



WHAT'S NEXT?

PRESS ENTER

Public Service Journalism in the Age of Distraction,
Opinion & Information Abundance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE
SUMMARY
INTRODUCTION
Q&A NOEL CURRAN
PART 1
PART 2
PART 3
CONCLUSION
INTERVIEWEES
AUTHORSHIP
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
ABOUT

4	Preface
5	Executive Summary
8	Introduction
11	<i>Q&A with Noel Curran, EBU Director General</i>
14	Part 1: What's Next in the World around Public Service Journalism?
17	Chapter 1: Democracy and Public Service Media
20	Chapter 2: Politics, Fragmentation, and Polarisation
23	Chapter 3: The New Landscape of Competition
26	Chapter 4: Public Service Funding Challenges
29	Chapter 5: The Erosion of Press Freedom
34	Chapter 6: Safety of Journalists
42	<i>Q&A with Annika Sehl, Professor of Digital Journalism, Universität der Bundeswehr</i>
45	<i>Q&A with Marius Dragomir, Director, Center for Media, Data & Society, CEU</i>
47	01 Case 'My Country Talks', Zeit Online
49	02 Case 'Flipping the Script', Deutsche Welle
52	03 Case 'Journalism Trust Initiative', Reporters Without Borders
55	04 Case 'Do it like Netflix with YLE', YLE
57	05 Case 'Beyond the Swiss Referendum', SRG SSR
60	06 Case 'Safety of Journalists', NOS
62	Part 2: What's Next in Connecting with Audiences and the Public
65	Chapter 7: Putting Audiences at the Centre
70	Chapter 8: Harnessing Technology to Serve the Public
74	Chapter 9: The Many Faces of News Avoidance
78	Chapter 10: Reaching out to Young Audiences
82	Chapter 11: Nourishing Trust
86	Chapter 12: Stating the Case for Impartiality
92	<i>Q&A with Nic Newman, Lead Author Digital News Report, Reuters Institute</i>
95	<i>Q&A with Fran Unsworth, Director News and Current Affairs, BBC</i>

97	07 Case 'AI and Automation Lab', BR
100	08 Case 'News Values Project', Sveriges Radio
103	09 Case 'RTÉ Brainstorm', RTÉ
105	10 Case 'Funk', ARD and ZDF
108	11 Case 'Source Transparency', France Télévisions
110	12 Case 'Social Media Guidelines', BBC
113	Part 3: What's Next in Leadership and Innovation?
116	Chapter 12: Navigating Uncertainty and Managing Change
125	Chapter 13: The Talent Challenge — Get them, hold them, nurture them
132	Chapter 14: The Fallout of Covid — What's Here to Stay
137	<i>Q&A with Martin Reeves, Author: "The Imagination Machine", BCG Henderson Institute</i>
140	<i>Q&A with Tinatin Berdzenishvili, Director General, GPB</i>
144	13 Case 'Changing Culture at SVT', SVT
146	14 Case 'The Social Media Strategy of German Tagesschau', ARD
148	15 Case 'Changing Work Environments at RTBF', RTBF
151	16 Case 'A European Perspective', EBU
154	Conclusion
158	List of Interviewees
159	Authors and Editors
161	Acknowledgements
162	About the EBU

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



PREFACE

In our very troubled and fast changing world, news is and remains the number one asset of public service media. During almost two years of the pandemic, we have worked hard and increased the trust of our audiences.

What's next?

Among the many challenges ahead, I can pick two that I feel we must collectively focus much more on:

- A common crucial fight against disinformation, especially hateful content which is dangerously dividing our societies.
- A shared effort to further increase our climate crisis reporting.

The never-ending stream of low-quality, non-curated, non-verified and often strongly opinionated content is leaving our audiences disoriented, frustrated, and above all divided.

As public service media, we must be seen as a beacon amid the noise, a trusted reference, a safe benchmark. We must act to be the antidote to filter bubbles, ideological frames, toxic and hateful content, by offering more diverse information and opinions, well-sourced, quality, and fact-based news, as well as serious, evidence-based debates which together make up the pillars of a healthy democracy.

I truly believe we also have a much bigger role to play in the climate crisis to create a shared climate literacy, one that allows us to inform citizens with solutions, and empower them to hold our elected leaders to account on their promises. One place to start is to ensure that climate change is a part of all news teams — not just science, politics and business, but also sports, lifestyle, culture. Mainstreaming climate literacy must be part of our public value, and it can also contribute to bridging worrying inter-generational divide on this issue.

Of course, there are many other very important challenges to overcome, including better embracing innovation in our new digital age. Solution-oriented and full of new ideas, this 2021-22 EBU annual News Report shows the way.

Together, we can do it!

Delphine Ernotte Cunci
President, European Broadcasting Union (EBU)

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public service journalism draws its legitimacy from a strong connection with the public. The EBU News Report 2021-22, “What’s Next? Public Service Journalism in the Age of Distraction, Opinion, and Information Abundance” highlights how today’s public service media organisations go about building and strengthening this connection while dealing with a variety of challenges. In three parts and 16 case studies it discusses, first, the political and economic pressures under which public service media are operating, second, new and innovative ways of connecting with audiences, and third, approaches newsroom leaders can take to tackle challenges they encounter in their daily operations. The report is solution-oriented and provides ideas on how to move forward. It is based on more than 40 interviews with media leaders, experts, and academics from the public service media community and beyond and draws on the latest research. Here are some of its main findings:

Part 1: What’s Next in the World Around Public Service Media?

