



Production Company Policy Paper

Executive Summary

This paper queries if these donations can be better utilised where **we** have total control over the content produced, because the issue at hand is not the TV Channel itself but the content that is produced. This policy paper is in no way, shape or form focusing on Channels as a company rather it raises concerns over the content that is mass produced in various forms such as TV Channels, Internet TV, Social media (YouTube) and lastly radio channels.

This paper has highlighted the need for a production company, it has also laid out what a production company is, and its three main processes in the production of content. We have also augmented our production company to act as a commissioner of content.

So the channels, organisations, or individuals may come to us and ask for funding, support or production of content. All in all we have developed a coherent working understanding of our needs, requirements, and the concepts of production. The next section will focus on two very distinctive implementation approaches.

Model A - Establishing the whole company at once

Model B - Gradually establishing a Production Company

Model B means the investment required is gradual, however each and every project will cost the investors of the company. Therefore as the production manager gains an understanding of the market, it makes it feasible to understand that they will expand the company by breaking down the services provided by each and every outsourced project, in order to bring some aspects of it in house and therefore growing the company based on the needs of the organisation. Furthermore we will be able to retain the creative control of the content, and the rights to all the content we produce.



Production Company Policy Paper

Objective:

The WF along with many community donors have contributed innumerable amounts of money into various Shia Television Channels. This paper queries if these donations can be better utilised where **we** have total control over the content produced, because the issue at hand is not the TV Channel itself but the content that is produced.

This policy paper is in no way, shape or form focusing on Channels as a company rather it raises concerns over the content that is mass produced in various forms such as TV Channels, Internet TV, Social media (YouTube) and lastly radio channels.

Setting the scene:

One of the services within the Islamic Education department (IE) is the production of Islamic Content, however the landscape of communication has changed in the last fifty years with mediums such as Television and Internet becoming far more powerful. With this in mind the policy makers within the IE department of The WF have noted that our community's preference to consume religious content has changed from print material to Video/radio content.



In the last ten years the number of Shia channels be it through live TV, Internet TV, videos or radio, have increased with their content visibility across platforms. It is un-arguable that without the contributions of the constituent members of The WF and the Khoja community at large, many of these TV channels would not have had the funding to meet their raising costs.

However in many cases these channels have continued to underwhelm, and in some cases their actions have led to the negative consequences. While this paper does not question the need to help such channels, it simply provides a solution to the donors within the Khoja community and its parent organisations of a way to contribute to these channels that allows us to maintain creative control over the content we fund, thus raising the standards of the content associated with The WF, and not leaving us liable for lack of accountability and negative consequences that are caused by in-efficient content from the channel's side.

Let's have a thought!

For the sake of better understanding, let's look at an Urdu medium Pakistani Shia channel where faultiness of Sectarianism and the vigour towards its heavy featuring of Indo-Pakistani speakers focusing issues that divide that society are evident.

Furthermore, many a times, they have been accused of promoting religious hatred through individuals engaging in inflammatory speech. Now that is not to say that there are not any TV channels that spout out Salafist ideology.

In this regard anyone actively contributing funds to this TV channel is seen as a supporter, and therefore could be liable when inflammatory statements are made by the speakers on the TV channel.

Additionally, from the standpoint of Media Law, the question of Defamation, Libel, and Malicious Falsehood all have bearings if someone decides to take action against the channel



by suing which will not only bring the channel to the forefront but also individuals and organisations that support it.

The Office of Communications, is the regulatory body of the broadcasting industry and on many occasions it has seen Shia TV channels in breach of broadcasting guidelines. This should be a serious concern for anyone funding these channels, as their portrayal of various Political events is often biased. Aside from the obvious bias, Journalists accept that Broadcast Media is extremely limiting when it comes to covering nuanced political event.

Moreover, when news or analysis is covered live then the chance to pre-empt such breaches is often limited. However there is no excuse when such breaches in the code are made from recorded programming. Covering politics requires seasoned editors, journalists, and media professionals, however these channels do not have the resources to employ these professionals.

One of the most disappointing things about these channels has been how little they have done to lift the scholarly debate within Shiaism. We all know of the grand standing nature of scholarly thought within Shia Islam.

Therefore, because there is a bigger need to be well informed, well-spoken scholars should appear on channels as this will attract viewership. Also, there needs to be regular training provided to scholars who choose to appear on these channels as the methodology and approach of delivering content is very different to delivering a lecture.

With Shia Islam being a diverse school of thought, scholars tend to have differed opinions and hence training will ensure the True Shia Islam is portrayed rather than scholarly personal opinions.

With the widespread penetration of these channels, there is a growing number of people within civil society who might take certain emotionally charged notions and cause harm to wider civil society and hence, scholars should be made aware of the consequences behind their speeches.

