huge audience coming off the back of the news and we have to hold on to them while we’ve got them. (Int. D. Personal interview)

This example highlights the complexity of the scheduling process. Establishing a strong audience share at the start of prime time is important to maintain flow throughout the evening. *Léargas* was moved because it was not achieving the expected share for the 7pm slot and this was damaging the figures for the rest of the evening. Commercial logic would dictate that the show should be removed from the schedule altogether. However, as the respondent puts it, *Léargas* ‘is not about numbers’; it is not scheduled in prime time to earn advertising revenue, but because it is an important part of RTÉ’s public service output.

Nevertheless, even though RTÉ cannot always act according to a strictly commercial logic, the respondents explained that they still try to apply an economic rationality and fulfil the public service remit cost-efficiently. For example, in the case of
Irish language programming, RTÉ has reduced the number of episodes in the *Léargas* series and instead made another Irish language documentary series, *Scannal*, which relies mainly on archive material and is therefore cheaper to produce. One respondent spoke about this new programme as a very sensible solution and also pointed out it had performed well in terms of audience share: ‘*Scannal* is done in a much more cost-effective manner and it’s done extremely well’ (Int. D. Personal interview). This example shows that even where RTÉ do not act according to strictly commercial criteria, they endeavour to use economic prudence.

The budget/slot logic dictates that no more should be spent on a programme than is necessary to win the anticipated share for the slot. It is highly cost efficient; however, it has resulted in what Born describes as ‘lowest common denominator’ logic ruling the schedule: ‘if it was possible to get an equally good audience for a slot with a cheaper show, then that’s what should be done’ (2004: 307). While *Scannal* was popular with audiences, *Léargas* was arguably a more socially valuable programme because it dealt with contemporary issues. Likewise, shortening the *Ear to the Ground* series might make economic sense, but it reduced the level of service to the rural farming community. The former independent producer also points to the tendency to rely on repeats of a popular Irish history programme, *Reeling in the Years*: ‘why is it being repeated over and over again? It’s cheap and it works’ (Int. G. Personal interview). This suggests that programmes are measured in economic terms rather than their social or political worth.

Yet there are other factors that influence scheduling decisions. As we have seen programmes are also considered in terms of their contribution to the RTÉ brand and their ability to fulfil legal obligations. Thus, in certain cases it is not possible to make a

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145 Int. G is a former producer. This individual worked in the independent sector between 2000 and 2009, producing programmes for RTÉ.
straightforward economic calculation of a slot’s value, that is, in terms of the ratings a programme will achieve. Extra spend is justified where the programme fulfils some other function; perhaps, if it meets public service requirements, contributes to the profile of the station, or if the programme will recoup the extra cost through future transmissions or sales. The key point however, is that within this system there is some attempt to weigh up the cost of investment versus the likely benefit.

**Schedules & Production**

In RTÉ, the Television Division is now organised in such way that production, acquisition and commissioning functions serve the needs of the schedule. This ensures a flow-through from strategic planning to programme output. That is, the schedule comes first, programmes second, or as Ellis puts it the schedule ‘orders programmes’ (2000: 33). As one respondent described it:

…and once you’ve mapped that out and said that the schedule desires that - because the audience needs that - to maintain our audience and our relationship with the audience and you have the budget for it, then that just gets planned into the resource schedule and the whole thing just follows through. (Int. B. Personal interview)

Born identified a similar strategy at work in the BBC, as this quotation from a finance executive illustrates, “now, the most important thing is the transmission strategy: you decide what you want in the schedule and make programmes to fit, to deliver what you want them to deliver” (2004: 306). This is a radically different approach to the offer-led system, where producers deliver programmes into the schedule (Søndergaard, 2002: 10).

Once the PSG decides on the needs of the schedule, and has allocated the budget for each slot, these are communicated to producers via commissioning editors.

…so you sit down with the commissioning editors and you go ‘right, we want you to look for this… and we try to make it specific… we say to them… ‘we’d like a Lifestyle programme on Monday night that is male skewing’, et cetera, et cetera.
So, we give them as much information as possible… (Int. E. Personal interview.)

Whereas before, producers were given basic direction in relation to the programme topic, the PSG provides much more detailed prescription\textsuperscript{146}. The former independent producer explained that ‘they are quite specific now in telling you the time slot and the audience they have and what’s filled it before and what they’re looking for’ (Int. G. Personal interview). Production companies must incorporate these elements into their pitch if they are to be successful in the commissioning round; as the producer explained ‘you are producing the widget for them, with specifications as to the kind of widget they want’ (Int. G. Personal interview).

This kind of direction is helpful for producers seeking a commission – ‘you can’t operate blind’ – and they adapt to this formulaic approach (Int. G. Personal Interview).

…they’ll say, “What’s really worked for us over the past five years” and they’ll name four or five shows that have really worked for them. So you’re obviously gonna use your head and say, right, those are the four or five shows that worked prior to this in this slot so they’re looking for more of the same (Int. G. Personal Interview)

Even where the PSG has not identified a particular type of programme, the main priority is to attract the specified target audience for the slot. Therefore, even if producers are asked to come up with new ideas, they are aware that ‘it’s only going to work if it takes that audience’ (Int. G. Personal Interview).

you know they want a family programme for say, eight thirty on a Sunday night. … so you’ve gotta say, what can that be really, if you’ve only got a half an hour, then it has to be some sort of game-show, quizz-y type thing … and if you get the half six to half seven slot on a Saturday night then that’s going to be talent-based because what will you get teenagers and small kids and a family all to watch at that time. (Int. G. Personal Interview)

\textsuperscript{146} When RTÉ launches the commissioning round, it publishes detailed guidelines including: the transmission time and programmes that surround that slot; the target audience; appropriate subject matter or theme; whether the programme should be serious or lighter in tone and the style of presentation (see Appendix I). For a discussion of the degree of autonomy enjoyed by producers in the British public broadcast system in the past, see Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 198.
As this comment highlights, industrial norms and traditions and assumptions about what the audience wants impose their own limitations on the producer. However, the most significant limitation is that the slot and the target audience have been prescribed by management.

The schedule-led production system has arisen out of a need to control and predict audience share. The former in-house producer recalls that prior to the onset of multichannel competition, while there was a professional ambition to get people watching, ratings were not a significant concern: ‘the perception of the audience driving everything - the size of the audience - really wasn’t there (Int. A. Personal interview)’. Since then, however, audience share has become critical for public broadcasters both for political legitimacy and financial survival.

Audience has become important because RTÉ, it had market domination, and with TV3 coming in, SKY … coming in to their audience, it made it more fragmented. So they have had to, in some ways, curb their enthusiasm for new and culturally unique product, when they know that if they put this on they’ll get x amount of audience. (Int. G. Personal interview)

Holding a steady share of the audience is more difficult now in a fragmented environment. Yet as the former independent producer reasoned, ‘they would argue … “if you want a unique Irish broadcaster the only way we’re going to survive is, we’ve got to have bums on seats”‘ (Int. G. Personal interview). Moreover, because advertisers will pay more if they can accurately predict the share for a programme, management at RTÉ are unwilling to risk a drop in ratings (Napoli, 2001: 7).

For example, Sunday night has now become a ‘battleground’ in the Irish television marketplace and the stakes are high (Oliver in The Irish Times, May 11 2006). A lot of money is invested in programmes for the slot and the management team are reluctant to risk their investment. ‘It’s harder to take a risk at half past six on a

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147 Int. A is a television producer, who worked in RTÉ during the 1980s and 1990s as a series producer of current affairs and factual programming.
Sunday night, you know... And we’ve taken risks and they’ve really bitten us, you know. It’s just, it’s a big spend, it’s really tricky…” (Int. E. Personal interview).

Consequently, once there is evidence that entertainment works there is a tendency towards repeating tried and tested formulas:

you decide, okay, once You’re a Star finishes, we want to have another programme that will attract the same kind of audience, that will have a competitive element, that will be fun, that will be glitzy and that will fill a whole hour between half six and half seven. (Int. B. Personal interview)

The programme that was eventually commissioned to replace You’re a Star met these specifications; Celebrity Jigs and Reels was a dance competition with well-known contestants aimed at a family audience. It was commissioned because the ratings had shown that this type of programme could be successful in a weekend prime time slot148. Thus ratings data are a key component in schedule planning.

This ratings-driven approach has now also become the modus operandi for producers. Rather than simply measuring the performance of past programmes, ratings actually determine the shape of future programme output. A member of the PSG described how producers can access audience measurement data and incorporate information about who is available in particular slots into their programme development.

…so you can actually go and say ‘who’s available in that slot, who watched it last year, what are other people watching on other channels’, you know, so you just really examine the slot from every single aspect and at the end you go ‘well, my main core available demographic at that time is: this’, and then you can tailor your material to it … which is to me common sense, you know... (Int. E. Personal interview)

This approach was used for the Irish language history series Scannall, referred to earlier.

148 The strategy was successful: in December 2006 You’re a Star (average share for the month) and Celebrity Jigs and Reels (December 31st) both achieved an audience share of 13.8; in March the audience share varied by just over two per cent. (Top Programmes, RTÉ1, Adults 15+) Available at www.medialive.ie [Accessed June 2011]
Scannal was a concept that was created as a result of looking at how audiences behaved and looking at who didn’t watch soaps at half seven on a midweek night … and they said ‘what would those people like’ and the answer they came up with was a bi-lingual programme, which was fact based and went behind the scenes of some scandals in recent Irish life and could tell the stories well using the archive - a very successful programme. Now … that’s a qualitatively different approach, a conceptually different approach. (Int. C. Personal interview)

This is indeed a ‘qualitatively different approach’ to programme making. As Hujanen argues, whereas before the imagined audience for a programme might be based on the producer’s instinct or anecdotal evidence, today it is ‘based on a careful analysis of the audience-research data in relation to the particular slots’ (2002: 119). Moreover, whereas before a producer’s autonomy within certain guidelines was considered ‘the guarantee of quality’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 198), today they are expected to conform to a methodology and orient their programmes to an abstract audience, constructed from quantitative data.