- The pandemic has been a game changer for public service media, which have seen rising trust and audience figures even in contested markets. Staying strongly allied with the public will help fend off attacks on independence and funding.
- Polarisation seems to be less of an issue in most markets than commonly assumed.
- Public service media’s position and reputation is increasingly being challenged politically from two sides: on the one hand, there are illiberal, sometimes radical political actors, and on the other, there are those who advocate for letting market forces have their play.
- The pressures on press freedom and the autonomy of media in general and public service media in particular is a threat to democracy. It is a growing problem internationally and affects several of the EBU’s member states.
- The media need to rally other institutions and society at large for support in combatting attacks on press freedom and editorial independence.
- Attacks against journalists have increased, with women and minorities disproportionately targeted. This needs action by authorities and by the organisations themselves.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

- The market dominance of streaming giants, internet platforms, and other large commercial players in the digital age requires structural and regulatory changes and the creation of more synergies among public service media to maintain its key position in democratic society.
- Funding pressures for public service media will persist, but there is potential for savings and reforms. The need for change must be clearly communicated to the public, since shifting budgets to new ventures risks alienating loyal audiences.

Part 2: What's Next in Connecting with Audiences and the Public?

- Content strategies should focus on providing solutions and ideas for audiences' problems, needs and struggles, and not primarily on politics and conflict. Staying close to the lives and habits of the public is key.
- Public service media need to reflect and serve societies in all their diversity, providing content on the platforms and devices where audiences are, not only where newsrooms want them to be.
- Everyone pays the licence fee. This mandates public service media to reach out to those that have been underserved by traditional journalism.
- The latest technology can be used to connect better with audiences and personalise offerings. It should reflect public service values to make it positive and distinctive.
- Younger audiences can be reached with content that is informative and entertaining, combining depth and rigor with passion and the occasional dose of humour. Younger audiences want to be met respectfully and in a friendly manner and treated fairly.

- Trust can be built and maintained by the quality and relevance of content, by becoming more transparent and by bringing the concept of impartiality to life in a world of disinformation and opinion.

Part 3: What's Next in Leadership and Innovation?

- Leaders can help their teams embrace change as the new normal through a collaborative and communicative leadership style as well as the broad use of change methodologies and performance metrics.
- Identifying, hiring, retaining, and developing diverse talent will be key to success in a competitive labour market. The commitment to public service values is a competitive advantage with those looking for meaning in their work-lives.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

- Organisations that encourage and facilitate intergenerational collaboration and eliminate any divides will be at advantage.
- An inclusive culture that fosters innovation and structured imagination is key to future success.
- Keeping the momentum of change and innovation that has accelerated during the pandemic is essential. The benefits of increasingly flexible work environments should be highlighted and build upon.
- Capitalising on the advantages of international cooperation, collaboration, networking, and learning will help organisations and their leaders to keep up with the pace of change and find efficient and effective solutions to shared challenges.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S NEXT?

There is a common narrative about the media and journalism these days and that is a story of declining trust. Politicians repeat it, as do industry executives and even journalists. The only trouble being: it is often wrong. After news organisations' tireless coverage of the pandemic, media in most countries worldwide have seen a significant improvement in their trust figures. Even in France, where the population has shown a high degree of scepticism towards the media, trust has grown, albeit from lower levels. Public service media were the winners in this category. In early 2021, some of them registered trust ratings of 80 percent or even higher.

But this is not the full story. For some countries, the trust crisis is very real. In many regions, a small minority is becoming increasingly radical in their rejection of journalists with whom they disagree with and even of independent journalism itself. Influential figures from politics and business attempt to further their agenda by fuelling the 'fake news' rhetoric, with the prime example being former US President Donald Trump. For some in so-called 'populist' movements this has gone even further. They portray the media as an enemy run by elites. Attacks on journalists in physical and digital spaces have increased, even in consensus-driven countries like Germany. And in some countries, it is part of the explicit policy of certain political parties to gain control of or 'reform' the media, most particularly publicly funded independent media. All these developments form threats to public service media, not just through pressure and controversy but directly through economic and political interventions. For some organisations, it may become a crisis that threatens their legitimacy and future.

The broad public endorsement of public broadcasters during the pandemic has helped. Still, competition is increasing — for all media organisations. And this competition does not primarily come from a fellow publisher or broadcaster on the national scene. It comes in the form of giant platform companies, many of them based in the US, which swamp markets with more entertainment and other modes of distraction than any individual could ever need. These companies control access to audiences and define standards for user experiences. Even the best resourced public service media struggle to keep up with these. To make matters worse, there are open attacks from within the industry, too. Instead of collaborating to ensure quality journalism, many private publishers attack public service media, which are easier to target and curtail than the Silicon Valley heavyweights upon which they depend for reach. Fearing for their own commercial future, they do not want public service media competing in the digital space.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

So, what to make of all this? What's next for public service journalism? According to EBU Director General Noel Curran, with whom we spoke for this report, changes have been so rapid and profound in recent years, that a five-year-plan can only form a rough guide (see [Q&A with Noel Curran, page 11](#)). He recommends that strategies have to be highly flexible to keep pace with these developments, as does leadership. "What's next" becomes rather programmatic in this sense. It means experimentation: trying something, assessing how it works, and moving on from there.