Finally, there has to be a mechanism through which fringe scholars who perpetrate religious intolerance on Shia channels are dealt with as their remarks not only mislead segments of society but in some cases are used as justification in the persecution of Shias.

All in all, the biggest dilemma these channels face is one of resourcing. They cannot afford to employ the professionals required in order to produce effective programming. One of the biggest advantage established channels have is their ability to hire effective researchers, to spend time researching the subject matter, and then producers to translate that subject matter in Broadcast Media.

The Solution:

Based on the issues highlighted above, and the success of that, The WF has had with recent documentaries produced, the idea is to establish a Production Company. An entity that can develop into a content producer and commissioner.

In this way any content we produce can help the channels but we can effectively attach our branding to it, and we can meet the standards of editorial and broadcast production.



Furthermore, this approach allows us to help the channels while still maintaining creative control over our work.

The WF has a legal, and ethical responsibility to ensure that any funding it provides for work to be done, adheres to the strictest standards of financial accounting, legal standards and ethical observances.

Therefore, we would not be meeting those standards if we continued to fund these television channels in our current format, as we would be liable legally as an organisation that funds such channels and programming. We would like to continue to support such channels, but it has to be done as a content producer and a content commissioner.

What is a production company?

A production company usually helps to create content. It usually takes an idea and sees it through to the completion of the project, and often ensures its distribution to the pertinent channels in broadcast or online. The job of the production company is to oversee the project from concept or idea, all the way to the consumption of the content by the public, and then it is required for the company to evaluate its content based on the comments made by the audience.

An overview of a production company?

To take any content from an idea to production requires 3 critical aspects:

1. Research and Development
2. Project Management
3. Production of film

Now it is vital to ensure that these three exist simultaneously so that projects go from an idea to completion. Now the timeframe for a production of content varies, however standard hour long documentaries such as Channel 4 Dispatches can take anything for 1 year to 2 years from initial idea to completion.

It should also be noted that many projects do not go from initial viability, and research stage as it is impossible practically to produce or manage the production of such content. Consumers are so busy these days that content has to be driven towards their interests, and provide them something new or relevant to their lives so that they will take the time out to absorb the content.

Therefore, without substantial efforts in research and development the product will most likely be superficial or lack the depth or thought or exploration required to meet the criteria that entices consumers to take in the film

1. Research and Development Stage:

This stage requires skilled, researchers and developers to not only develop the concept of the content but also its horizontal and vertical integrations with audiences and how this content will eventually benefit the organisation. At this stage to keep the projects costs down it is vital that there be an individual who can oversee both management of research and the development of the idea, while there being someone whom this individual reports to in order to meet the deadlines and keep to the task at hand.



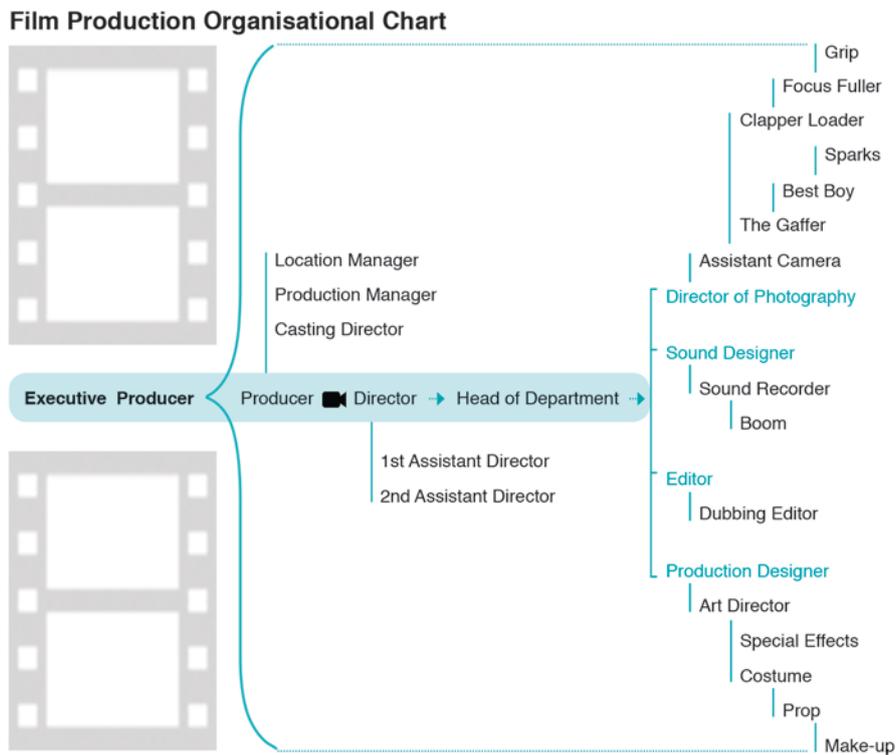
2. Project Management Stage:

As we have pointed out initially, the project at the research and development stage requires a combination of skills in one individual, while employing freelancers for specialist research and development tasks.