Ratings are fallible, both as a sales tool and as a means of knowing the audience (Napoli, 2003: 35; Nightingale, 2004: 238 – 239). However, because of the value attached to economic, calculable information in the industry and in wider society ratings bring a ‘sense of objectivity’ to the process (Ang, 1991: 21). Ang argues that audience measurement ‘with its aura of scientific rationality, has an entrenched position in the institution as a whole’ (1991: 22; see also Nightingale, 2004: 238). As such, for a public broadcaster trying to shake off its reputation as elitist and out of touch, the ratings-driven method creates the sense that they are responding to the needs of audiences.

The respondents at management level argued that the ratings-driven approach is more sensitive to the needs of audiences. One suggested that the old auteur approach did not always create programmes which reflected the interests of audiences.

You see, back then I think… programme making was often thought of as a kind of electronic authorship. You know, ‘making a programme is like writing a book and … I’ll write the book I want to write’. Whereas now, I think, it’s much more about saying ‘what does the audience want’. (Int. C. Personal interview)
As this comment suggests, attitudes about the role of the producer and the nature of service to the audience have changed. The schedule-led, ratings-driven system ensures that programmes are now oriented towards the target audience for the slot. It is therefore a more rational system because it produces programmes that meet a given objective. It also exerts control over producers; with this system, however, control is achieved via the schedule and by promoting the ratings-driven method rather than through direct hierarchical control from management.

The demarcation structure was based on preventing any outside interference in the creative process. However, there was a strong sense from respondents that their priority is not to protect the autonomy of the producer, but to ensure that programmes meet the needs of the schedule.

I think the day is gone when you can go ‘I’ve a great idea; I’ll make a programme about fruit! ‘Cos I think I really should.’ You can’t do that anymore, you have to know where it’s for and why you’re making it. There needs to be a rationale. (Int. E. Personal interview)

The facetious comment about making programmes on a whim exposes an attitude amongst management that the old system indulged the elitist, artistic motivations of producers. Indeed, one argued that full artistic freedom is never possible in an industrial setting.

…writing a book in a factory is different from writing a book in an ivory tower, or in a villa in the South of France. This is a book that is going to go through a production line and it’s going to have to sell in some numbers and it entails all the frustrations and compromises of that… You can’t simply, because you’re a producer in RTÉ, click your fingers and whistle up, you know, time, money, people that will enable you to make the greatest television programme that you would like to make. (Int. C. Personal interview)

Rather, management regarded the new system as a more appropriate and rational, or ‘common sense’, way to serve the audience in the current environment (Int. E. Personal interview). Thus, serving the audience is now taken to mean reacting to ratings. When challenged on whether the schedule-led system negatively affects production, one
respondent replied emphatically, ‘No, I think it’s very positive. Look, people, the public pay for this’ (Int. C. Personal interview). This comment suggests that management have also accepted and internalised the principles of accountability and value for money as core elements of public service.

Although the schedule-led system may be more rational from a commercial perspective, because it is easier to predict the ratings for the new programme, it limits the opportunities to introduce new ideas. Since future programming decisions are based on retrospective data, Born argues that the effect is ‘to encourage a shift in the mindset of the entire production community towards thinking in ever more standardised terms’ (2004: 311). This is certainly borne out in the former independent producer’s discussion of the commissioning process. It is easy to see how the schedule-led production system can lead to cycles of generic oversupply if future programmes are commissioned on the basis of past success (Ellis, 2000: 33; Born, 2004: 312).

**Shared Objectives: Shared Rationalities**

Tjernström argues in a public broadcast organisation ‘different groups identify with different demands, some with an informational role and some with entertainment and attracting audiences. The built-in conflicts in goals, structure and internal perspectives merely mirror the environment in which the firm operates’ (2002: 253). This conflict is due to the tension between value systems which Weber discussed. As outlined in chapter three, the fundamental differences between value spheres means that ‘what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another’ (Weber, 1930: xxxiii). So, for example those whose focus is to earn commercial revenue will clash with those who are concerned with the organisation’s public service mandate. Each of the factions within the organisation will have different priorities and hold distinct views on what is appropriate and rational action.
Moreover, RTÉ’s dual funding system imposes further competing demands on the organisation. On the one hand, the schedule must provide a public service in fulfilment of the legal remit; on the other it has to compete in a market system and earn commercial revenue. These two obligations mean that RTÉ is often faced with conflicting choices. For example, earning commercial revenue may be necessary to fund the public service, but at times it may be incompatible with some elements of the public service remit. Tjernström notes that ‘if an organization receives a variety of demands from its environment, it may seem natural to develop strategies that include contradictory elements (2002: 253). Therefore, management have to make difficult decisions regarding use of resources and the most appropriate way to fulfil the organisation’s demands. As such, one would expect to see conflict between various occupational groups in RTÉ.

The composition of the PSG means that the competing demands of the division are addressed and negotiated. One member of the PSG describes it as a ‘forum, where all of the areas within the TV IBD are represented’ (Int. E. Personal interview). Senior management from sales and programming, ‘not necessarily easy bedfellows’, sit on the group (Int. E. Personal interview). The sales department representative focuses on commercial priorities.

What I hope I bring to the party is looking at the audience from our perspective, which is not necessarily always the same perspective that other people have, which is, for example, looking at the younger audiences ‘cos 15 – 34 year old men for example would be a key audience for us because of beer and products like that … so what I do is [make] sure that those audiences are represented across the schedule. (Int. F. Personal interview)

Another PSG member was keen to stress that while the sales department has an input into the schedule they are not allowed to dominate: ‘So they are at the table. They don’t dictate, but their view is a view which is as valid as anybody else’s view’ (Int. B. Personal interview). He describes the sort of negotiation that takes place between sales
They may well say they don’t want a particular programme to go out because it’s not very attractive to their advertisers because it’s geared at an over fifty-five year old audience. A group of other people, and the majority of people, may actually argue against that and say, ‘well, quite frankly, we need to get at that audience because we’re a public service broadcaster and we need to talk to five year olds and we need to talk to eighty year olds – we have a mandate’. (Int. B. Personal interview)

The sales and programming departments sometimes clash and when they do, the managing director takes the final decision. The sales executive explains:

…there are occasions, em, and mainly in relation to sponsorship, where sometimes the Programmers [personnel from the Programming Department] would not be comfortable with something that we wanted to do, for example, we wanted to sell a particular programme to a particular sponsor. They may have an idea that they don’t think it’s appropriate or whatever it may be. And in those cases, the Director of Programmes and I would sit together with [the Managing Director of Television] and he would arbitrate. Now, what he has to do is, he has to keep both sides in mind and that’s really sensible… (Int. F. Personal interview)

This highlights the effect of the hierarchical business structure. As head of the business division, the Managing Director must take ultimate responsibility, bearing in mind the station’s competing demands.

These comments indicate that the PSG allows for conflicting demands and perspectives to be worked out and represented in the schedule. While Sales can focus on commercial priorities, another member of the PSG from the programming department argued that they advocate for the station’s public service obligations.

I think the programme makers at the group … we’re very aware of our public service broadcasting remit, you know so, em, you know peak key commercial slots, absolutely, you’re aware of them, you know, but there are also peak public service slots and you’re aware of them as well. (Int. E. Personal interview)

That is, in some parts of the schedule the PSG will prioritise its public service commitments and in other areas focus on earning commercial revenue: ‘we approach it with two hats, basically’ (Int. E. Personal interview). For some slots, maximising revenue is the primary objective: ‘…we’re just being very competitive. We want to put entertainment programming on, we want people to watch, it generates revenue’ (Int. D.
Personal interview). In other slots, the PSG might be less concerned with audience
share and revenue.

...We make Scope with Forfás, which is aimed at reaching children who are going
to study science. Now, 80,000 people might look at it; that’s not a great share, but
if you realise that 30 per cent of the 4 – 14 year olds watching television at that
time were watching the programme, you’ve got what you want, you know. (Int. E.
Personal interview)

While audience share is not always the main concern, as discussed above in relation to
the budget/ slot logic, RTÉ will always try to balance the books. In the case of Scope,
RTÉ could better afford a small audience share because its investment in the
programme was minimal (as discussed in chapter five, funding was provided by an
outside body, Discover Science and Engineering). Also, if they invest heavily in a
programme that is not likely to achieve a very high share, they are careful to schedule a
show on the other channel that will compensate for the cost.

Arts Lives is expensive and a full Arts Lives commission could be seventy or
eighty grand, but we know that’s not about getting numbers; it’s about the quality
of the idea and the production. At the same time, we’ve Desperate Housewives on
RTÉ2 – that’s no accident! ... So, we’re maximising the opportunity there. (Int.
D. Personal interview)

One respondent defended the strategy in terms of public service, that is, as providing
choice to the viewer.

If you look at Monday nights, RTÉ1, 9.30 ... there’s the News, followed by The
Asylum, followed by Questions and Answers. There’s a good, factual, heavy
night’s viewing, challenging viewing on RTÉ 1, but actually on RTÉ2, we’re
going to be giving you Naked Camera, followed by Lost, followed by Podge and
Rodge. So, you’re actually saying – in the nature of having the two channels –
we’re actually going to offer a choice to people. (Int. B. Personal interview)

Complementary scheduling is an effective way for RTÉ to fulfil its public service duties
while, at the same time, aggressively defend its share of the market. It is also effective
in maximising audience share because the two channels together appeal to a broad
range of people.

It is interesting that providing choice through complementary scheduling is
rationalised as public service, since Ytreberg argues that the strategy undermines some key principles of public service: ‘to unite the nation’ and ‘to provide a generic range of television programmes’ (2002: 301). Furthermore, as argued in chapter five, if the schedule directs audience groups towards particular channels and programmes viewers are less likely to experience the serendipity of finding programmes they may not otherwise have watched. This underscores Tjernström’s argument that competing demands can give rise to contradictory strategies (2002: 242 – 253).