This report hopes to deliver some guidance for those brave organisations, teams and individuals who are reflecting on their next strategic steps. It draws on state-of-the-art research, as well as over 40 interviews the authors conducted with leaders from the public service media community and renowned experts in the fields of media, journalism, and public service news. Additionally, 16 specific and potentially instructive case studies show how some organisations have tackled challenges that will be familiar to others in the business. These case studies focus on what works and act as calls to collaborate and engage. Their main protagonists are happy to share their experiences with those who are interested and willing to learn.

This report has three parts. The first, "What's Next in the World Around Public Service Journalism?" sheds light on some of the political and economic challenges public service media are facing. It looks at political fragmentation, polarisation, and threats to press freedom. It addresses the challenges the new global media and entertainment landscape poses for public service media, also in their relationship to commercial publishers and broadcasters. And it also highlights the value and significance of public-funded independent media and their contribution to ensuring people are well-informed and engaged citizens of democratic societies.

The second part, "What's Next in Connecting with Audiences and the Public?" discusses what people need and expect from journalism and the media, and how media organisations in the EBU community are responding to these needs and expectations. As Pascal Doucet-Bon, Deputy Director of News at France Télévisions, puts it: "The biggest challenge is redefining and reaffirming our usefulness. Why do people pay the license fee? It has been more and more necessary to answer this question. We have to stop assuming that our usefulness is obvious. We must move from the implicit to the explicit." There is broad agreement among our interviewees that the absolute best argument against public service media's many critics is a strong connection with the public and a commitment to serving a variety of audiences who would otherwise not be served. Importantly, public service media need to communicate — and show through their work — that they ultimately serve a higher, democratic end that benefits everyone. Building trust with audiences and safeguarding impartiality is at the core of their mission and efforts.

The third and final part is about how to get there. How can public service media change internally to achieve these overarching goals? "What's Next in Leadership and Innovation?" consults media leaders about their experiences in managing people and

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

driving change but also with external experts who are familiar with the industry. What is the best formula for change? How can an organisation become an 'imagination machine' which is both responsive to challenges and inventive at the same time? How can public service media attract and retain talent? And how has the pandemic impacted all of this? These topics will be particularly relevant for those in leadership roles and those with leadership aspirations.

A note of caution: This report does not offer any blueprints or recipes, for several reasons. For one, standard form solutions do not exist to many of the structural challenges outlined in the following chapters. Second, public service media differ from country to country and not all of them face the same issues. What might work in one country would not necessarily work in another, even though many challenges to media organisations and journalism are strikingly similar across the globe. Third, public service media are not always in a position to 'do something', especially when it comes to political challenges or threats.

Finally, all of those who so generously shared their insights and experiences with us are infinitely more expert in their field than we could ever be. In this report, we share evidence, real-life experience, and bring evidence-based nuance to the common narratives that shape the media industry in general and public service media in particular. While this work will leave many questions open, we hope that it will help to spark informed and even passionate conversations among those who are interested in the future of journalism and democracy. We hope that these conversations will contribute to improving public service media so it can form an essential part of the digital world — to the same extent that it has been at the heart of the democratic analogue world.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



Q&A 1

NOEL CURRAN

EBU Director General

“WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER. WE ARE FACING GIANTS”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

What do you see as the top current challenges for public service media?

The audience is always a challenge. Audience habits are changing, tastes are changing. And we have an issue with younger audiences. Second, the market is changing. We are seeing consolidation, even among the big players. An event like the merger of AT&T’s Warner Media and Discovery, with the intention to form a global leader in entertainment, has a significant impact on the European market. There are bigger players than we have ever seen before in our industry. And third, there is increasing political pressure in some countries. There is a sense that journalists should be told what to do and that governments should have a much bigger say in the media sector. On the positive side is: We know our audience, we have trust, we have a connection. Nothing is written in stone; we can shape it.

Covid-19 has raised trust in public service media, but attacks have increased anyway. How do you explain this?

With Covid-19, public service media became portals for public information campaigns. Trust levels rocketed as did audience figures. The governments of many countries were initially very happy. Then public service media did what they do: They offered a range of voices — including dissenting voices. Public service media allow debate and criticism. This was when we saw some governments turn against them.

There are political attacks, even in countries like Switzerland and Germany. Do you think this is dangerous?

Political pressure is dangerous. Everyone needs to wake up to the scale of the threat in some countries. Public service media have become a target in some countries,

particularly on the back of the audience figures during the pandemic. You have this crazy situation where public service media have done well, they have done their job and that has made them a much bigger threat. Commercial media coverage needs to recognise the scale of the threat to public service media's independence in some countries.

What's the EBU's strategy in dealing with attacks on press freedom, particularly in Eastern Europe?

The EBU has become more vocal on this issue. We make public statements; we bring public attention to cases where we feel there is interference and where the media organisation is coming under pressure. We are also prepared to criticize our own members. We showed that when we released statements in support of journalists in Belarus who were complaining about interference in election coverage. We work with the European Commission on this very issue, we work with the Council of Europe, with journalist organisations, we work with members and help the members.

When you criticise members, how do the organisations usually react? Do they listen, what do they do?

There are a lot of journalists in these organisations who are doing the best they can. The last thing they want is to be cut off from the EBU. Some of the management are trying very, very hard to maintain their independence when their political masters have undue influence. There is nothing black and white in this area, there is a lot of grey. You have to take each organisation and each country as an individual case.

Belarus is quite an extreme case, what about others?