Now at the production management stage, it requires someone to come into the project, as both those researchers and producers are so focussed on their roles that they forget the practicalities of deadlines and organisational objectives. These are specialists who require management, but not micro-management. It requires a collaboration to ensure that deadlines and objectives are set, and then met.

3. Production:

The chart below gives you an idea into the complexity of producing video content to a very good standard. Each and every individual within this structure plays a vital role at this stage of the project, and then the video content is easily recognised due to its quality not only on the production of the content but also the subject matter of the content.



What is a Commissioner?

The role of a television commissioner is different based on the needs of each and every entity or organisation. In addition to the production of content for television channels, The WF will be augmenting its production company with a role of a commissioner. This will be a very specific role, where television channels will submit to us proposals for their production of new content.

We will then review those proposals and choose the content that meets our objectives and then work out a method where we can work with the television channel either in helping them produce the content according to our guidelines while we fund the project or producing the content for them based on the idea and development they provide.



The role of the commissioner will be specifically geared towards ensuring that this section of the company is sufficiently developed. It will also involve setting up a mechanism via which individuals, TV channels, and entrepreneurs may pitch an idea for the production of content.

The commissioner will then review the proposals, and then begin upon the process of production or funding production and managing the project. While all of this is happening, the commissioner will also be looking to raise funds so that the next round of funding on new projects may begin.

Public or Private Company?

This has to be a private company, which donors of The WF are principal investors in. By making it a private company, and allowing it to have a non-religious specific name will enable the growth of the company, into producing content that isn't just for the Shia channels in the event The WF requires content production for wider audiences.

The Implementation:

This paper has highlighted the need for a production company, it has also laid out what a production company is, and its three main processes in the production of content. We have also augmented our production company to act as a commissioner of content.

So the channels, organisations, or individuals may come to us and ask for funding, support or production of content. All in all we have developed a coherent working understanding of our needs, requirements, and the concepts of production. The next section will focus on two very distinctive implementation approaches.

Model A - Establishing the whole company at once

A production company is a business that requires considerable investment both in capital and human capital. Therefore, if we were to establish an entire production company at once, we would require top of the range technology, and seasoned experts, in production management, producers, sound producers, camera operators, video editors, and overall managers.

Now the investment in technology, would need to have a full sound studio, a live video studio, camera equipment, latest in Apple Mac Technology and considerable server capacity.

Many in the industry who have taken such a route never imagine that both human capital and technology requires continual investment as both require updating. For a production company to function the technological aspects need to be maintained with latest technologies, and the human capital constantly requires investment in training as the industry moves fast.

Finally one of the biggest forms of investment a production company requires is a constant stream of freelance investigators and researchers who can come in as the needs of the project dictate.

Judging by the state of the production market, the companies that are in profit are those establishments that produce content for the big Television channels. Now many new



companies start out in the market, they rarely start out with full capacity as the sunk costs initially to set up are quite high, and the running costs are high too.

It is also difficult to find projects initially that keep the company sustained or breaking even. In pursuing this option, which is investment heavy, the pressure to deliver the results, such as breaking even or producing quality programming will be too high, as we are entering into a market that we have little practical knowledge of. Most successful businessmen will tell you the difference between research, and practical knowledge therefore our estimation is based on our needs at the moment as it seems more prudent to gradually develop the production company.

Model B - Gradually establishing a Production Company

Now this model appreciates the situation of the market, and our needs for a production company. Therefore here we can set up the official company in the paperwork, give it the professional look and feel, online and in all the advertising material.

However when it comes to the investment we hire a Production Manager. The job of the production manager is to manage the projects that need to be produced by The WF. So this producer will outsource the projects, and oversee all of them.

The drawback to this model is that outsourcing is expensive, companies will charge you for developing content, while the Production Manager never retains the skills or experience necessary to grow in human capital from a production manager to an actual producer.

However at the start, it will allow the Production Manager to understand the market, and therefore as the number of projects increase we can begin to assess the growth of the company.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This approach will mean the investment required is gradual, however each and every project will cost the investors of the company. Therefore as the production manager gains an understanding of the market, it makes it feasible to understand that they will expand the company by breaking down the services provided by each and every outsourced project, in order to bring some aspects of it in house and therefore growing the company based on the needs of the organisation.

This model is far more sustainable, and it allows for the production company to become a commissioner of programming so if the channels then have ideas for programming they can then come to the company, send in their project proposals, and we have the ability to decide whether or not to produce that content if it matches our objectives. Furthermore we will be able to retain the creative control of the content, and the rights to all the content we produce.