Given that RTÉ has to accommodate commercial and public service objectives, there are certainly merits to the IBD model and the PSG system. It ensures that all the organisation’s priorities are addressed in the schedule. However, while there was evidence of debate and an attempt to balance commercial and public service objectives in the schedule, no real tension was apparent between the competing factions at management level. Nor was there a sense that any of the respondents wrestled with a conflict of interest between their professional commitment to public service and commercial demands. Demarcation presupposes an inherent conflict between creative, economic and administrative functions and therefore a need to isolate them in an organisation. Meanwhile, Briand and Bellemare argue that adopting organisational structures that are ‘heavily influenced by private sector thinking and neo-liberal ideology’ will result in a clash of values in public sector organisations (2006: 73). Yet, all members of management who participated in the study spoke positively about the IBD model and the PSG. Even allowing for the fact that those in elite positions in the organisation are likely to give the ‘party line’, there was a strong sense that they all genuinely regarded the new system as the best way forward for RTÉ.

I argue that this indicates the emergence of public service pragmatism and an alignment of objectives and values among management in RTÉ. Where before, those responsible for programme output only had to concern themselves with production, now
they are keenly aware of the organisation’s multiple and competing demands. One respondent was keen to stress that RTÉ is not unique in relying on commercial revenue.

People always compare you with the BBC, who are mainly just funded by the licence fee… but actually, if you look across Europe, you’ll find that there are plenty of public service broadcasters who are… surviving on a licence fee and commercial and are trying to balance, you know, those two elements. (Int. B. Personal interview)

However, another individual, who was not part of the PSG (and had worked in RTÉ for many years), argued that dependence on commercial funding can conflict with the public service remit.

You see - a lot of people realise this, but not enough people understand it - the funding mix does affect the output. There are certain things that you do, you do a Samuel Beckett season and you take a Saturday night on RTÉ television and you show Waiting For Godot and the documentary about Beckett’s life, and you don’t do that [says this emphatically] to take the highest share of viewing that night. If your public funding, or if the mix of your public and commercial funding, is not right, you won’t do things like that …in other ways, you won’t take the risks with home production that lead to success - this covers everything from Podge and Rodge to Celebrity Jigs and Reels to eh, a documentary about H Blocks to the latest successful drama - you won’t take risks in all those areas, and you have to take risks... if you don’t have some security about funding. Simple! (Int. C. Personal interview)

In spite of the licence fee increase and index-linking, secured after the Forum on Broadcasting, RTÉ’s financial revenue is heavily dependent on commercial revenue, which is vulnerable to the market and as such is never secure\textsuperscript{149}. Therefore, even if commercial revenue is buoyant (as it was when the interviews were carried out) it does not provide a secure financial basis for risk-taking in programming\textsuperscript{150}. Yet, none of the respondents working in the Television Division expressed any difficulty with the situation and accepted the ‘economic reality’.

\textsuperscript{149} A recent report for the BAI suggests that RTÉ’s dominance in television market, in advertising and commercial revenue, may have to be addressed in the future (Shaw, Picard and Abbink Spaink, 2010: 103). Any moves to reduce its commercial revenue earning capacity would most likely lead to a contraction of service.

\textsuperscript{150} The volatility of advertising revenue is evident in the downturn that followed September 11\textsuperscript{th} 2001 and more recently, the global financial crisis that began in 2007/2008.
…this is the classic compromise of working in a place like RTÉ: your funding’s not guaranteed, you have to be competitive, you have to be commercial, but how can you do that and at the same time fulfil all the subjects, the things you’re supposed to ‘cos you get a licence fee, [it is] a constant challenge…. it’s a compromise about maximising your commercial potential and also, at same time, ticking the boxes and doing what we’re paid to do. (Int. D. Personal interview)

The respondent’s matter-of-fact reference to ‘ticking the boxes’ (Int. D. Personal interview) suggests that public service may now be considered in terms of a legal obligation rather than an ethical or professional principle\textsuperscript{151}. While it is clear that RTÉ management are mindful of their remit, their responses suggest that public service obligations can only be fulfilled if they do not compromise the underlying need to operate on a financially viable basis.

In contrast, Küng found that senior members of staff in the BBC saw a clear discord between the organisation’s public service ethos and the strategic emphasis on commercial activities (2000: 179 – 180). Perhaps this is because the BBC has always been funded by the licence fee whereas RTÉ has always relied on commercial revenue. However, the most significant factor in cultivating this attitude in RTÉ is the recent structural change, prompted by fundamental political and economic shifts in the broadcast sector. The aim of the IBD model was to create ‘closer links between programming and commercial operations’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 45). The consultants did not advocate an entirely commercial approach, acknowledging for example that ‘more populist programming’ would undermine RTÉ’s public service role (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 15). Nevertheless, they argued that ‘commercial accountability should not be divorced from creative/ editorial functions’ (Logical and KPMG, 2002: 31).

\textsuperscript{151} In a discussion on developing accountability systems for public service broadcasting, Jakubowicz warns against imposing very narrow “monastery model” remits on PSB organisations, to be assessed on the basis of a “box-ticking” approach (2003: 59).
In the Television Division, commercial and editorial functions were brought side by side through the PSG while the schedule-based budgeting system linked output and programming costs directly to revenue. These have been instrumental in cultivating a shared focus. As the individual from Sales put it, ‘that has made a fundamental difference because we understand their requirements and they understand ours’ (Int. F. Personal interview). The same respondent argued that making everyone more commercially focused can benefit production: ‘there is a real reward for them if we all work well together because we bring in more money and they get to spend it’ (Int. F. Personal interview). This was echoed by a representative from Programming.

what’s happening now is it’s a very nice mixture of the business stroke the editorial to get the very best for the schedule and that you fulfil the vision and values that RTÉ has; that you fulfil the public service broadcasting; that you make sure that you get peak share as well; that you make sure that you’re relevant to people’s lives, and also that there is, and this is very practical, that there’s a commercial gain as well, because if something does extremely well in share then it’s very good for Marketing; they sell the advertising, and the money goes straight back into Programmes. … So, without sounding like, you know, ‘and then everybody lives happily ever after’ that’s actually, genuinely what it means for programming. (Int. E. Personal interview)

These comments show that RTÉ management regard commercial success as a means to an end because it provides the resources to fund programming. Indeed, they are not just accepting of the situation, but upbeat.

Branson argues that individuals need to make their work meaningful to them (2008: 378). As noted above, many of the respondents, particularly those from a production background expressed a strong public service ethic. Therefore, in order for them to value their work they would have to believe they are providing a public broadcast service. This certainly comes through in their defence of the scheduling management system. They argue that the best way to serve the audience is through the ratings system and that the way to guarantee programmes are produced is to
ensure commercial success. It is also evident in their vision of what a public service looks like.

…what we don’t want to do is become a very narrow public service broadcaster that just does say news and current affairs and heavy programmes. For us, *The Late Late Show* on a Friday night, when a big issue emerges, or even the fact that 45% of the audience sit down and watch *You’re a Star* and argue the toss in the pub afterwards that that was a crap song or was good song – that’s, for us, equally valid as a broadcaster. (Int. B. Personal interview)

Another acknowledged that a broad-ranging service is essential to providing a public service because schedules must be appealing if they are to attract people: ‘If you don’t have the right mix of the *Lost* and the *Friends*… you won’t have the people watching’ (Int. C. Personal interview). Having a broad-ranging programme service as the guiding model allows management to reconcile their genuine commitment to public service and their creative motivation to make programmes with the demands of commercial viability. It explains why there is little tension between the commercial and programming parties in the PSG, except for example, when there is a need to show programmes in prime time that are not likely to attract a large audience.

**Conclusion**

To survive and compete in the contemporary broadcast environment, RTÉ has adopted organisational structures and systems to improve cost efficiency, predictability and top down control over programming. This chapter has shown how these formal structures have affected the work of those at the core of the scheduling process. Although it is a small-scale qualitative study, it reveals important insights into the factors that shape the scheduling process and the ways in which management negotiate competing demands. While management exhibit a strong commitment to public service, calculability, predictability and rules now govern their decision-
making. The study indicates that management have adopted a pragmatic approach to public service, keenly aware of the need to maintain commercial viability and ensure the survival of the organisation. Thus rationalisation of scheduling has led to a fundamental adjustment in the attitudes and practices of management in RTÉ. The next and final chapter will consider the long-term implications of this shift for programme diversity, creativity and the public service ethos.
Conclusion: Rationalising Public Service - A Means to an End?

Today, public broadcasters across Europe must prioritise cost efficiency, accountability and audience share while continuing to fulfil their public service remit in a competitive, commercialised sector. So far we have seen how, in response to these challenges, public broadcasters have adopted new organisational structures and practices; scheduling is at the heart of those changes. Scheduling now functions as a strategic management tool; this has allowed for economic control and greater competitiveness, critical in the contemporary broadcast environment. Rationalisation of scheduling is therefore a practical and reasonable response to the economic and political challenges public broadcasters now face. However, this final chapter will consider the consequences of this process for the future of public service broadcasting in the European broadcast sector.

The analysis of programme output in chapter five showed that while RTÉ has managed to maintain programme diversity across its schedules, genuine choice and pluralism was in fact diminished by scheduling practices. Chapter six showed that management at RTÉ have taken control of the creative process and have applied a ratings-led, strategic approach to programming. These trends are outward manifestations of the rational logic governing public service broadcasting today. This chapter will discuss the implications of these rationalised practices for programme output, before considering the more fundamental transformation of public service broadcasting. It will argue that schedule-based management reflects and reinforces a fundamental redefinition of the relationship between public service broadcasters and their audiences and, indeed, of public service broadcasting itself.