What has happened in the Czech Republic is quite worrying. This is a new phenomenon of overt pressure, there are threats against management and appointees to governing bodies. You worry if a country like that moves down this road, others will follow. There have been a lot of examples.

So, you are not mentioning Hungary and Poland?

I think you can go through a list. There are levels of this around Europe.

What's the general line of EBU members on this issue? Is there solidarity or do members just care about their own backyard?

We have 116 members in over 50 countries; there is no uniform view. Some members feel a harder line needs to be taken where there are breaches of values. Other members feel these under pressure need help, not sanctions. And others are just busy surviving. There is no single uniform approach. We suspended Belarus. This was a very significant step, we felt we had no option. It was quite an exceptional case. It showed we are prepared to take action. We will review it over the next period of years.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

How should public service media deal with the more subtle attacks, such as funding pressures? What should they do and what should they stop doing?

The majority of our members get most of their funding through public money: a license fee, or taxes. So, there is some risk. The biggest way to protect funding is to have a strong, firm connection with your audience: they need to feel that you are meeting their needs, and that you change and adapt to what those needs are. Making the case publicly for public service media is important. And it is a question of managing our own finances. To this end, all of our members have to realise that the shift to digital is unstoppable. In the pandemic, we have seen huge linear figures. I worry that has led to some sort of complacency. I don't think those figures are sustainable. The shift away from linear is continuing.

How does leadership have to respond to that pace? What have you learned as a leader? A lot of the old certainties are gone. The idea of five-year strategies is becoming increasingly redundant. The overall approach needs to be much more flexible. Leaders need to lead on what's happening in the market. It is important that leaders don't become complacent. Leaders need to be very in tune with their staff and motivate their staff. Also, leaders should be positive. There is so much negativity already. Positivity is not complacency.

Where are you envisioning the EBU ten years from now?

The EBU will still be here in ten years' time. There was a moment when I wasn't sure about that. But I feel we are in a strong place. If we make the digital changes that are necessary, the EBU will be here in providing services, information, content. I'm very confident. But we need the members to realise what is happening around us. The shift in audience behaviour is dramatic, and we need to be dramatic in our response. We need to pool resources, skill bases, knowledge, have an open exchange. We need people to buy into the concept that we are much stronger together. We are facing giants.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



What's next in
**THE WORLD AROUND
PUBLIC SERVICE JOURNALISM?**

PRESS ENTER



PART 1

WHAT'S NEXT IN **THE WORLD AROUND
PUBLIC SERVICE JOURNALISM?****SAME, BUT DIFFERENT: INSIDE THE STRUGGLES FOR RELEVANCE, RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION**

Public service media organisations all over the globe resemble each other in many of the challenges they are facing. At the same time, they can differ vastly, even if they operate in the same country. They are shaped by different histories, cultures, politics, and economic circumstances. A web of influences determines their autonomy and independence – or a lack thereof. Certainly, they all share obligations, the most important ones being a commitment to impartiality and the mission to serve the entire public in its diversity with high-quality programmes and journalism. But they have to rely on varying, sometimes changing systems of funding and governance. They enjoy different levels of trust, influenced by factors such as historical context and demographics, but also the population's general trust in institutions. As a result, the question of what's next for public service journalism hinges on future changes to the social, economic, and political environment.

What are the political and social forces that influence public service media? What are the economic pressures? And finally, how should public service media respond to a deterioration in press freedom, attempts to weaken their autonomy, and increasing attacks against their staff? This part of the report will discuss these questions. It will also provide some ideas about how to respond to broader developments in the outside world over which the organisations themselves often have limited influence.

It is safe to say that the pandemic has been a game changer for public service media. In their fears, doubts and insecurities, large parts of the public turned again to institutions that some had believed they could do without. The media – and public service media in particular – was one of these institutions, at times the most important one. This came as a relief. As was set out in previous EBU News Reports, public service media entered this period under considerable strain from external forces, be it technological, economic, societal, and political, all of which represented a significant challenge to their future role and even existence.

Key to the public service mandate is the organisation's relationship with the public. That is why the contest for relevance and engagement has become fierce. For public service news the challenge was even more acute. The nature of the democratic dialogue had become fractured, fragmented, and increasingly divisive and hostile in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, and with intense use of social media by some parties. Suddenly,

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



partisans identified the media itself as a player in the political game, symbolised by the phrase 'fake news media', which placed extra pressure on editorial principles and choices. Former editor of the Washington Post, Marty Baron, repeatedly tried to remind the public that the media was "at work, not at war," sometimes to no avail.

In this context, the pandemic gave public service media new opportunities to assert their relevance in society. The EBU News Report 2020 dealt with this in detail. The analysis of audience figures and trust levels shows that the effort to serve and engage the public has paid off (see analysis in Part 2 of this report). But what's next? How can the gift of renewed attention and trust be nourished and built upon?

