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'Prove It': A community radio research methodology

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Abstract

Context

The UK has over 200 full time licensed community radio stations, all of which aim to deliver 'social gain'. The Community Radio Order 2004 states this primary outcome to be: *"Local services provided…for the good of members of the public, or of particular communities, and… in order to deliver social gain, rather than…for commercial reasons"* (p. 3).

This definition of social gain focuses not on the broadcast output of the radio station but prioritises outcomes such as helping people into employment, improving the take up of public services, enabling access to local democratic processes or simply boosting well-being.

For station managers who have been developing their community presence since 2005 evidence of social gain is experienced in day-to-day interactions and from listener/volunteer feedback. Yet managers struggle to see beyond a numbers based, audience focused, approach when faced with the need to attract advertisers. Quantitative research methodologies cannot demonstrate how and why audiences, community and stakeholders engage with their local community radio station. By repeatedly using narrow commercial methodologies the sector fails to properly account for itself.

'Prove It'

The changing and growing sector, alongside an ever-harsher funding environment prompted the 'Prove It' project; a methodology to help stations prove their impact beyond audience numbers – to funding bodies, their staff and volunteers and their communities.

This paper outlines the methodology and explores the results of the accompanying small-scale trial results of the methodology. In particular, the paper will address how use of the toolkit:

1. Equips community radio managers and volunteers with the tools enabling them to carry out their own soft outcomes research and peer review.

2. Enables stations to assess their effectiveness in achieving their aims and to review their methods and projects to maximise the impact that they have with their listeners and community;

3. Demonstrates the effectiveness of the station to potential grant funders and service delivery partners thereby boosting the station's ability to secure grants and service delivery contracts. This is particularly important given the increasing financial pressure that stations are currently facing.

The methodology builds on a qualitative framework first developed by a team at Griffith University in Australia (2006). Combined with Griffith's approach are quantitative methods that enable community radio stations to build a rich picture about their audiences, stakeholders and how successful they are in delivering social gain.

Using the resulting toolkit, station staff and volunteers can carry out data collection - conducting street surveys, recording one-to-one interviews, and facilitating focus groups. This is encapsulated by a 'peer review' (buddying) approach, whereby stations pair themselves to support each other and to collect data in each other's transmission areas.

The paper argues that successful research methodologies are those that carry their worth over to practitioners and how research for community radio station is a key survival tool.

References
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2004). *Community Radio Order*. London: HMSO
- Meadows, Forde, Ewart & Foxwell. (2007). *Community Media Matters: An audience study of the Australian community broadcasting sector*. Brisbane: Griffith University

'Prove It': A community radio research methodology

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1. Introduction

Community radio in the UK is a changing and growing sector that draws on an ever-harsher funding environment. The 'Prove It' project is a methodology to help stations prove their impact beyond audience numbers – to funding bodies, their staff and volunteers and their communities.

This paper presents an analysis of the development of the 'Prove It' community radio research methodology and evaluates the first results that came from the pilot. In particular, this paper addresses how use of the toolkit:

1. Equips community radio managers and volunteers with tools enabling them to carry out their own soft outcomes research and peer review.
2. Enables stations to assess their effectiveness in achieving their aims and to review their methods and projects to maximise the impact that they have with their listeners and community;
3. Demonstrates the effectiveness of the station to potential grant funders and service delivery partners thereby boosting the station's ability to secure grants and service delivery contracts. This is particularly important given the increasing financial pressure that stations are currently facing.

2. Context

The UK has over 200 full time licensed community radio stations, all of which aim to deliver 'social gain'. The Community Radio Order 2004 states this primary outcome to be: *"Local services provided...for the good of members of the public, or of particular communities, and... in order to deliver social gain, rather than...for commercial reasons"* (p. 3).

This definition of social gain prioritises outcomes such as helping people into employment, improving the take up of public services, enabling access to local democratic processes or simply boosting well-being. In essence 'community radio is a stubborn medium that does not lend itself to easy description or

prescription". (Fairchild, C, in Howley, 2010, p. 24) and as such, requires a richer methodological approach to enable station managers to account for the different social strands it represents.

For station managers who have been developing their community presence since 2005 evidence of social gain is experienced in day-to-day interactions and from listener/volunteer feedback. Yet when faced with the driving need to attract advertisers and funding managers struggle to see beyond a traditional numbers based, audience focused, approach. These quantitative research methodologies cannot demonstrate how and why audiences, community and stakeholders engage with their local community radio station; most often the truer measure of 'value' or more importantly 'community gain'. By repeatedly using narrow commercial methodologies the sector fails to properly account for itself.

3. Previous work

For a long time, narrow, commercial methodologies have been the favoured approach for measuring UK radio audiences in particular, and little else. This is a sector that has been shaped by a culture of research geared to larger local and national public service/commercial stations. The methods focus on numbers, mainly using a diary-based approach (RAJAR) or the use of local street surveys to gain a picture of the numbers and types of listeners a station has. Focus groups have sometimes been used but within a narrower commercial remit; rarely to look at the role a station plays within its community.