The changes in scheduling and the introduction of scheduling as a management tool were initially justified on the basis of being more attentive to the needs of viewers...
In fact, scheduling management and the rationalisation of scheduling practices also represent the imposition of commercial logics, standards and practices throughout the sector. The demands for commercial viability, (economic) efficiency and accountability and the assessment of PSBs on the basis of audience share, are all manifestations of this. This process is affecting broadcasting in two key areas: diversity and creativity.

**Creativity**

Creativity is the lifeblood of any cultural endeavour. From an economic perspective, ‘creativity is a critical strategic resource because of the nature of cultural goods’ (Küng, 2008: 145). To maintain competitiveness, media organisations have to keep coming up with new ideas (Küng, 2008: 145). It is also important from a public interest perspective. Creativity is essential for the vitality of broadcasting culture, to allow new ideas and formats to emerge which might better reflect the concerns and interests of the public. Croteau and Hoynes argue that ‘innovation and risk taking – including promoting fresh perspectives, developing new formats, and welcoming controversy – are part of what it means to serve the public interest’ (2006: 37). As such, sustaining and encouraging creativity must be a priority for public broadcast organisations (see Blumler and Nossiter, 1991: 422).

Organising creativity is, to some, an oxymoron yet that is the challenge for cultural institutions and businesses. Küng notes that within the field of management research ‘the inspirational component of creative acts made them hard to accommodate within rational management concepts’ (2008: 146). There is an inherent tension between the ‘arationality of the creative process’ (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2006: 6) and the formal rationality of bureaucratic organisations. For example, Donaldson points to research which shows that decentralised, less formalised organisations are less

Media organisations therefore face a dilemma of how to organise creative work. As Gallagher asks, ‘how can ‘mass media industries reconcile the dictates of organizational efficiency – for example, towards regularity, routine, control – with the commitment of individual ‘creators’ to their skills or craft?’ (1982: 163 – 164).

Demarcation is considered by some to be the optimum way to organise cultural production because it protects producer autonomy and limits the influence of commercial pressures on the creative process (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007: 534; see also Alvesson and Thompson, 2005: 493; Küng, 2008: 151 – 153). It is ‘based on the notion that the best way to maximise the potential of creative people is to set the task and then extend to them the necessary autonomy for its execution’ (Davis and Scase, 2000: 72). As discussed in chapter two, before the adoption of scheduling management, creative and management functions were kept separate in public broadcast organisations. This system is not unique to public broadcasting, however; Küng identifies insulating creative workers from market forces as a crucial factor in the success of HBO and Pixar, two private production companies that have achieved huge critical and commercial success (2008: 159).

Demarcation leaves creative workers free to focus on the task at hand without concern for external issues such as funding or whether the product will be popular. Eikhof and Haunschild argue that limiting the influence of commercial logics is essential to safeguard the creative worker’s artistic motivation (2007: 534). Moreover, in public service broadcasting, notably in the BBC, autonomy was traditionally regarded as a fundamental aspect of the producer’s professional identity (Murdock, 1993: 125). Davis and Scase also argue that demarcation allows for indeterminacy,
which they identify as one of the key dimensions of the creative process. This refers to
the extent to which the goals of the organisation are determined by the creative process
rather than by management (Davis and Scase, 2000: 20). In an organisation that
supports indeterminacy:

While senior management are responsible for setting the overall strategic goals they are dependent on an indeterminate creative process for their interpretation
and implementation. Indeed, in many work settings, the goals of the organization
will be shaped by the creative process, with senior managers having an entirely
supportive or facilitative function. (Davis and Scase, 2000: 20).

Within this structure, then, creative ideas emerge from the bottom up, without control or interference from management and without undue commercial pressures. It is the role of management to create an environment for that to happen.

Demarcation works best when the organisation’s financial position is secure and when there is a strong demand for its products (Davis and Scase, 2000: 72). However, as we have learned these are no longer the conditions under which public broadcasters operate. They have to redefine and defend their role in a highly competitive environment. Küng argues that when environments become more turbulent, management tend to take control of the creative process (2007: 27). Thus as public broadcasters grappled with a rapidly changing environment, they have taken creativity out of the hands of producers and expanded it ‘to include activities concerned with the organization’s systems, process and strategy’ (Küng, 2007: 27). This was achieved through the adoption of a schedule-led production system.

**Rationalisation of Creativity**

As discussed in chapter three, in a bureaucracy, any mechanism that enhances calculability and allows for more accurate, technical assessment of means, ends and consequences makes the organisation more rational. Thus, as RTÉ sought to improve strategic control, cost efficiency and accountability, it rationalised its scheduling and
production practices. The schedule-based budgeting and planning (SBBP) system strengthened top down control of programme output and improved cost efficiency by linking all spending to the needs of the schedule. It also enhanced calculability by valuing each slot in terms of audience share and advertising revenue. Thus, by improving control, calculability and predictability, the organisation has become more economically rational. However, in terms of encouraging creativity, it might be said that this approach is decidedly irrational.

Some claim that control from management need not inhibit creativity and argue that in fact creative work can and should happen within limits (Amabile, 1998: 81). For example, Küng argues that resources should be sufficient but not ‘over-generous’ (2008: 154). Amabile argues that management can set the overall strategic goals and dictate the budget and timeframe, while still allowing cultural workers the space and autonomy to do creative work (1998: 81). In other words, management define what should be done and leave creative workers free to decide how to do it. Gallagher refers to this as tactical autonomy versus strategic control (1982: 167), while Amabile argues that creative workers should be given autonomy in respect of ‘the means…but not necessarily the ends’ (1998: 81).

On the face of it, this is what scheduling management achieves. The Programme Strategy Group (PSG) decides on the requirements and the budget for each slot; producers then pitch their ideas to commissioning editors. In this way, management maintain control over costs and strategic outcomes while leaving producers free to produce the programmes. In fact, however, scheduling management goes much further than this. The PSG has editorial responsibility for the schedule and, together with commissioning editors, makes key creative decisions for programmes, specifying items such as the subject matter, style, tone, and target audience.

Thus, the adoption of scheduling as a management tool represents the formal
incorporation of creative work into the domain of management\textsuperscript{152}. This transforms the relationship between management and producers and, Born argues, has resulted in ‘the erosion of the creative autonomy and confidence of BBC production’ (2005: 304). This is why Ellis (2000) describes scheduling as the ‘last creative act in television’. Whereas demarcation was based on isolating the creative process from the rest of the organisation, the scheduling management system removes this buffer.

Küng argues that analysis which focuses only on rational structures misses the fact that creativity is ‘deeply embedded in many routine activities’ (2007: 27). Indeed, Roberts found that many working in management positions in the UK television industry have come from a programming background (2010: 774). This is also true in the case of RTÉ, where a number of members of the PSG began their careers in production. Therefore the assumption that managers are not creative is flawed. From this perspective, whether ideas come from the bottom or the top, creativity can happen within rational structures.

However, when creativity is integrated into management structures, it becomes subject to control, calculability and predictability. Furthermore, creative freedom is limited when management have to concern themselves with financial, competitive and regulatory issues. Management must take responsibility for the organisation’s survival and this will mean, for example, they are less likely to take a risk with a slot or to spend money on a programme for ‘art’s sake’, that is, unless there is some calculable benefit. Past programmes are evaluated on the basis of audience share, and ratings data is used to inform future planning and budgeting. Hence, commercial concerns impact on the creative process at every turn.

Where before the issue was how best to preserve creative autonomy (Gallagher,\textsuperscript{152})

\textsuperscript{152} Davis and Scase define incorporation as the absorption of key creative roles into the management structure (2000: 73). They refer to giving producers responsibility for management functions as an example. Here it is interpreted as making management responsible for creative decisions.
1982: 152), today this is no longer a concern. Even in so far as producers are left to devise programme ideas, they are expected to incorporate ratings data into their programme development. Moreover, producers are less likely to pitch new ideas to their commissioning editor because they know the scheduling system demands a predictable audience share. Management in RTÉ argued that this approach ensures that the interests and concerns of viewers influence programme output. However, there is a risk that this may diminish artistic motivation and lead, ultimately, to creative inertia in the broadcast sector. Tracey argues that the rules of broadcasting should liberate rather than restrict the programme-maker, but the schedule-led system curbs creative freedom (1998: 31). It may also limit a broadcaster’s capacity to fully reflect the plurality of voices and identities of its audience.

Diversity

As noted in chapter five, media diversity and pluralism are upheld as ‘foundational values that hardly anyone is opposed to’ (Karppinen, 2006: 53). It has become an important focus of Irish broadcasting policy of late, in light of rapid demographic and socio-cultural change153. However, while the schedule analysis showed that RTÉ has ostensibly managed to maintain a range of programme types, in prime time in particular, the diversity of genres is limited. Moreover, RTÉ’s high dependence on advertising revenue limits the organisation’s capacity to cater for a diversity of minority voices and cultural experiences. Hence the actual outcome falls short of the objective. The divergence between the two can be traced back to the introduction of market-based broadcasting regulation and what Karppinen (2006) describes as the ‘technocratisation of European media policy’.

153 In 2010 the BAI published two reports on broadcasting and cultural diversity (Titley, 2010; McConagle, 2010). Available at http://www.bai.ie/publications_researchpub.html [Accessed May 2011]
Scannell (1990) notes that pluralism first emerged as a normative value in British media policy in the late 1970s with the Annan report, which paved the way for Channel 4. Channel 4 was established to enhance plurality in the UK television sector by providing programmes from a range of sources and representing minority cultural interests (Scannell, 1990: 20; McQuail, 1992: 57). Karppinen links those early debates on pluralism to the criticism of public service broadcasters as elitist and unable to reflect the multiplicity of cultural experiences and political views (2006: 56). From this perspective, pluralism was regarded as a democratic and cultural necessity. Later though, as market-based policies took hold in the wider economy as well as the broadcast sector, pluralism was framed in terms of freedom of choice for the consumer (see Scannell, 1990: 21; McQuail, 1992: 58). Deregulation of the entire European broadcast sector was defended on that basis. Diversity as choice thus emerged as a guiding principle in media policy at European and national levels and as a standard measure of a public broadcaster’s performance.