The common purpose of public service media is anchored in democratic principles. There is increasing evidence that the democratic framework of society determines how effective public service media can fulfil their role. This correlation is shown starkly by recent analysis considered in this chapter. We will also examine how wider political fragmentation and the polarisation this brings might impact on this role, and how the dominance of platform monopolies affects the leverage of public service media. Finally, we consider how these struggles fit into wider global concerns over media freedom and the safety of journalists in a social media environment that structurally amplifies the voices of increasingly radical minorities.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 01 DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

WHILE DEMOCRACY STABILISES PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA, THEY IN TURN HELP TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

Plenty of research suggests that the quality of a country's democracy seems to correlate with public service media's role in society.¹ More explicitly: Where democratic traditions are strong and liberal democratic principles well-protected, public service media tend to flourish and develop a higher level of professionalisation and autonomy from political control. This in turn allows them to serve as a high-quality "pluralistic forum for public discussion and as a means of promoting broader democratic participation."² Other studies indicate that public service media have a positive impact on the amount of hard news produced, helping to deepen and develop levels of political knowledge. This, by extension, may incrementally increase political participation.³

Research also suggests that strong public service media correlate with lower information inequality between advantaged and disadvantaged citizens and more democratic engagement in society.⁴ A recent EBU report on democracy and public service media found that citizens are more satisfied with democracy in countries with well-funded public service media, trust each other more, and are less inclined to think of authoritarian leadership as a good way of governing.⁵ In essence, where public service media are protected and strengthened by an intact democratic system, they can help to strengthen and reinforce the same.

Public service media have also proven to be an important counterbalance to various forms of polarisation. For example, countries that spend more on public service media per capita seem not to be as polarised as those with lower levels of investment, although cause and effect are somewhat unclear, and counterfactual explanations point to other potential factors.⁶ Other research suggests that public service media contribute to higher levels of social trust, a more realistic view of one's own society, and less extremist views among the population.⁷ Public service broadcasting can also help to counteract 'silo effects' where citizens stay within their own bubble, only consuming news that is in line with their existing political preferences.⁸ It also seems to play an important de-polarising and unifying role in modern media environments marked by an abundance of choice, as Annika Sehl, Professor of Digital Journalism at the Universität der Bundeswehr München points out. "Polarisation becomes a problem when social groups no longer engage in a common discourse with each other. Public service media have an increasingly important task to counteract tendencies that go in this direction and to connect and integrate different parts of society." (See Q&A with Annika Sehl, p. 42).

In recent years, a number of media organisations have started to develop formats that help to break up bubbles of thought and engagement. One of the most prominent innovations

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



which has gained international attention was developed by German publisher *Zeit Online*. 'My Country Talks', also dubbed 'political Tinder', pairs people with opposing views and brings them together to debate constructively. Even German Federal President Frank Walter Steinmeier was intrigued, endorsing '*Deutschland spricht*' at the initial kick-off in Germany (see case study 'My Country talks', p. 47). Breaking up the usual patterns of media-led debates was also what German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW had in mind when launching the format 'Flipping the Script' in the run-up to the federal election in September 2021. Here, the audience was at the helm, interviewing politicians (see case study 'Flipping the Script', p. 49). While the impact of these experiments might not be quantifiable on a larger scale, projects like these are well suited to delivering on the media's mission to foster dialogue and build bridges in an environment in which social media feeds polarisation.

The link between robust democracy and flourishing public service media should be good news for those working in the arena as well as those whom they serve. But it follows that there is reason to worry when things become a bit rocky. When public service media's relationship with audiences weakens, its contribution to democracy reduces. As cross-national data from the 2018 Reuters Institute Digital News Report shows, public service media score best in the surveyed countries where they are perceived as independent from the government.⁹ More recent data from the 2021 edition of the report seems to confirm this observation, with public service media remaining the most trusted news sources in many European countries, often both online and offline.¹⁰ However, in countries where governments have increased their control over public service media, trust drops both of itself and compared to other media. As figure 1 shows, public service media in Poland and Hungary have the lowest trust scores of the EBU members included in the Reuters survey and these scores have further declined from 2018 levels.^{11,12}

In contrast, any increasing fragmentation and volatility in the political environment does not necessarily present a problem for public service media, as long as certain conditions are met. Countries such as the Netherlands, for example, have a highly fragmented political landscape yet their public service media organisations are highly trusted and independent. It does become problematic when political forces actively start to undermine and attack public service media for ideological reasons. These controversies often come from far-right parties, but not exclusively. In Greece, it was left-wing parties which have been more outspoken against public service media. These tendencies have become increasingly visible with the rise (or increasing dominance) of right-wing populist parties across Europe, for example in Austria, Germany, and Sweden, but also of other, more mainstream conservative parties, such as in the United Kingdom. Attacks are not only made verbally, which at least lends opportunities for debate. In some countries, more severe interference occurs through attempts to alter funding mechanisms or interfere with the governance structure through direct political appointments.¹³ Public broadcasters will have to lobby and convince these groups that they are worth supporting and protecting.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