Over the past decade some community radio stations have tried to innovate and carry out audience research that tells a richer story. Stations such as Oldham Community Radio have used a simple and quick telephone survey to establish who the caller is and when they listen. Numerous stations have used 'pop up' or invitation based surveys on their websites.

Future Radio's Listening Figures Report 2010

The 'Prove It' project eventually devised both a quantitative and qualitative approach. In part this was informed by the expertise of Future Radio, a community radio station based in Norwich, that has run its own listener survey. The methodology drew broadly on one advised by Dr Janey Gordon, based at the

University of Bedfordshire, and used an unprompted approach that enabled "a more reliable comparison to other stations and allowed an assessment of Future Radio's impact on the local radio station market" (Future Radio, 2010, p. 4). The survey aimed to have some comparability with RAJAR and thus gave it traditional credence to stakeholders. Future utilised a partner organisation to carry out their survey; an approach that Brian Lister described as required "where the results are to be used to impress external bodies such as advertisers, sponsors, supporters, Ofcom or the press it is usually necessary to commission an independent outside body to undertake the fieldwork and data analysis" (communityradiotoolkit.net). However, this approach presents a continual problem for community radio, as partnerships with organisations to carry out research usually have a cost.

UK community radio is still young so examples of methodologies that told a richer story were sought by drawing on more established expertise. In particular, the methodology built on a qualitative framework first developed by a team at Griffith University in Australia (2007).

McNair

The team at Griffiths were able to draw on the entirely separate and established Radio National Listener Survey undertaken by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia in partnership with McNair Ingenuity Research. This is a quantitative survey that has been conducted every other year since 2004 via telephone interviews with approximately 5000 listeners of the metropolitan, suburban, regional and rural licenced community radio stations. The survey looks at listener awareness of community radio, average listeners a week, the demographics of listeners, crossover of audiences between commercial, public and community radio and the reasons listeners are drawn to community radio in particular. Over the ten years that the survey has been conducted a longitudinal picture of community radio usage is developing and the survey incorporates new questions around technology use and listener engagement.

No comparable national survey exists in the UK though demand clearly exists across the sector.

Community Media Matters – the Griffith University study (2007)

The McNair survey is to be lauded for its regular reporting of the state of the Australian Community Radio Sector. However, a survey cannot account for the deeper reasons for listener engagement with a radio station, the social, cultural and community empowerment this particular medium engenders, and why the sector has continued to see growth. This led to the development of the methodology used by the researchers at Griffith University led by Professor Michael Meadows.

The methodology uses a three-pronged approach. Though traditional audience member focus groups formed the main method these were followed up with interviews with key people who were often cited during these focus groups. The key people fell into two groups, the first group interviewed were those on the immediate periphery of the station such as 'station coordinators, sector representatives and language group representatives...to identify key these emerging from the qualitative research' (Meadows, Forde, Ewart & Foxwell, 2007, p. 23). The second group comprised those within the community such as groups, sponsors, musicians, artists etc. They were interviewed to 'identify the nature and extent of local access: to define the 'community value' of local broadcasting for such groups: and to determine the educational value of community broadcasting to local communities' (ibid). The research compared two distinct listener and station types, those based in metropolitan areas and those concerned with indigenous and ethnic programming.

By taking this approach the team were able to map out not just the personal relationship a listener has with a community radio station but also the station's role and position within its community. The results yielded illuminating material that enabled the team to make vital observations and recommendations about the two station types but also for the wider community radio sector. Key to the value of the qualitative study were the cross comparisons with the McNair study.

This highlighted the value of a potential combined qualitative and quantitative method and was key to the rationale behind the 'Prove It' methodology to enable

community radio stations to build a rich picture about their audiences, stakeholders, and community figures and how successful they are in delivering 'social gain'.

Rationale for 'Prove It'

In considering an appropriate methodology for the UK community radio sector the 'Prove It' team were aware how immersed in the day-to-day life of their community radio station managers were. They were keenly aware of the quality of output they produce; the volunteers involved, and already had a picture of their community of listeners. However if someone asked them to describe what impact the station had, whilst they would probably be able to regale them with stories of where they knew the station made a real difference; asked to account for it in a grant application or as part of a report, backed up by a method that felt independent and credible, they would not feel confident. This was an issue faced across the sector and felt more keenly as community licenses began to come up for renewal or grants ran out. Station managers were describing a need for not only easy to conduct quantitative research that would give hard numbers but also qualitative methods that could explore attitudes, perceptions and tastes about a station and its actions.

The methodology eventually went further, drawing on the experiences of the researchers at Griffith University, to draw in the experiences of key figures, and also stakeholders and, significantly to provide the mechanism of a system of peer review between stations should the research be regularly repeated.