Since deregulation, public service broadcasters have been under pressure to justify their role and funding in a multi-channel market. The old ‘we know it when we see it’ conceptual definition of public service broadcasting was no longer deemed sufficient and regulators needed to clearly define the public service remit. This has given rise to the culture of accountability that pervades public service broadcasting today and the implementation of mechanisms to measure public broadcasters’ performance (see Coppens and Saeys, 2006: 265). Diversity as choice functions as a key performance indicator in this context. Karppinen argues that the market definition ‘is rather easily quantified and measured’ whereas pluralism, along with ideas of public

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154 In 1999, a BBC review panel report stated: ‘we decided that we may not be able to offer a tight new definition of public service broadcasting, but we nevertheless each felt that we knew it when we saw it. And not only did we all share some basic conceptions of what it meant, but we believed that these would be common to many people, probably the majority, in our society (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999: 10).
sphere, citizenship, creativity and national culture, is ‘notoriously difficult to define in an unambiguous way, let alone measure empirically’ (2006: 58). Hence, programme diversity offers a more concrete means to assess PSB’s fulfilment of the ultimate goal of cultural and political pluralism. That is, normative social values are translated into measurable objectives.

The application of measurable standards reflects a wider trend towards legalistic regulation. This is itself a consequence of the pervading influence of market logics and standards. Weber argued that ‘modern rational capitalism has need… of a calculable legal system and of administration in terms of formal rules’ (1930: xxxiii). That is, it is in the interest of the market to eliminate normative values and stick to ‘objective’, measurable standards. Karppinen points out that the market definition of diversity is supposedly value-neutral because it focuses on tangible programme output and is therefore divorced from any overarching value system (2006: 59). In fact it is absolutely value laden because it derives from the market and as such imposes commercial values onto public service broadcasting. Thus, the shift from pluralism to diversity has, according to Gibbons, ‘conveniently assisted a shift from public service dominance to a market approach’ to broadcasting regulation (2000: 307).

The market model of diversity as choice has therefore come to dominate both regulation and practice. As long as public broadcasters are judged by diversity of programme types this is what they will focus on, to the detriment of the ultimate value of pluralism. In other words, the means become more important than the ends. This was borne out in the schedule analysis presented here. For example, in 2005 the prime time schedule contained popular drama, soap opera and lifestyle programming on RTÉ1 alongside informative and educational programmes, such as nature documentaries on the second channel. Members of the PSG argued that this mixed programme strategy offered the viewer choice. Moreover, offering informative and educational programmes
in prime time was part of a strategy to defend the organisation’s reputation as a quality public service broadcaster and secure support for funding.

This strategy is a clever and rational solution to the problem that public broadcasters face. It allows them to cater for different audience segments and to offer choice to the viewer. Providing choice was presented as an important aspect of serving the audience and thus a core element of the public service remit. It is also effective from a commercial perspective since providing options allows the broadcaster to target different demographic market segments (see Croteau and Hoynes, 2006: 38). By providing nature documentaries on the second channel in prime time, RTÉ could catch soap avoiders and thereby maximise audience share. However, while this strategy meets the diversity standard and allows RTÉ to meet its commercial and legal requirements, it is more difficult to say if programme output truly reflects the multiplicity of voices and interests in Irish society.

As this dissertation has shown, RTÉ’s scheduling strategies are now in the main governed by budget/slot logic. Under this system slots are valued according to their economic worth, which is measured in terms of audience ratings. The analysis did show that calculations are not always made on a strictly commercial basis. Nevertheless, there is a deliberate attempt to balance the cost of a programme with the share it is likely to achieve. Consequently, programmes that are deemed to have limited appeal are still included in the schedule, but at times where the available audience is relatively small, thus minimising any loss of advertising revenue. The result, Søndergaard points out, is that such programmes ‘reach fewer viewers than their quality merits’ (1996: 11). By applying the budget/slot logic, RTÉ manages to provide a relatively diverse range of programmes but in a cost-effective way and in a manner which protects commercial revenue. However, the logic dictates that once programmes are shown to be ineffective,
either commercially or even in terms of garnering critical acclaim and political support, they will be squeezed out altogether.

Likewise, the budget/slot approach prioritises more valuable audience groups, including for example, housekeepers and young adults, at the expense of other members of the public. These demographic groups are served in the prime slots, with a budget to match, while those that are less commercially valuable are excluded or are served at less convenient times and/or at low cost. As Søndergaard argues, the consequence is that viewers in these groups ‘receive poorer service’ (1996: 11). Therefore RTÉ ostensibly manages to fulfil its public service responsibilities, but in fact it privileges some members of the public over others. As a result, RTÉ falls somewhat short of its duty to reflect and serve the plurality of voices that make up Irish society.

Rationalisation of scheduling and programming practices in public service broadcasting has transformed creativity from an instinctive, producer-led activity to a scientific, ratings-driven process, and has redefined diversity in terms of choice. Furthermore, the emphasis on measurable indicators of service leads RTÉ to prioritise certain genres over others. Genres such as news, current affairs and home produced drama receive greater investment and more prominent slots because they strengthen the broadcaster’s reputation while working competitively in the schedules. These developments have serious consequences for programme output, yet underpinning them is a far more profound and fundamental revolution in public service broadcasting. Rationalisation of scheduling reflects and reinforces a redefinition of the audience, and indeed the very concept of public service.

**Defining the Audience: Defining Service**

Hart argues that for communication to take place, it is necessary to know the audience (1991: 44). By the same token, public service depends on the broadcaster knowing, and
understanding the needs of, its audience. In years gone by, this insight was based on instinct, anecdotal evidence and some limited research. Today, however, broadcasters can no longer rely on informal, tacit knowledge. For political and competitive reasons, they must strengthen their relationship with viewers; the schedule is the basis of that relationship. The schedule-led system creates a direct link between the broadcaster, the audience and programmes through the incorporation of ratings data into programming strategies.

Ratings data offers an objective, scientific means of knowing the audience. It allows the broadcaster to identify who is available throughout the day, predict programmes that might be popular, and finally measure how many people watched. Nightingale argues that this justifies ratings data ‘as the only pictures [of the audience] worth having’ (2004: 238). Ratings are the currency of advertising sales, but more than that, they are the standard by which public broadcasters are judged (Flynn, 2002: 173). In order to justify receipt of the licence fee, public broadcasters must prove that they are listening to, and providing a relevant service for, their audience. Consequently, ratings are a crucial part of a broadcaster’s defence and the schedule-led, ratings-driven system is upheld as being more alert to the needs of audiences.

Ratings are, however, fallible and produce limited knowledge. These limitations are accepted for the purposes of advertising sales (Napoli, 2003: 35). However, they cannot measure audience interpretation or response to programmes (Nightingale, 2004: 236 – 237). As Webster and Lichty argue, they transform the moment of meaningful engagement with media into standardised and measurable time-units (1991: 179). Yet today the relationship between a public broadcaster and its audience is defined primarily by ratings data155. Hartley argues that ‘the audience is a construction motivated by the

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155 RTÉ also makes use of an internet-based audience survey, known as the Audience Reaction Panel. Established in 2007, the survey can measure the reaction of viewers to specific programmes or
paradigm in which it is imagined’ (2002: 11). Thus, the use of ratings as a lens for knowing the audience reveals how public broadcasters know their audience, not as a public with shared interests but as a market model of individuals.

Within the market model audiences are conceived as consumers of media and as commodities to be bought by advertisers (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006: 38; Smythe, 1981). Within the public sphere model, on the other hand, audiences are perceived as a public (Croteau and Hoynes, 2006: 38). This word ‘public’ denotes ‘a set of citizens who share and pursue objectives and interests’ (McQuail, 1992: 2). Here, the audience is regarded as a democratically and culturally engaged collective body. It recognises their common interests, their need for a shared discursive space and their right to access, and be represented within that space (McQuail, 1992: 2; Dayan, 2001: 744).

Rooted in the nation state and often considered as a mass homogenous entity the term public has lost some of its currency in the context of political and social change (Søndergaard, 1996: 6). Moreover, with multi-channel television and the emergence of personalised viewing habits, it is more difficult to think of viewers as a collective. Nevertheless, media services that recognise audiences as publics are vital for democratic debate and for social cohesion. Lowe and Jauert argue that public service media can ‘maintain the ties that bind’ and ensure ‘intercultural understandings’ (2003: 28); Blumler describes this as social knitting (1998: 56). It can also facilitate inclusive

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impressions of the service in general. Data from the survey is incorporated into performance assessment and informs future scheduling decisions. However, information is not collected for all programmes and ratings continue to be the main mechanism for audience measurement. See ‘RTÉ Corporate Responsibility 2008’. Available at http://www.rte.ie/about/pdfs/rtecorporateresponsibility2008_Eng.pdf [Accessed May 2011]

Livingstone critiques the notion that audiences and publics are oppositional concepts, arguing that political engagement can happen in all sorts of mediated spaces and formats (2005: 19 – 20). Dayan, on the other hand, argues that media audiences only become publics in limited and transient ways and that activity only happens beyond the medium (2001: 753). The issue, though, is not whether these are mutually exclusive concepts. Dayan’s conception of publics does not suggest that audiences can never be politically and culturally motivated. Rather it stresses the need to provide a shared communicative space and to engage audiences as citizens with common concerns (Dayan, 2001: 757).
and informed political debate (see Habermas, 1989; Søndergaard, 1996: 8). As public communication becomes increasingly mediated, and since television is such an integral part of daily life, these functions are more important now than ever (Blumler, 1998: 54; Dahlgren, 1995: 2; see also de Zengotita, 2005; Scannell, 1992: 323).