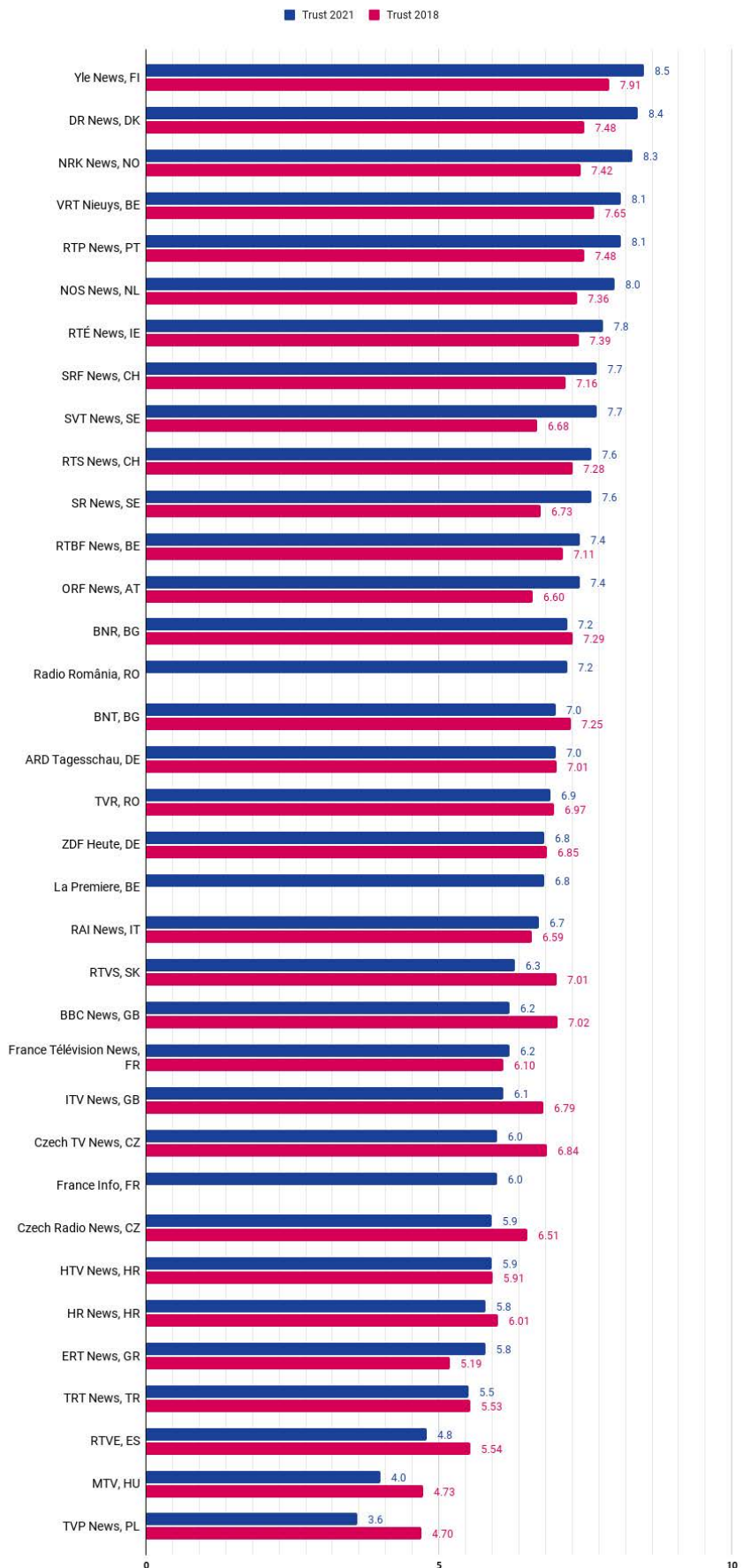
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



FIGURE 1 TRUST IN PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA NEWS BRANDS, DATA 2018 AND 2021



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT, 2018 AND 2021, POLLING BY YUOGOV
(No comparison for companies newly added in 2021 report)

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1**
- PART 2
- PART 3
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES



CHAPTER 02

POLITICS, FRAGMENTATION, AND POLARISATION

POLARISATION IS REAL - BUT LESS PRONOUNCED THAN COMMONLY ASSUMED

It is safe to say that Europe has seen increasing social and political turbulence in recent years. European democracies are undergoing transformations, albeit very gradual ones. The origins of these are complex, but changing demographics, the rise of inequality, and disagreements over major issues such as migration, climate change, and identity, all seem to play a role. This turbulence is also evident in politics. Mainstream parties in multiple countries have lost some of their dominance. At the same time, the rise of political outsiders on both the right and left of the political spectrum has led to increasing political fragmentation and greater electoral volatility. This should not be confused with political polarisation, which is a different matter.¹⁴ Political fragmentation, broadly understood, refers to an increase in the number of parties involved in an election or the government and an inequality in their size. Political polarisation, however, is often defined as the extent to which opinions on any given issue are opposed.

This development is by no means new, nor are these changes uniform across countries or linear over time within individual countries.¹⁵ As the political scientists Catherine Hobolt and Sara de Vries argue in their book *Political Entrepreneurs. The Rise of Challenger Parties in Europe*, the origins of this development are complex. They include structural changes to the economy and economic downturns, globalisation, and a cultural backlash against multiculturalism and immigration. But one common factor across the board is how it has led to strategic opportunities for what are considered 'challenger parties' to mobilise voters around new political issues. These challenger parties have also used this as an opportunity to fan anti-establishment rhetoric aimed at undermining various institutions, from governments to the media and the courts. In many countries this has made the political landscape increasingly volatile and raised the intensity of conflict.