4. The 'Prove It' methodology

The methodology draws on the 'outcomes' based understanding of 'social gain' explored earlier and the fact that community radio stations are centres of activity for individuals and groups. Community radio enables a strengthening of social networks and provides a setting that enables those involved "to produce their music, or their radio programmes, to spread information, and to organise activities that often have no other form of public expression and acknowledgement (Fairchild, C, in Howley, 2010, p. 27)". These networks and

their connections provide not only the content for the station but also the resources (people and financial) that enable the station to continue.

This provided the rationale for drawing in stakeholders and community figures in analysing the 'value' of a station. It came from the Griffiths study but also from practical experience that said those most able to tell community radio's stories were those shaping it with their community priorities *and* funding. This is further reinforced by Fairchild who states; "any understanding of the role community radio plays in fostering local cultural production has to take into account both the formal and informal relations between radio stations and larger institutions of governance, public or private, ideological or material" (ibid, p. 24). If stations fail in these constituency relationships they fail in any potential business to be done.

Like the Griffith University approach, 'Prove It' uses one-to-one interviews and focus groups to understand the sector's ability to engage with and empower wide-ranging communities. 'Prove It' uses listeners, key community figures, and 'stakeholders' to tell the story about each station and its meaning to them. The objectives for working with each of these groups are:

1. **Listeners**: Engage with and understand the relationship listeners have with their community radio station.
2. **Community**: Illustrate the depth and quality of engagement the station has with its community.
3. **Stakeholders**: Explore how the station works with key stakeholders to help them meet their aims.

The 'key commitments' that each station formulates demonstrates their operating ethos and is often a balance of working with these three key groups to meet need and create impact. This information is valuable, to station managers, funders, partners and advertisers.

The triad of survey, interview and focus group

'Prove It', like the Griffiths methodology, takes a 'three pronged' approach – it starts with a listener survey, moving onto one-to-one interviews with

community figures and stakeholders, and finally carrying out a listener focus group.

To meet the objectives for working with listeners, community and stakeholder key figures the blend of methods work like this:

Survey

The survey builds up a first picture of listenership, preferences and station impact. A standard survey was designed for the 'Prove It' pilot, drawing on best practice and feedback from station managers. The survey asks standard demographic questions and goes on to delve deeper to explore the relationship the listener has with the local community station. The survey is split into two distinct sections:

1. A general section that starts to build the overall percentage of listeners, understand where they come from and their awareness of the station. Respondents don't go past this page if they are not a listener of the station
2. A detailed listener section where the respondent answers questions about when and how they listen to the partner station and their perception of the station's role in the community.

Interview

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews illustrate the depth and quality of engagement between a station's community and its stakeholders. The 'Prove It' interview format was designed to ask questions that yield useable and relevant data for the 'Prove It' report 'template' that focuses on priorities and outcomes. It was suggested that interviewers also ask extra questions that inform their buddy station about what they do well and what they might improve or branch out their activities to do next. Stakeholders and community figures are defined as follows:

Stakeholder: is defined as a person or an organisation that has a stake within the radio station or its activities. These could be organisations that e.g. provide project-based funding for the station, commission the station to produce programmes on their behalf, use the station to carry out volunteer training, or

engage the station to help deliver core services for them e.g. media training. These must be recent or current stakeholders so that their contribution has the most relevance.

Interviews with stakeholders are about teasing out the key priorities they want to achieve, the relationship the station has with the person or organisation, and how the station is helping them to meet *their* priorities. Being able to prove this demonstrates to others the potential benefit of working with that station. Examples of stakeholders who took part in 'Prove It' are: a school teacher who commissioned a station to have staff working with the children on a closed loop school-based station and make broadcast content; a local NHS trust who pay for the station to produce a health show and run feature-length information adverts; a team from a council-run cultural partnership that used the station to deliver volunteer training; a festival organiser who commissions the station to cover the festival live on air.

Community figure: is defined as an individual who holds some standing or a particular role within the broadcast area of the station. These may be individuals who have had a role at the station, appearing on programmes or helping to shape activities. They may be working in partnership with the station as part of business or cultural forums, their role might be religious, or they may work with particular interest groups within the community. Key to their relevance to the research will be their past and present interaction with the radio station and its community. As such, they hold valuable knowledge about the meaning of the station and its work. Being able to prove the impact and relevance of the station within its community is valuable for funding and project bids.

Examples of key community figures who took part in 'Prove It' are: the rector of a local church who occasionally broadcast a music programme and sign-posted people to the station from his community work; a community liaison officer for a health organisation working closely with members of the community who provided advice and news content to the station; the officer of a youth organisation who worked alongside a station to provide services and volunteer support to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET); a key

worker for an organisation working with older members of the community who recorded memory shorts to be used in broadcasts.