Certainly RTÉ contributes to the formation of public opinion through some of its programming and in this way fulfils an important role in ‘activating’ publics (Dayan, 2001: 756). However, Livingstone argues that the media can deny the possibility of audiences becoming publics ‘via strategies of exclusion’ (2005: 11). The schedule-led system embeds such strategies of exclusion within public service broadcasting. Since RTÉ depends on commercial revenue, it must prioritise those segments more highly valued by advertisers. Meanwhile, lower valued segments are seen as marginal groups who must be accommodated in the schedule rather than as equal members of society. This prejudice is reflected in the budget/slot logic, that is, setting budgets and assigning slots on the basis of audience share.

Adopting this approach has been crucial to RTÉ’s financial survival. It also addresses the broadcaster’s need to maintain a strong position in the sector, to secure political support. However, in redefining and serving the audience in these terms, it favours certain members of society over others. Gandy argues that ‘the segmentation of the audience reflects the differential value placed on each segment by those who are in the market for access to audience attention’ (2004: 331). While public broadcasters have a duty to serve all members of the public, this differential value influences how they treat each audience member. Thus segmentation of the audience may act as a divisive force, reinforcing and even actively creating economic and social inequalities.

157 Louw doubts whether public service broadcasting represents a Habermasian public sphere (2001: 100). Fraser, meanwhile, contests the notion that there should be a single overarching public sphere because it will inevitably be unequal (1993: 17). However, following Garnham (1996: 372), I argue that there is a need for an overarching public sphere that is analogous to the national cultural and political space, which facilitates dialogue and reflects society.
rather than contributing to common bonds (see Gandy, 2004: 336; see also Turow, 1997: 199 – 200).

**Rationalising Public Service**

As we have seen, the ascendancy of commercial standards and practices in public service broadcasting threatens to undermine the values of pluralism and equality of participation and representation. It also disrupts the shared public experience and weakens creativity and innovation in broadcasting. This arises because of an apparent clash between public service and commercial values. As discussed in chapter three, Weber argued that there are fundamental inconsistencies between different value spheres. Moreover, as Brubaker argued, rationalisation ‘progressively intensifies tensions’ between different value spheres, because the discrepancy between them become more acute (1984: 75). This implies that one can never hope to satisfy competing values and objectives, since action which satisfies one value sphere will necessarily conflict with another.

Moreover, Weber maintained that formal rationality contains its own inherent qualities, which may be inimical to certain purposes. The case of RTÉ illustrates how insistence on control and consistency of outcome can stifle the creative process. Furthermore, where financial concerns encroach this too can restrict the freedom needed for creativity to flourish. The issue of diversity highlights a broader process of rationalisation, or technocratisation, of media policy. This formal rational approach to regulation, which is concerned with measurable indicators of performance, leads to the prioritisation of choice in place of pluralism and the emphasis on key programme genres as short hand for public service.

Thus, the consequences of imposing a formal, economic rationality on public service broadcasting, and the effects of a clash of values, can be clearly seen in the case
of RTÉ. Weber’s concepts therefore provide an invaluable framework to understand the pressures facing public service broadcasters. Yet this case study also highlights the divergence between reality and theory. As discussed in chapter three, ideal types are just that; in real life, competing forces prevent any one form of rationality from advancing to its fullest extent. This is reflected in the theoretically imperfect public broadcasting model that operates in RTÉ. Since RTÉ depends on advertising revenue and must compete in a market system, commercial pressures and rationalities are ever present. Furthermore, the professional commitment to public service, which was plainly evident from this research, and the legal mandate mean that RTÉ will never be completely commercialised. The regulatory framework, determined by national and European policy, also shapes the form of public service found in Ireland. Local broadcasting traditions and audience expectations add their flavour too.

To speak, therefore, of a pure public service rationality is useful because it highlights the effects of commercial pressures and formal quantitative reasoning. However, it does not fully capture the complexity of the situation. This does not mean that the theory of rationalisation is inadequate. Rather, Weber’s concept of economic action conceptualises the dilemmas and contradictions of real life. He recognised that at times, it is not possible to act according to one set of values. Instead, one must adopt an economic approach. Economic action involves weighing up the ends, means and possible consequences of each course of action, while striving to make the best use of resources. It is not concerned with satisfying a particular value sphere. Nor, though, is it a strictly technical calculation of the best means to an end. Since it must take into account the relative merits of various strategies it is ‘an inherently evaluative concept’ (Brubaker, 1984: 11).

RTÉ has to contend with competing obligations and this demands an economic approach. It has to fulfil its public service remit and maintain financial viability; each of
these goals will entail a number of, often competing objectives. There may be a number of ways to achieve the various goals, which will each bring about different consequences. For example, in maintaining financial viability, should the organisation try to attract larger audiences or prioritise those segments that are more commercially valuable? RTÉ could serve minority interests by providing less popular programmes, but it may lead to criticism for being irrelevant to the majority of the audience. Therefore, RTÉ has to weigh up the consequences and the costs of each course of action. It must strive for the overall satisfaction of demands rather than just one, and balance its resources between these various ends.

As the previous chapter revealed, management at RTÉ accept the ‘economic reality’ that for the organisation to survive and continue funding domestic production, they must earn commercial revenue. At the same time, the organisation has to fulfil its legal obligations and defend its reputation as a quality public service broadcaster. Therefore, in their budgeting and scheduling decisions, they must take account of the consequences of their actions and make choices about which goals to prioritise. That is, rather than acting according to a pure public service ethic, and the consequences be damned, management at RTÉ must choose the ‘relatively best’ option (Weber, 1948: 151).

Some acknowledged the difficulty in meeting all their obligations and conceded that sacrifices had to be made. Yet they all accept that public service duties must be balanced with commercial and political demands. RTÉ may have to maximise commercial revenue in prime time and provide minority interest programmes in less competitive slots. On the other hand, sometimes public service obligations will mean that economic considerations must be sidelined. In taking this approach RTÉ has applied an ethic of responsibility, an idea Weber (1948) introduced in his writings on
politics as a vocation. Weber argued that a rational approach, which is, weighing up the consequences of one’s actions, is responsible (1948: 120).

Against the pragmatic ethic of responsibility, however, Weber also posited an ethic of conviction or ‘absolute ends’ (1948: 120). One who follows an ethic of conviction is only concerned that their action satisfies some set of values, regardless of the consequences or the chance of success (Weber, 1948: 120; Schluchter, 1979: 85). The conviction ethic ‘demands no adjustment of core beliefs’ (Whimster, 2001: 63). Whimster describes the ethic of conviction as ‘a lesser form of rationality unable to assess goals or take into account the consequences of action’ (2001: 63). Weber acknowledged that the politician does not always have the luxury of acting according to an ethic of absolute ends, without regard for consequences (1948: 120 – 122). Yet he also argued that unless people held on to their core beliefs, fundamental values would be lost to the world completely (Weber, 1948: 77). So, where does this leave RTÉ and public service broadcasting?

As long as RTÉ depends on commercial revenue, it will have to balance multiple and competing objectives. And while regulators judge public broadcasters according to standards adopted from the market, RTÉ will have to negotiate the tension between commercial and public service values. In this context, the rational economic approach appears to be the only option. As Schluchter puts it, the ethic of conviction is ‘blind to reality’ while the ethic of responsibility is ‘realistic’ (1979: 88). RTÉ cannot operate in a bubble; it is sensitive to trends in the global television marketplace, and must satisfy different stakeholders: regulators, audiences and advertisers. Scheduling management allows for competing obligations to be accommodated in the schedule. In this sense it represents a form of negotiated rationalisation, which has been adapted for the needs of public service broadcasting in the contemporary environment.
Given that RTÉ has to satisfy competing objectives – balancing public service, popularity and cost efficiency – this rational, economic logic seems prudent. However, there can be no doubt that the adoption of scheduling management has far reaching consequences. It has resulted in a qualitatively new approach to the programming/production process. In an attempt to reduce uncertainty in a highly competitive environment, RTÉ management have applied rules and a scientific rationality to a process that was previously outside of their remit. This system is defended as being more attentive to the needs of audiences. As such, it reflects and reinforces a new understanding of public service.

In 1999, Syvertsen argues that ‘what we are witnessing today is a systematic struggle to shift the content of the concept from two traditional interpretations toward a new, third meaning: from broadcasting as a public utility and broadcasting in service of the public sphere toward broadcasting in service of the audience’ (1999: 7, author’s emphasis). She argues that this shift reflects greater responsiveness on the part of policy makers and broadcasters ‘to the individual media consumer than to the audience as a culturally interested, democratically oriented body’ (1999: 9). Scheduling management formalises this concept. Within this definition, ‘serving the audience’ is taken to mean reacting to ratings and the broader public interest is neglected in favour of audience share and advertising revenue. Therefore, just as diversity was the subject of contestation by competing actors in the sector, so the very concept of public service is undergoing a radical transformation.

As policy makers engage with the question of how public broadcasting should be defined, organised, and supported in the contemporary media environment this fundamental transformation must be acknowledged. Moreover, they need to pay attention to the effects of commercial logics and practices on public broadcasting. Therefore, rather than expecting public broadcasters to operate as ‘quasi-commercial’
operators in a market environment, the sector may need to be reoriented in support of public service broadcasting. As Feintuck and Varney argue, it may be time to ‘argue loudly for an acceptance of the reality that only the public service tradition has been proven to guarantee the range and quality of programming and reach all sectors of society that the public interest demands’ (2006: 256). Otherwise, public broadcasters will continue to adopt the logics and practices of the market in pursuit of a rationalised, but ultimately diminished version of public service.


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Appendix I: Methodology

The Schedule Analysis

Channel versus System Diversity
This study is not directly concerned with the level of system diversity, that is, the range of programme genres available in Ireland (see Hellman, 2001: 184 – 185). Rather, it seeks to understand how scheduling practices in RTÉ have changed in response to environmental pressures and how this affects the range and structure of programme output provided by the broadcaster. Consequently, it only examines the programme output of RTÉ1 and RTÉ2.

