EMMA Presentation

[SLIDE 1 – Title]. I am presenting this paper on behalf of myself and Dr Richard Wallis, with whom I have collaborated on a number of projects, now, around career development, working conditions and management practices in UK television

[SLIDE 2] Employment conditions in the British television industry have become a focus of attention of late to academics as well as industry leaders and support organisations. The modern industry is characterised by a largely casualised, freelance workforce, excessively long hours, and informal hiring and working practices that often skirt the margins of legal compliance– and while the work can afford great job satisfaction, the workers experience is too often marked by toxic work cultures, bullying and burn out – resulting in poor mental health outcomes for workers and skills deficits in the industry as its fails to retain experienced staff.

A survey of some 1200 television professionals we carried out in 2021 for BECTU indicated a steadily worsening situation in this respect as commissioners require increasingly ambitious product, for increasingly squeezed budgets – and often on nigh impossible time-scales.

[SLIDE 3] as countless studies in organisational psychology have demonstrated, good management is a key factor in job satisfaction for employees across myriad sectors – and our research suggests that television is no exception.

[SLIDE 4] For this project we interviewed 22 individuals – mostly series producers and heads of production - who, in any other industry would be considered middle managers –and asked.....

 - What does it mean to be a good (people) manager in the specific context of TV production?

 - What are the challenges faced by those who aspire to fill the role?

- How can they be addressed across this fast-changing industry?

[SLIDE 5 – Good person] We have borrowed the title of this paper from Bertold Brecht's parable play 'The Good Person of Schetzwan', in which the generous-hearted heroine, Shen Te, finds it almost impossible to survive as a 'good person' in a society that does not value or encourage goodness. It is our contention that would-be 'good managers' in TV often find themselves in a similar predicament.

[SLIDE 6] Good management has been shown to be a critical in the Job Demand-Resource model, both in itself and through the improved team relationships it engenders. Good management both boosts the energising impact of 'challenge' demands and provides a buffer against the enervating impact 'hindrance demands.

[SLIDE 7] Conversely what 'Skogstad and Einaresen term 'destructive' practices are correlated with poor outcomes – this being the case for both actively destructive practices, such as those that characterise tyrannical leadership, and for passively destructive practices such as those adopted by 'laissez-faire' managers.

[SIDE 8] Research suggests **good management** in most cases it's what is often termed 'transformational management, which is positively correlated workers psychological wellbeing and negatively correlated with burnout and bullying. There are no empirical studies focused on the creative industries, or on any industry quite so dominated by short freelance contracts, but there are parallels in terms of vocational professions - such as teaching or nursing – where money is clearly not the primary driver, while short-term agency staff have been found to be especially motivated by transformational strategies such as constructive feedback.

[SLIDE 9} Unfortunately there are a number of obstacles to good management in TV. These fall into 3 broad and overlapping categories.

- **Identity** – 'manager' is not how TV folk see themselves. Successful creatives are promoted to these positions, often with no meaningful preparation and interest in anything other than the creative outcomes – and possibly the budget – which are the criteria on which their next job depends;

- **Management Training** meanwhile has, until very recently, been practically non-existent – or inaccessible to freelancers who must fund their own training, and undertake it in unpaid time, and so are unlikely to engage unless they see clear career benefits. Employers, meanwhile, hiring most of their managers on short term contracts have no reason to invest in expensive training.

- Both these factors reflect the wider **Structural and cultural context -** managers saddled with increasingly ambitious production briefs and ever-shrinking productions budgets feel they have neither the time nor the resource to engage with their teams welfare, while workers on precarious contracts are not in a position to complain – and the ideology of exceptionalism is used to justify a working environment that would be deemed unacceptable in, say, a supermarket – this is different because its telly and its 'just the way the industry works'. Without training, managers are dependent on role models that may lead them to replicate bad practice, underpinned by the sense that they will win no brownie points for good practice in an industry that does not value management skills.

[SLIDE 10 – two overarching Challenges]

We found that many of the structural and cultural issues that lead to poor working practices and a potentially damaging working environment in the first place , also militate against precisely the kinds of good management interventions and leadership strategies that might help tackle those issues – these are illustrated by the remarks of two of our respondents: **(see slides**)

[SLIDE 11 – challenges identified in interviews] Our respondents identified myriad specific challenges to good management practices in their own working experience:

- They found it impossible to clearly communicate goals to their teams when they were getting mixed messages from above

- They struggled to give regular constructive feedback due to time constraints but also due to a limited understanding, in most cases, of what that might look like

- Lack of expertise was also an issue when trying to support individuals under equal opportunities legislation, for example – but even in areas where managers were more confident, they sometimes found themselves thwarted by their own superiors – (driving example)

- Fair and open recruitment was logistically impossible on factual productions that were greenlit at the last minute with days to crew up – but at the same time a culture that supported a policy of hiring who you know made it difficult to push back even where managers were minded to do so

- Once hired, there was no room to work developmentally with team members given the combination of ever shorter contracts and production pressures that required everyone to hit the grounds running

- Meanwhile frazzled managers felt they had neither the time nor the expertise to engage in the kinds of timely conflict resolution within their teams that's Agotnes flags as critical to avoiding bullying and the development of toxic working cultures.

- Likewise performance management was another area where a lack of capacity in terms of either time of expertise meant that, for the most part managers would find ways to work around poor performance until the end of an individuals contract and simply not renew or rehire – with that individual kept completely in the dark as to why.

[SLIDE 12] In effect the structural and cultural context in which our respondents work militates against good management practices and positively encourages destructive practices. Between the highly stressful nature of running a production and the negative norms of the industry, good management practices seem to be the exception - and again, industry cultures appears to place little or new value on good management of the people it relies on for its success.

[Slide 13] people who work in TV are, on the whole, a positive lot and our respondents were optimistic about future change - and indeed there is an increasing recognition of the needs for management training across the industry and some positive moves afoot to address that need. However the best trained managers, and those most highly attuned to workers' needs, can only do so much in the face of the impossible brief and an ideology that supports unhealthy work cultures. There is a clear need for structural and cultural change across the industry in the interests of maintaining a skilled, motivated and healthy workforce.