Focus group

Having conducted the interviews and started to understand the context of the station within its community, the role of the focus group was to explore in more depth the meaning of the station for listeners through a semi structured, focused discussion.

The aim of the 'Prove It' focus group is to find out why people are listening to the station, what the station is doing well, and how it could enhance its output. It might also give some indication as to why people don't listen to the station.

Buddying up – a critical friend

A unique addition to the methodology was the aim to build a sense of peer review across the UK's community radio sector. The buddying system:

- Engenders a feeling of mutual support, and a critical friend, between two geographically close community radio stations. Managers and staff can often feel quite isolated and inward facing as they firefight daily operational issues.

- Enables volunteers to gain an insight into the workings of another radio station and so share lessons in best practice and new skills learned through undertaking research

- Reduces the cost of the process of research

- Ensures a sense of rigor and less risk of bias by having a partner station conduct the research rather than the stations own volunteers and staff.

The pilot therefore tested the concept of 'buddying', where stations partner with each other to conduct each other's 'Prove It' research.

Methodology summary

The methodology was written up as a toolkit with the aim to make it freely available to stations. The methodology process is summarised here in following steps, as it appears in the toolkit:

First step	Find a nearby 'buddy' station who wants to work with you to collect audience research information about your stations		
Then	**For your buddy's audience research**	**For your audience research**	**'Prove It' provides**
Listener survey	Find a minimum of 6 volunteers to carry out some on the street surveys in your buddy station's home, over 2 days in 1 week Arrange a brief training session for your volunteers, and provide transport or expenses for travelling to the street survey locations Collect up the surveys and enter the survey results into the 'Prove It' number crunching Wordpress 'plug-in'	Identify 2 or 3 good locations where your buddy's' volunteers can carry out the street survey	The street survey questions and instructions and survey badges for volunteers The 'Prove It' 'plugin' which will analyse the survey results and automatically produce a survey report
One-to-one interviews	Conduct ideally 6 one-to-one interviews over a week with community figures and stakeholders suggested by your	Identify a number of key community figures and stakeholders for your buddy station to interview	Questions for key stakeholders and community figures Instructions on how to analyse the interview

	buddy station Listen back to and make notes on or transcribe the interviews, and then interpret the results. Allow a week to do this.		data
Listener focus groups	Produce a radio advert calling for your buddy station's listeners to participate in a focus group Take calls from people wanting to participate in the focus group, and arrange a date for this Run the focus group, with the help of a volunteer Listen back to and interpret the focus group data. Allow a couple of days to do this.	Play the radio advert produced by your buddy calling for listeners to participate in their focus group Arrange a local venue for the focus group	Instructions on how to set up a focus group, including a script for an on-air advertisement, focus group recruitment poster, a consent form, and focus group questions Instructions on how to analyse the focus group data
And finally	Put together the data you have collected above into a 'Prove It' station report Meet up with your buddy station to swap and discuss reports		A template and instructions for writing the 'Prove It' report

5. A pilot case study

The pilot for 'Prove It' took in four case study stations. The aim was to test out the methodology as it had been developed thus far. The pilot took place over the winter of 2011/12 and partnered stations within Greater Manchester.

Though the final methodology is to be carried out by stations themselves, the researcher, employed at Radio Regen, facilitated the pilot. This was to enable a full evaluation of the methodology and to make appropriate adjustments. The final stage of the project is to pilot the completed methodology, carried out by two stations independently.

What follows are results from the first of the case study stations that demonstrate the type of quantitative and qualitative data that the methodology can yield.

The station

The station's origins lie in a series of RSL's from 2000 that focused on the inner Manchester suburbs. Going on to become one of the first access radio pilots in 2002 the station earned its full-time licence in 2005 and eventually became independent from the parent overseeing community radio charity.

Recent funding changes have put the station under renewed pressure. The independent management team and the volunteer network hoped to make the station self-sustaining however the pressure from major funding partners, such as Manchester City Council, re-evaluating their relationships with community organisations meant the station faced a particularly tough period.

Survey Results

The survey took place in three locations at the heart of the station's TSA. These were two local markets and a shopping area. Volunteers from the buddy station met with the researcher to be briefed on how to conduct the survey before conducting the survey in the chosen areas. The team went out on three separate days.

150 people were interviewed using a non-probability sampling technique. Volunteers aimed to reach a broad range of respondents based on age and gender. The majority came from the 'other' and 'M14' postcodes. When asked, 36% stated that they had listened to the station and proceeded to complete the detailed listener section of the survey. Of those who did not listen to the station, 24% were aware there was a local community radio station.

When asked how regularly they listened the most popular response was 40% who listened "daily". Listeners tended to tune in for programmes during the "morning" and "afternoon" part of the day/week. Of these listeners, 32% had acted on information heard on the station with the most popular action being "called the station" and the second most popular being "contacted an organization featured on the station".