Measuring Diversity
A number of studies employ rather complex mathematical formulas to measure levels of diversity (see for example Hellman, 2001; van der Wurff and van Cuilenburg, 2001). Léon adopted the Dominick and Pearce (1976) method to measure the extent to which a certain number of programme categories dominate prime-time (2007: 89). However, while diversity of genres is a key concern, the changes in scheduling practices are the main focus of this study. Thus, variations in the range of programmes available through the years are examined as an indication of changing strategies. For that reason, relatively straightforward quantitative analysis was combined with qualitative analysis to give a more comprehensive picture. That is, rather than simply measuring the number of different types of programmes, the study seeks to understand where and how programmes are used in the schedule.
Unit of Analysis

Analysis was based on the number of minutes accounted for by each programme category, as opposed to instances of each genre. This follows the approach adopted by a number of other studies, including Hellman, 1999; de Bens and de Smaele, 2001; Aslama, Hellman and Sauri, 2004; van der Wurff and van Cuilenburg, 2001. Léon, on the other hand, measured the number of broadcasts, rather than programme length, on the basis that ‘the duration of each programme is determined, among other factors, by its own genre and characteristics. A larger duration does not always mean that the programme is more important for the channel’s strategy’ (2007: 89). However, time was chosen as the unit of analysis in this study in order to assess the level of choice available to the viewer and also to show the extent to which broadcasters rely on certain programme categories to fill air time. This is particularly important in prime time, since peak viewing hours are limited. If a high proportion of prime time is taken up with just a few genres, this clearly limits choice at the time when most viewers are available.

Programme Categories

The list of categories was devised specifically for this study, following the reasoning that programme categories should be appropriate to the character of output of a particular broadcasting region, even if this makes international comparison more difficult (see Ishikawa et al., 1996: 255). Nevertheless, in drawing up the list of categories, attention was given to other diversity studies with respect to the number and type of programme categories. Other studies used lists ranging from nine (de Bens and de Smaele, 2001) to fifteen categories (Hellman, 2001; see also Hellman, 1999: 347). Most of the lists contained a combination of form (for example documentary), genre (news) and target audience (children’s). This sort of taxonomy is intended to reflect industry classifications and choice of content as understood by audiences (see Hellman,
2001: 196). However, some of these categories, for example, documentary are rather broad and do not provide enough detail on the content available to audiences. Therefore, this study borrowed categories from the EBU classification system.

The EBU classification system contains a range of categories, including intention (to entertain, inform, and so on), format, content and target audience, thus allowing for a rich description of programmes. Programmes were initially coded using the full EBU classification system. In hindsight, this level of detail was unnecessary; coding took an inordinate amount of time and in the end, the data proved too cumbersome for analysis and discussion. There is a balance to be struck between an overly broad list of categories, which would fail to recognise the range of content and formats available to the audience, and one that is so detailed and descriptive that is renders comparative analysis over time meaningless. In the end, a simper list of categories was used, based on the EBU classification system and bearing in mind the schemes used in other studies and local broadcasting traditions. A similar approach was taken by La Porte et al. who incorporated the EBU categories and those used in the Eurofiction project (2001: 58). This allowed for easier analysis and more meaningful discussion of trends over time. However, having a database of carefully coded programmes meant that the final analysis of the schedules was more thorough and precise.

The task of coding programmes can be beset by risks of bias and inaccuracy. Such risks have been acknowledged by other researchers, including Litman and Hasegawa, 1996: 207 and Léon, 2007: 89. A key consideration was that the categories were mutually exclusive in terms of content to allow for more certainty in the coding process. Extensive care was taken in the initial coding stages to describe each programme accurately.
Sampling

The existing diversity studies favour either a long timeframe or a number of weeks per year, but not both (perhaps because data collection and coding of programme schedules is extremely time-consuming). Since the aim of this study is to track changes in scheduling practices during the period of commercialisation, analysis is based on one week from the autumn schedules in 1990, 1999 and 2005. Scheduling is seasonal and there are distinct differences between summer and autumn; less so between spring and autumn schedules. There is no common approach among the available studies regarding which season should be selected. Some studies take a week from spring and autumn to account for these seasonal variations (Hellman and Sauri, 1994); others analyse a number of weeks throughout the year to draw an average picture (van der Wurff and van Cuijlenburg, 2001; Aslama, Hellman and Sauri, 2004). A number of others take a week from spring time (Ishikawa et al., 1996; Litman and Hasegawa, 1996) while de Bens and de Smaele (2001) selected two weeks in January.

Autumn is selected for this study because this is typically when general interest television service providers offer their strongest programming. As such, it can be taken to represent the broadcaster’s strategic priorities, a key consideration in understanding scheduling as a strategic management tool. For this reason, it must be acknowledged that the results may be, in a sense, skewed in the broadcaster’s favour, in so far as the schedule is likely to contain more home programming, for example. However, this is not a significant issue for the overall analysis, since the aim of the research is to show how programme output and trends have changed over time.

Analysing programme output over the course of a week is important to capture the full range offered, even though there is a degree of repetition from day to day (increasingly so in later years). Some studies distinguished between weekdays and the weekend (Ishikawa et al., 1996; Litman and Hasegawa, 1996, Hellman 2001).
However, Ishikawa et al. reported only minor differences and noted that ‘the changes that do appear are largely explainable by appeals to new demographic groups that become available on the weekends…. Also there is a tendency to move away from hard news to more light entertainment programming during the weekend’ (1996: 217). All seven days are included here to as to give a representative picture of the full range of programming available throughout the week. However, in the discussion, weekday scheduling patterns are treated separately where appropriate.

Definition of Prime Time

According to AGB Nielsen, ‘Primestime’ also referred to as ‘peak time’ refers to the ‘evening daypart associated with largest audiences, generally between 19.00 and 23.00, though precise times may vary slightly by country’\(^\text{158}\). RTÉ defines its peak viewing time as 6pm to 11.30pm. Through discussions with Irish industry practitioners, I learned that viewing figures tend to fall off at around 10.30pm. It might make sense, therefore, to only analyse actual peak viewing times. In Léon’s study, prime time was established in each country as the three hours with the highest audience rating (2007: 89). Nevertheless, I decided to follow RTÉ’s definition, to establish some certainty and to allow for assessment of the organisation’s programming strategies in various day parts. In terms of data collection and coding, all programmes that started at or after 6pm and before 11.30pm were included in prime time. As a result, some programmes that run beyond prime time may be included.

The Interview

Choice of Method

Having analysed the RTÉ television schedules, the purpose of the interviews was to understand the debates, dilemmas and choices that go on behind the scenes to produce them. There was also a practical, fact-finding purpose; I needed to know exactly how the scheduling process worked in RTÉ. I was also interested in how those working in scheduling negotiate the competing demands of commercial viability and public service. Interviews were chosen because they offered the opportunity for a focused discussion with key individuals involved in scheduling. The semi-structured, qualitative interview allowed for an exploration of ‘meanings and understandings’ (Stroh, 2000: 202). This was central to understanding how management approach their work and how they address the competing constraints that affect their organisation.

An alternative to the interview method was observation. Extended immersion in the field site, including observation and informal conversations (similar to the approach used by Born (2004) in her study of the BBC) could have yielded a rich analysis of the lived experience of those involved in scheduling at RTÉ and the pressures they face. However, the interview allows participants to reflect on their everyday practices and so provides for analysis of the meanings and values they attach to their work. The interview method can also yield data on changes in scheduling practices and organisational structures, which happen over a period of time. This would not have been possible with observation, which can only study current practices. Furthermore, given the episodic, seasonal nature of schedule planning it would only have been possible to observe all relevant occasions if fieldwork could have continued over an extended period of time; this was not feasible. In addition, I had reservations about the level of
access I would have been able to negotiate, since schedule planning is a commercially sensitive activity. As Gallagher noted, media organisations tend to be relatively inaccessible and, indeed, sensitive to criticism (1982: 151 – 152).

Selection of Participants

The objective of the research was to understand the dilemmas and choices that shape programme output. Participants were chosen for the various perspectives they could offer on the scheduling process. These included, primarily, individuals in senior management positions, who have a direct input into scheduling, production and commissioning. Those working at senior management level are also in a position to offer a perspective on the strategies and policies adopted by the organisation in response to environmental pressures. As Newcomb argues, since subjects are usually involved in projects for many years, ‘they are able to point to changes caused by technological, financial and regulatory factors’ (1991: 101). Indeed, he suggests that ‘one of the pleasures of interviewing is to discover how analytically aware practitioners are’; this was certainly my experience (Newcomb, 1991: 101). In addition, producers were interviewed to uncover how the scheduling system affected their work.

Key individuals from the programme strategy group were selected. In addition, an individual who had worked in the organisation for many years and was involved in scheduling during a significant period of change in the mid-1990s was chosen, to offer a historical perspective. The selection of interviewees was partly opportunistic, sometimes referred to as convenience or snowball sampling (Bruhn Jensen, 2002: 239). For example, it was not possible to interview the managing director of the Television Division. This highlights the difficulty of institutional research. Once initial contact was made, interviewees recommended other individuals who had important knowledge or
could offer a useful perspective. Based on their recommendation and referral it was easier to gain access to these individuals.

Sampling of producers was also opportunistic; because of concerns they may have had about discussing their working relationship with the broadcaster, access to producers was through personal referral. Cottle advises that it generally helps to use contacts, if you have them, to gain access (1998: 52). However, sampling was purposive, that is, care was taken to choose individuals who could offer different perspectives on the production process (Negrine and Newbold, 1998: 242). One had worked in the organisation before scheduling management began, while the other had worked as an independent producer in more recent times and therefore had experience of the commissioning process.

The Elite Interview
All the research participants would be regarded as ‘elites’, defined as ‘someone who is in a privileged position as far as knowledge is concerned’ and who is ‘likely to have a particularly comprehensive grasp of the wider context’ (Gillham, 2000: 81). That is, they can provide an overarching view of the organisation and can report on its ‘policies, past histories, and future plans’ (Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 113). Accessing these perspectives was critical for understanding how scheduling functioned in the overall context of the organisation. However, it also places them in a position of power relative to the interviewer.