However, political polarisation, often cited as a key concern by pundits, politicians, and journalists, seems to be less important in Europe than is commonly assumed. One explanation for this is that many of the current debates around polarisation focus on the situation in the United States, where the political divide is arguably more pronounced, which has had a negative effect on trust in media among parts of the public.¹⁶ A second explanation is that those who are most concerned about polarisation — for example journalists, academics, and policymakers — spend a lot of time on social media platforms such as Twitter, which are known to be a poor mirror of society and are often more polarised.¹⁷ In other words: the structure and affordances of social media often exacerbate the misperception that society is more polarised than it actually is.¹⁸ Another likely reason is that there is a lot of confusion around what people actually *mean* when they talk about

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



polarisation. Polarisation can be defined as the extent to which public opinions on any given issue are opposed (*ideological, issue, or political polarisation*) but also the extent to which citizens feel more negatively toward other groups in society or other political camps than toward their own (*affective polarisation*).¹⁹

While the evidence remains murky, recent studies have suggested that in several European countries, affective polarisation has on average remained stable since the 1980s,²⁰ with data from the Varieties of Democracy project painting a broadly similar picture. In contrast, ideological polarisation has somewhat increased across Europe in recent years. This is most likely due to both economic developments such as rising inequality and the Great Recession, the economic downturn from 2007 to 2009 after the U.S. housing bubble burst and the global financial crisis ensued, as well as cultural issues such as immigration, the environment, and various identity-related developments.²¹ Still, it is nowhere near the level most people assume it to be.

A number of Eastern and Central European countries have seen an increase in (perceived) political polarisation since 2010.²² In some countries, a significant contribution to polarisation has come from the emergence of what have been termed populist or radical right parties. These parties have positioned themselves as being in favour of 'traditional' values as opposed to what they call the 'liberal' values of openness and tolerance, with heightened conflict on social inclusion issues and immigration policy.²³ Hobolt and De Vries emphasise that one significant claim of these movements is that they are "strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and by returning to traditional values."²⁴

Various research projects have tried to rate the state of democracy across European countries. One of the most respected is the V-Dem project at the University of Gothenburg. Their data allow some careful conclusions about recent developments. While most European countries have broadly remained democratic since the 1980s, there are notable differences, with some countries especially in Eastern and Central Europe recently experiencing forms of what experts call democratic backsliding. This entails an erosion in the quality of democracy which, as academic researchers Seán Henley and Licia Cianetti write, is "a gradual [process], led by democratically-elected governments (often right-wing populist) [which] begins with attacks on constitutional checks-and-balances, the judiciary and media pluralism." In their view, the clearest cases are Hungary, Poland, Serbia, and North Macedonia, where democratic standards have eroded under legal changes.²⁵ Yet, Henley and Cianetti confirm that the situation is nuanced, with many positive cases of advancement. "In the bulk of CEE cases," they write, "there is neither clear democratic progress nor sharp regress."²⁶

It is too early to tell if the pandemic will upend or potentially slow some of these developments. For example, in its 2021 report on the rule of law within the European Union, the European Commission noted some positive developments but also pointed out that "concerns remain and in certain Member States these have increased, for instance

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



when it comes to the independence of the judiciary and the situation in the media.”²⁷ At the time of writing, it is uncertain what effect various measures taken by the European Commission against individual members states will have and if they will be able to help safeguard democratic norms. Likewise, while levels of polarisation overall currently seem to be moderate, recent increases could well end up continuing. A lot will depend on structural socio-economic changes, the fallout from the pandemic, and the development of the climate crisis. The latter might not only affect people materially by influencing the supply with energy, water, and other resources. It could also have psychological effects, for example, heightening insecurity and reducing confidence in governmental capabilities. For now, the best working assumption is that these long-term structural developments will not simply disappear but continue to play a significant role in the continent’s socio-political landscape, thus ultimately affecting public service media.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 03 THE NEW LANDSCAPE OF COMPETITION

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA NEED TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AMONG NEW PLAYERS,
FAMILIAR COMPETITORS AND CHANGING HABITS

For a long time, public service media across Europe were truly mass media. They enjoyed a strong position in their respective national markets, often leading in both radio and TV for decades. However, this situation has changed in the digital age. The rise of the internet and its social media, search, and gaming platforms, all available everywhere on mobile devices, has provided plenty of alternatives, not only for accessing and consuming news and entertainment, but also for spending down-time in general. While many people used to read newspapers on the train or listen to the radio on their commute to work, they have now other ways of keeping themselves busy and distracted, which they are free to choose at any moment. In addition, traditional TV has become less attractive to many with the advent of streaming giants. As data show, including from the annual Reuters Digital News Reports (see figure 3), public service media still enjoy a wide reach for offline news in many countries, while many lag behind online.²⁸

This is a challenge, particularly when it comes to connecting with young audiences. The 2019 Reuters Institute report entitled '[Old, educated, and politically diverse: the audience of public service news](#)' highlighted the need for public broadcasters to adapt to an environment where audiences increasingly consume their news and content online from a large variety of content. Public service media organisations need to act if they want to retain or expand their reach and thus legitimise their existence and relevance — Part 2 of this report addresses the diverse ways media are serving and trying to connect with their audiences.

Public service media's relevance has been repeatedly questioned in recent years, as Annika Sehl confirms: "Recently, we have increasingly heard the argument that public service media are no longer needed because the scarcity of information that contributed to their foundation no longer exists; today, we live in an age of information abundance." According to Sehl, what she terms 'neoliberal forces' in particular have argued that the free market should now be in charge of providing citizens with information and content, a view that Sehl does not share. "Public service media continue to offer a diversity and quality that the market often cannot or will not provide. The combination of both private sector media and public service media is seen as most beneficial for society."