The survey then looked at the role of the station for the listener and their perceptions about its role in the community. 60% "agreed" that the station was more relevant to their local area. 74% "agreed" that the station was entertaining. Importantly, for extending the station out to its community, 44% "agreed" that the station offered local people opportunities. 50% "agreed" that the station had an impact on the local community.

Of the qualitative responses, listeners felt that they valued "the music that is played, the local info, the news and the local weather for Manchester", the fact that "you can ring up and they put music on almost instantly" and that the station was "a place for local expression…I value that it's here, and supports all areas of this diverse community, it gives a voice to everyone".

Listeners also expressed opinions on areas they felt that the station could improve. In particular, the potential for to "bring members of the community in to the studio and MPs for discussions about things that are happening in our community to make us feel were havin' our say". There were specific requests; similar to the Griffiths findings of the importance of "more niche programming/specialist music such as drum and bass" or that the station "should highlight more of the Manchester culture and heritage".

Interviews with key community figures and stakeholders

The researcher spoke to three community figures identified by the station.

1. A church leader who had previously been connected to the station

2. A manager of the Iranian Cultural Centre (ICC) who was connected to the Persian programme

3. A festival manager, who had a contra-deal for the Irish/local festivals

Services used and nature of engagement: It became clear there was a differentiation between how well the station worked creatively with community figures yet these relationships were often not used to their full potential. In reflecting on past station usage and his pleasure of having a regular programme, the church leader nonetheless felt that "I'm not sure the radio station ever for us developed really strong links...we did advertise things...drop-ins, concerts, um credit union were involved in and all those sorts of things. We advertised all of those but I'm not sure anyone particularly responded to the radio publicity that we used to give it". This had led to a gradual move away from the radio station though he remains at the heart of the local community. Key figures such as the church leader provide the station with links out into the community and he has since re-established a relationship with the station's management. For the cultural centre, it seemed there was a gap between their involvement with the Persian show on the station and the multitude of Iranian business people who weren't engaged with the station.

The local and Irish festivals are a key vehicle for the station as the conta-deal meant free publicity for the radio station within its TSA. The festival manager described the deal as "we advertise the station on all our advertising in the brochure, for the local festival it is a fifteen-thousand brochure that we actually produce, so they'll go on the front page as a logo, there will be a reference inside about them being a media sponsor, they'll be on the website, they'll be on the banners, they'll be on the front box, they'll be on the posters etc".

In return the festival manager was able to access the Irish programme and promote the festival through the station. He did this through advertising during the festival but felt that the relationship had much more potential. He said "we haven't had a big take up on offers from the actual station itself to do some live broadcasts with us…we are now in our thirteenth year, if all the presenters at the station are local presenters, they must know that it is actually taking place each year, why don't they plan to do something during the actual festival itself?" Such activities are important for re-embedding the station within its community and would have capitalised on the creativity within the radio station.

Finally, the festival manager really valued the belief in creativity that is part of the station ethos. Comparing the willingness of the station with the BBC to promote new music and bands he said "the station tends to take more chances, and give them that little piece of limelight and a chance to shine, and I think local bands actually appreciate that, you know, people starting off". He also had recommendations for the station, stating that "the editorial part of it needs to be more advertised really, and saying to people okay, we are not as commercial, but you can get your message across".

The value community figures place on their relationship with the station: In reflecting on the past positives the church leader said "I think one of the nice things about the whole experience for us was the relationship we built with the station…they did welcome anyone in to learn radio skills. And our church here has a lot of contact with asylum seekers, refugees, people from overseas, all sorts of things like that. There were a number of people who were looking for things to do that we could…just invite in…they would come in and do a show". This diversity and outward facing perspective was what the church leader particularly valued and something he felt the station should look to achieve again, particularly with the changing demographic face of the station's TSA.

The ICC manager placed a lot of value on the ability to broadcast the Persian programme but said, "it's a shame we don't have a bigger coverage because we've got quite a few number of Iranians who live the northwest". He felt there

was value in ties between Manchester stations to rebroadcast programmes that had community value further afield.

The festival manager particularly valued the reciprocal nature of the relationship with the station as it clearly had mutual benefits. He said, "the wider community…sees the station actually doing something in the community… people listening at home will find out about what is going on in the festival. People coming to the actual broadcast itself will find out about the radio station, it is like a dual partnership". Both interviewees acknowledged the pressure the station was under and like other interviewees felt that the transition to independence and a harsher funding environment provided an opportunity for the station to re-evaluate its purpose and position within its community. In doing so, the station should "be a lot more local…'What's On' will concentrate on what's in town, whereas there is lots of events locally…not just in Levenshulme, but in South Manchester…should be your starting point". The festival manager saw a differentiation in covering local arts events to large-scale events in the city centre "because otherwise what difference are you from Key103 who are just concentrating on what is on at the MEN or at The Lowry or at The Palace? How many people in Levenshulme actually go to those venues, and why push people out of the area? Why don't you encourage people to have more sustainable entertainment locally?"