Interviewing elites poses challenges for the researcher. As Gillham points out, elites ‘have a great deal more knowledge than you about their area, topic and its setting’ (2000: 81). Furthermore, Marshall and Rossman note that elites are likely to be ‘well practiced at meeting the public and being in control’ (1999: 114). For these reasons, the ‘elite’ is likely to hold the position of power. In addition, interviewees in corporations
or public institutions may be subject to surveillance; as discussed in the main text, RTÉ
had been subject to sustained criticism from the press in relation to its performance and
financial accountability. As such, there is a risk that the interviewee may issue ‘canned
There is also a risk that the researcher may accept the interviewer’s responses without
due critique, because of their informed position on the subject or because of their status
in the organisation.

To deal with this, Marshall and Rossman advise that the researcher ‘must
establish competence by displaying a thorough knowledge of the topic or, lacking such
knowledge, by projecting an accurate conceptualisation of the problem through shrewd
questioning’ (1999: 114). This certainly bore true in the research. With each interview
my knowledge and understanding of the issues improved. As a result, my questions and
prompts were more insightful and relevant and I felt that interviewees responded by
giving more candid, detailed answers.

The Interview Process

Although every effort may be made to establish a rapport and to make the participant
feel comfortable, the semi-structured interview is not a ‘normal’ conversation. The
dynamics of the interview will be affected by a range of factors, including the
relationship between the participant and the interviewer, and even the mood of each
party on the day. Furthermore, the content and structure of the interview schedule direct
the ‘conversation’ and will inevitably influence the participants’ responses to some
extent. Thus, Fontana and Frey urge researchers to regard interviews as ‘negotiated
accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts
and situations in which they take place’ (2005: 716). They stress that the results of
interviews cannot therefore be claimed as ‘objective data with no strings attached’
(Fontana and Frey, 2005: 716). These considerations can only be recognised and accounted for in the analysis.

The interview schedule consisted of open questions, topics and prompts. Core themes of the research and concepts emerging from the literature were explored. In addition, the schedule analysis threw up questions, which were pursued in the interviews. Each interview schedule was tailored to the individual and their particular role and perspective. One of the aims was to understand how those involved in scheduling and production negotiate commercial demands and public service obligations, how that negotiation happens and how it shapes programme output. Open questions allowed interviewees the space to reflect on these issues (see Gillham, 2000: 41). More direct questions were also posed to clarify facts, for example to establish timelines, or confirm an individual’s responsibilities or the activities of a group.

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and coded according to the original themes and concerns identified. New themes and concepts also emerged in the analysis. In some cases, as referred to above, initial analysis of the first interviews informed the topics and questions for those carried out later on. In the final analysis, direct quotations were used extensively, as advised by Gillham (2000: 83). This provides a greater sense of the meanings and understandings of respondents, which was critical for describing the change in the attitudes and practices of management in relation to public service.
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Figure 6: Programme Origin, Autumn 1999, RTÉ 1

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**Legend**

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- **US**: American
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- **Grey**: Local

Figure 7: Programme Origin, Autumn 1999, RTÉ 2
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**Legend**

- **IE**: Irish
- **AU**: Australian
- **GB**: British
- **US**: American
- **Imported - other/unknown**: Imported or other unknown
- **Unkown**: Unknown
- **Not Included**: Not included in the programming.

**Figure 8: Programme Origin, Autumn 2005, RTÉ 1**
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**Legend**:
- *Daily News (incl. weather)*
- *Current Affairs*
- *Social/Political*
- *Religious*
- *Leisure/Personal Interest*
- *Arts and Media*
- *Humanities*
- *Sciences*
- *Popular Drama*
- *Serious Drama*
- *Comedy*
- *Soap*
- *Films*
- *Hosted Show*
- *Quiz/Contest/Game Shows*
- *Music/Ballet/Dance*
- *Children’s*
- *Other/Don’t Know*
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**Figure 11: Programme Range, Autumn 1990, RTÉ 2**

**Legend:**
- News
- Current Affairs
- Social/Political
- Religious
- Leisure/Personal Interest
- Arts and Media
- Humanities
- Sciences
- Popular Drama
- Serious Drama
- Comedy
- Soap
- Films
- Hosted Show
- Quiz/Contest/Game shows
- Music/Ballet/Dance
- Children's
- Other/don't know
- Not included
### Figure 12: Programme Range, Autumn 1999, RTÉ 1

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### Legend

- **News**
- **Films**
- **Children's**
- **Music/Ballet/Dance**
- **Hosted Show**
- **Comedy**
- **Serious Drama**
- **Humanities**
- **Arts and Media**
- **Leisure/Personal Interest**
- **Religious**
- **Sports**
- **Social/Political**
- **Current Affairs**
- **Daily News (inc. weather)**
- **Legend**
### Figure 13: Programme Range, Autumn 1999, RTÉ 2

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**Legend**
- Black: Soap
- Red: Popular Drama
- Blue: Serious Drama
- Green: Popular Comedy
- Purple: Popular Light Entertainment
- Brown: Serious Light Entertainment
- Grey: Music/Ballet/Dance
- Yellow: Comedies
- Green: Comedy
- Red: Film
- Yellow: Film
- Blue: Current Affairs
- Green: Current Affairs
- Purple: Documentary
- Blue: Documentary
- Brown: Sport
- Black: Sport
- Grey: Social/Political
- Green: Social/Political
- Red: Leisure/Personal Interest
- Purple: Leisure/Personal Interest
- Yellow: Drama
- Blue: Drama
- Grey: Children's
- Green: Children's
- Red: Children's
- Purple: Children's
- Yellow: Children's
- Blue: Children's
- Grey: History
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- Red: History
- Purple: History
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- Grey: Nature
- Green: Nature
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- Grey: Arts
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- Grey: Religion
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- Grey: Miscellaneous
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- Grey: Politics
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- Grey: Science
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**Legend**
- **Soap**: Soap operas
- **Comedy**: Comedy shows
- **Current Affairs**: Current affairs programs
- **Daily News**: Daily news programs
- **Legend**: Information on how to read the chart.
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Figure 15: Programme Range, Autumn 2005, RTÉ 2
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**Legend**

- **Daily**: Regular time slot
- **Daily, Irregular slot**: 2-6 times/week
- **Weekly**: 2-6 times/week, Irregular slot
- **Weekly**: One off
- **Weekly**: Single programme
- **Weekly**: Series/serial
- **Weekly**: Anthology
- **Weekly**: Branded slot
- **Weekly**: Mini-serial
- **Weekly**: Other/extraordinary
- **Weekly**: Unknown

**Other**

- **2-6 times/week**: 2-6 times/week
- **Irregular slot**: Irregular slot
- **One off**: One off
- **Single programme**: Single programme
- **Series/serial**: Series/serial
- **Anthology**: Anthology
- **Branded slot**: Branded slot
- **Mini-serial**: Mini-serial
- **Other/extraordinary**: Other/extraordinary
- **Unknown**: Unknown
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Legend

- Daily
- Daily, Irregular slot
- 2-6 times/ week
- 2-6 times/ week, Irregular slot
- Weekly
- One off
- single programme
- series/ serial
- anthology
- branded slot
- mini-serial
Figure 18: Scheduling Frequency, Autumn 1999, RTÉ1

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Legend:
- **One off**: Single entity broadcast in two or three parts
- **Mini-serial**: Single programme
- **Anthology**: Single programme
- **Branded slot**: Single programme
- **Series/ serial**: Single programme
- **unknown**: Single programme
- **other/ extraordinary**: Single programme
- **Weekly**: 2-6 times/ week, Irregular slot
- **Daily**: 2-6 times/ week
- **Irregular slot**: Daily, Irregular slot
- **Daily, Irregular slot**: Daily
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**Legend**

- **One off**: Single entity broadcast in two or three parts
- **Weekly**: 2-6 times/ week, Irregular slot
- **Daily**: Daily, Irregular slot
- **Unknown**: Single entry, broadcast time unknown
- **Branded slot**: Single entry, branded slot
- **Series/ serial**: Single entry, series or serial
- **Anthology**: Single entry, anthology
- **Mini-serial**: Single entry, mini-serial
- **Unknown**: Single entry, broadcast time unknown
- **Series/ serial**: Single entry, series or serial
- **Unknown**: Single entry, broadcast time unknown
- **Branded slot**: Single entry, branded slot
- **Series/ serial**: Single entry, series or serial
- **One off**: Single entry, broadcast in two or three parts
- **Weekly**: 2-6 times/ week, Irregular slot
- **Daily**: Daily, Irregular slot

**Figure 19**: Scheduling Frequency, Autumn 1999, RTÉ2
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**Legend**
- **Shaded** indicates branded slot
- **Branded** indicates single programme
- **Series/serial** indicates single entity broadcast in two or three parts
- **Weekly** lists two or more times, and Irregular slot
- **Daily, Irregular slot**
- **Daily**
- **Other/extraordinary**

**Figure 20: Scheduling Frequency, Autumn 2005, RTÉ1**
### Figure 21: Scheduling Frequency, Autumn 2005, RTÉ2

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**Legend:**
- **Mini-serial:** Single or mini-serials, branded slots
- **Series/serial:** Series/serials, mini-serials and mini-serials
- **Anthology:** Anthology series/button hole shows
- **One off:** 1-2 times
- **2-6 times/week:** 2-6 times/week
- **Daily:** Daily
- **24 hours:** 24 hours
- **Television Programme:** Television Programme
- **Film:** Film
- **News Headlines & European Weatherline:** News Headlines & European Weatherline
- **Network News & Weatherline:** Network News & Weatherline
- **Desperate Housewives:** Desperate Housewives
- **News and Weatherline:** News and Weatherline
- **Out of Time:** Out of Time
- **Irregular Slot:** Irregular Slot
- **Special:** Specials
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