How the station accounts to its community: It's only through strong links and feedback that the station can be seen as truly accountable and embedded within its community. Touched on earlier, the church leader discussed his concerns about the long-term sustainability of the radio station due to funding issues. One effect of this was seeing the station slowly withdrawing from many of its community activities partly because of the loss of the community development worker. However a lessening of external work such as outside broadcasts was perceptible and "it's often talked about as something significant at the ward performance meetings". Due to his experience of working with the station in the past the church leader understood the pressures faced internally of wanting "to maintain the quality of your output and there's a lot of technical work that has to be done in that…but at the same time that fights with the community

development and in the end I think the community development is the thing which struggles really". Whilst funding might not exist to employ another community development worker there was the potential for the volunteer group to be better utilised to carry out some of these outward-facing activities.

Similarly the ICC manager perceived an underdevelopment of the relationship between the station and its Iranian community. He felt this was something that could change though "at the moment I think it's a time of seeding really, nothing is growing and I'm sure at the time of the harvest, there will be something for the community and something for the radio and they'll go hand in hand".

In accounting to its community, the festival manager thought there was under utilised potential for the Irish and local festivals to work with more programmes. He said, "we have not had a great deal of input from other shows…we would like to develop that because it works both ways. It is good for the festivals and it is good for the station, but we don't know how to accomplish that".

The station's role in changing the community figure's view of their locale: Community radio should sit at the heart of the community, reflecting the current and changing nature of its people through broadcasting their voices. The church leader reflected on the changes the suburb had gone through; "people here now are much more confident. They're much more bolshie and much more politicised…and that's all good". The station was seen to have played a role as "I do think the radio station has been a part of that tapestry, I'm not saying you can measure that the radio has changed everything but I do think the radio station has been part of building up the local identity and confidence".

He went onto discuss the importance of the station's physical location. The lack of a 'shop front' was a "a psychological barrier to some people. If it had a shop front…with that row of shops there, broadcast from the back of shop…people can come in. You can almost imagine it, you want to come and say something on the radio station, 'just call in and we'll put you on.'" The choice of the station *not* to be part of the community centre was viewed as positive within the community; a statement of independence. Though relocation would be a highly unlikely, the

notion of a station 'shop front' and of the immediacy of putting someone on air should be considered to assist re-engaging with parts of the community.

The significance of the station for enabling the community figure to engage with their community: Asking how the interviewees would communicate with their target audience if the station did not exist was another way of measuring the value they placed upon the station. Both acknowledged the difficulties in the local area of reaching out due to poor local newspaper provision and the expense of using other media. The church leader engaged with community groups and said "30 people come to a ward performance meeting and there's 20,000 people who live here so there is always a constant problem of publicity". However, as echoed with the ICC manager, neither felt the station was currently integral to their methods of communication with their community. The festival manager spoke about the importance of the Levenshulme Festival website for year round local publicity whilst the church leader acknowledged that the web had limited impact when half of his community did not access the Internet. There is the potential for the station to have a far greater creative and community based role for disseminating information and both interviewees wanted to see the station reaching out in this manner.

Stakeholders

The researcher spoke to four stakeholders identified by the station.

1. A manager at Standguide, an employment/training organisation

2. Two managers in separate departments of Manchester City Council

3. A manager of the Manchester Literature Festival (MLF)

4. A policeman who hosted a show as part of a contract between the station and Greater Manchester Police (GMP)

Stakeholder's key priorities; identifying and fulfilling them: The research placed an equal emphasis between community figures and stakeholder for the sustainability of community radio stations. For the station it is often a financial

arrangement but for it to be successful, the relationship needs to help deliver positive outcomes for both the stakeholder's key priorities, and in doing so, fulfil those of the station. The main factor in this is the station's understanding and engagement with the stakeholder as a continual process of iteration.

In particular, creative projects were a strong point for the station. The manager of the MLF spoke very positively about the mutual attainment of key priorities during the poetry project. The outcomes had helped MLF engage "with hard to reach audiences but also if there are legacies, as with this project, that people can access through the website then that really helps us again to reach out to other audiences". Meeting overall outcomes also led to particularised positive experiences in the process. One volunteer/poet would "go home at night really buzzing at having learnt all these new skills".

For a local policeman the key priorities were about everyday engagement with the community through the broadcast of his monthly programme. It helped him to make connections with the community whilst "it puts more of a human side to me as a Police Officer, that I'm not just in uniform that I can do something else, like some of the tunes that I play on the radio, I'm a big Michael Buble fan...I'm getting a reaction; do you know what I mean?"

The manager at Standguide discussed the importance of their partners understanding the ethos behind their approach of dealing with worklessness which he felt the station in particular were well placed to do. Staff at the station "actually really cares about the individual. What the station provides, it's been definitely one of the more outstanding placements". For the station, evidence of working so well with those not in education, employment or training (NEET) is particularly valuable as the station considers potential future stakeholder relationships. The manager described the process staff at the station undertook with Standguide's placements that "have not got the self respect...confidence...I've seen her change, I've seen her come along. Her confidence is through the roof, she's taking ownership of her role there. I can see from talking to her that she's more optimistic and that to me says that staff

understood the issues I was talking about and they've done extremely well, they've delivered".

The station has a strong legacy of success of working with Manchester City Council on its intergenerational projects that focus on placelessness and generational divide. Similarly, the New East Manchester project had enabled the Council "to facilitate an informed discussion and debate about what we were trying to do, why we were trying to do it and what our broad outline ideas were. We used them as a way of people contributing, debating through phone in at promotion events and engagement".

Recently, priorities were changing and the focus, for Standguide, was "about how to grow the city...we need to increase people's employability skills and get them into jobs and decrease dependency". These changing priorities were something that community radio could play a role in "facilitating, both articulating that message but also supporting people through that process...[but] that's not just about giving people a volunteering opportunity and developing their social skills". Where the station had already displayed a deeper understanding of working with long term or youth unemployment there is the potential for the station to build new relationships with the council.

Station engagement with its stakeholders: If part a successful relationship between a stakeholder and the station is an iterative process then this needed to be explored. The research queried the active nature of the relationship, as the major risk was a good original understanding that eventually diminished as the project ended. In reality what needed to happen was continued contact between the station and stakeholder so changing needs could be fed into further, new, partnerships.

One way of doing this was for the stakeholder to see clear outcomes that came from their work with the station. For the policeman, the outside broadcast at the Manchester Apollo was a measurable way to gauge the success, and reason to keep, the radio show because "1,500 people attended that event...they knew that there's a possibility that they may be on the radio so I would say then that we

had probably a big following then because...if you know you're going to be on, then you're going to listen".

The relationship with some parts of the council was established and positive. The manager cited the legacy of the intergenerational projects meaning the station staff were particularly responsive. However, while other council departments had "changed fundamentally" the station had been less engaged with the stakeholders needs. This is unfortunate as despite "key personalities" moving on at the station there should still be a live dialogue that builds "on the heritage of what we've done in the previous ten years". For the "danger with things like community radio is that in a [bidding] 'beauty contest' it hasn't shouted strong enough to be the 2 out of the 20 things that are strongly supported. That's my fear". The discussion with Manchester City Council pointed strongly towards a need for partnership working between Greater Manchester stations if radio as a method of delivering key priorities was to be actively supported. This partnership working needed to be coordinated so that "community radio was at the top table" when it came to key decisions.

The value and quality of the relationship between station and stakeholder: This final section focuses on revealing the value stakeholders place on their relationship with the radio station. Integral to this is the quality of interactions between them. By examining this, the station can demonstrate the unique value community radio can generate.

The manager at MLF discussed how the project had given the poets "a good platform, being on community radio obviously reaching a much bigger audience than they might do in getting to their own local audience in a way that they perhaps wouldn't be able to do". Whilst, at the same time, getting poetry to "an audience who wouldn't normally engage with it".

The manager at Standguide particularly valued "what goes on within a radio station...[it] is full of work skills that are transferable, I think teamwork...a pressured environment, things going out live...there's deadlines...scripts... there's research". These were all skills a young person could develop whilst working in an attractive media environment.

For the council, the station has been able to work with a stakeholder and not "get lost in our jargon of regeneration but they understood, we came together in terms of people". The fear was that during such a transitional phase the council was facing, that the relationship with stations, acting as mediators between council priorities and residents by being a community hub, was at risk. For the council, community radio had "demonstrated its effectiveness and would be a disaster if it's lost". To avoid this the station needed to capitalise on the value stakeholders place on it as an experienced and competent project partner. Despite such council uncertainty "in the future I'd naturally gravitate to the station because it's easier. I mean I like easy…and when you have the trust and confidence, I like it…if [you're] funding something you don't have to be constantly worried about it and…you can create a relaxed relationship".

The policeman reflected how he would "miss that relationship and we'd miss that opportunity to get out there in a different manner". Without the station "it would be basically getting billboards out there or posting letters or what have ya. I think this is a fantastic vehicle to get our message out there". That said, there was the potential for the station to raise the quality of this relationship by integrating the police show and its presenters into the radio station as they were conscious that "it's very rare that we meet up with the other presenters".

Finally, many concerns were raised about the lack of engagement with key council officers to ensure community radio sat at the "top table" as service level agreements were considered. Equally, champions exist within the council who value the quality of the relationship community radio in particular can forge between the council and its communities.

> *"As a former careers advisor and a Connexions Manager…I would say 'give me a story about a couple of complex cases, give me a bit of a narrative'.*
>
> *You know, I could look at how many assessments were done…I could look at destination stats and that is a crucial role as well, but actually you want to get behind that don't you? Actually, at times community radio stations are better than other organisations at doing that, but probably more of that would be helpful" (Manchester City Councillor).*

Focus group

It was a primary aim to run a focus group of the station's listeners to build on the survey results. Participants were mainly gathered from survey respondents who were regular listeners of the radio station. An advert was broadcast for a period of two weeks however only one participant came from this campaign. Additional emails from volunteers, Twitter and Facebook adverts yielded no further participants. Part of this may be a flaw in the methodology however concerns were be raised about the deeper relationship the station has with its listeners as the focus group was unable to go ahead due to a lack of response.

The failure to carry out the listener focus group meant this richer information was not available. As the station was the first pilot station for the 'Prove It' project it was recommended that the station repeated the focus group call with the assistance of their buddy station.

Case study conclusion: The analysis shows areas where the station is very successful at building strong relationships that means it meets its social gain objectives and others where, over time, relationships have been allowed to wane. Following a period of change the station needed to re-establish itself at the heart of a changing community, one that it's had a positive hand in its creative development. The station is viewed very warmly by all three groups in the research however this could not continue by a legacy of work alone but by active engagement with the community outside the station.

Research indicated that action was needed to enable the station to communicate its continuing relevance and enhance sustainability. This included building on the narratives the station already had, through its direct interaction with community figures, developing richer relationships with listeners and through continually revising, refreshing and reporting back to stakeholders.

6. Critical evaluation of the methodology

The case study demonstrates the richness of information that a dual quantitative/qualitative approach can yield, particularly when utilising, and building on, the three-pronged approach championed by Griffith University. The information yielded is able to satisfy the most basic numbers needed for

demonstrating listener reach and awareness whilst the qualitative analysis gives the radio station solid data to demonstrate its effectiveness to potential grant funders and service delivery partners.

The use of the 'Prove It' methodology had many strong points however the pilot, as it should, exposed some weaknesses.

Focus groups: These are notoriously difficult to arrange and that was the case for the station presented here. For the three other pilot stations lessons were quickly learned and good practice was drawn to improve potential engagement and attendance of participants. In particular, the use of a competition element was used (a draw for shopping vouchers) to provide an incentive but also a variance of when the focus group was run to enable most participants to attend. The other three focus groups were more successful. This part of the methodology still requires refinement.

The plugin: A Wordpress plugin was developed to enable quick data entry of the surveys. The aim was to reduce the onerous task of handling data and also enabled quick identification of erroneous data entry. This was done through the use of dedicated logins given to individual volunteers. For the pilot this worked well however later updates of Wordpress required an update to the plugin. As this requires specialist PHP coding experience it poses a problem if the copyright holding charity (Radio Regen) are unable to get the code updated.

Buddying: This paper has put the case for establishing a sense of peer review and mutual support between radio stations. The logistics of building the buddying system has been a cause of anxiety for the charity. This is for two reasons; it requires two stations to work together that are relatively near each other; this is not *always* attainable. Second, it requires stations to invest time and a small amount of money to support their volunteers to get to the buddy station's area to carry out the research. The potential benefits to buddying outweigh these anxieties however for the final, unsupported, pilot, careful consideration needs to be given to help make this relationship work.

A role for universities: In seeking to establish the final pairing for the unsupported pilot it has been suggested that universities could carry out the research on behalf of community radio stations. From the outside this has some benefits; radio researchers can build up a bank of empirical data, students have the opportunity to test their research skills and it builds a new relationship between academic and community organisations.

However this potential approach should also be treated with caution. To remove the involvement, and commitment, of station staff/volunteers, the research is no longer 'owned' by those involved and so erodes the commitment between stations to invest time and resources in proving their effectiveness. A key weakness to 'Prove It' is the time required to support the interviews and analyse the qualitative data. There is however value to academic researchers working in *partnership* with radio stations to help facilitate the methodology and buddying process. This would have immense benefit to both parties.

7. Conclusion

This paper has presented a case for why a quantitative and qualitative research methodology is needed by the UK community radio sector. As community radio moves to a period of maturation, there is an ever-greater need to demonstrate effectiveness at delivering social gain and value. The analysis of the first case study station draws out the ways in which stations are both vital to their communities but also tread a precarious line of survival when they become too inward looking.

Drawing on best practice elsewhere and further developing it to meet the needs of radio stations, community figures and stakeholders involved, the 'Prove It' methodology has potential to tell the most complete picture of a station's 'story'. Community radio may be a 'stubborn medium' when it comes to describing it, but 'Prove It' is a first step to making sense of and enabling the sector to become more sustainable.

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