While the pandemic led to a temporary increase in TV news and radio consumption across Europe, overall consumption patterns still point to a shift towards digital sources in the longer term. Nevertheless, audience figures have also demonstrated that public service media can be and are successful online, with their websites performing well as reliable

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

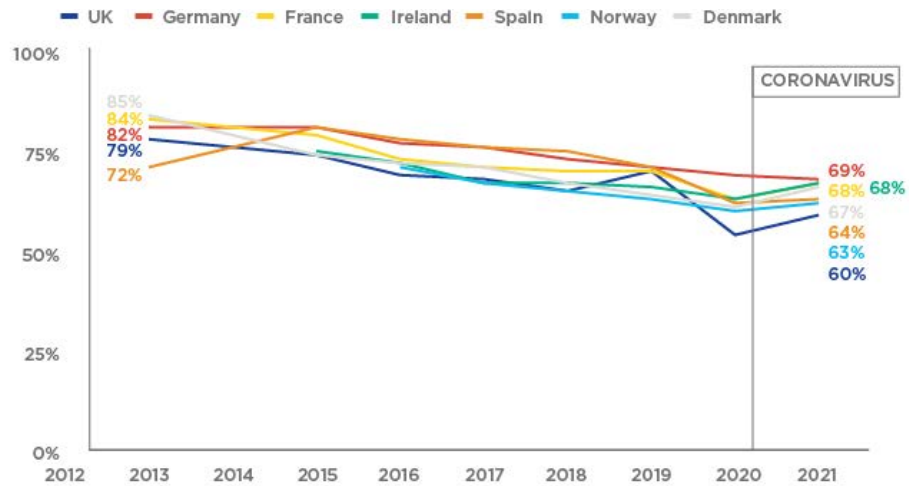
ABOUT

REFERENCES



sources of information. This might be, as Nic Newman and colleagues note, “because they have been able to use their reach via TV and radio to promote more detailed information online.”²⁹

FIGURE 2 TV USAGE TRENDS (2013-2021)



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2021; POLLING BY YOUNG&Rubicam

Streaming and internet platforms, mostly based in the US, have public service media worried, though. Recent years have seen the emergence of major players such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Apple TV. Merger plans (e.g., between Warner and Discovery) and acquisitions sprees by other actors (e.g., Disney) will lead or have already led to even greater competition. Audiences benefit from the so-called ‘streaming wars’, with the streaming giants spending large budgets on original content. In contrast, traditional public service media and their news offerings are increasingly at risk of being crowded out or left behind by the growing number of alternative options available to viewers while they also face budget constraints.³⁰ And while streaming giants carry substantial amounts of public service media-made content, their news content is generally not. This is very problematic, according to EBU Director General, Noel Curran: “Prominence — or findability as it is often called — is a crucial principle to ensure citizens are sufficiently aware of public service content, and other content of particular value to society. What’s the use in having the best, most trusted content in the world available if you can’t find it online?”³¹

Public service media are in a difficult position, as they mostly rely on the support of policymakers to enforce legislation that would level the playing field and allow public service news content to be more easily found by audiences.³² For example, online operators currently do not have so called ‘must carry’ rules, which traditionally forced television distributors to deliver specific channels and in the past guaranteed the prominence of public service broadcasters on linear devices.³³ As a result, public service media do not enjoy special privileges on online platforms or internet-connected devices such as smart TVs or speakers. This likely puts their news offerings at a disadvantage. While the UK government is currently pressing ahead with legislation “to ensure content from the UK public service broadcasters is ‘discoverable’ on smart TVs, set-top boxes, streaming sticks and other platforms,”³⁴ similar regulation at the EU level is being considered in the forthcoming Digital Services Act.³⁵ One step forward would be

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1**
- PART 2
- PART 3
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES



the extension of the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) standard, launched by Reporters Without Borders in cooperation with the EBU and the news agency AFP as partners. The JTI advocates incorporating relevant data points on trusted media organisations in the algorithms on third-party platforms that control content curation ([see case study 'Journalism Trust Initiative', p. 52](#)). This could be a crucial step forward in up-ranking quality content on social media, where current business models favour the noisy, the bizarre, and often the divisive.

In this hotly contested environment, public service news organisations and commercial broadcasters and publishers could become allies for the sake of quality journalism. But in the minds of too many media managers, the old world of competition lives on. Instead of combining their forces against giants from Silicon Valley and elsewhere, too many of those in leadership roles are still busy defending their own backyard. Commercial media leaders routinely accuse public service media of market distortion and unfair competition. When broadcasters use public funding to expand both online and offline, commercial media are 'crowded out' and lose revenue, they argue. This line of reasoning has been used numerous times in recent years to argue for cuts to public service media funding or to limit their remit. For example, private media outlets in Finland and Estonia filed complaints with the European Commission last year, alleging "unfair competition" from public broadcasters Yle and ERR.³⁶ ([See case study about the Finnish streaming platform Areena, p. 55.](#))

However, research so far has not supported the crowding out argument. As a KPMG report commissioned by the BBC Trust found in 2015, "there is no clear evidence [...] that any increase (decrease) in the level of BBC activity has resulted in a decline (increase) in commercial broadcasters' viewer hours or revenues, or local newspapers' readership or revenues."³⁷ Likewise, a 2020 study which analysed national broadcast and online markets in all 28 European Union countries revealed "little to no support for the crowding out argument for broadcasting and related online markets" with the authors' findings casting "doubts on the strongest version of the crowding out argument, because they either suggest that commercial media have benefited from strong public service media, or that any negative effects have been relatively weak."³⁸ Yet, despite a growing evidence base which throws the 'crowding out' argument into doubt, the debate continues.

Gilles Marchand, Director General of Swiss SRG SSR, has highlighted the dilemmas at the heart of the relationship between the competitors. Struggling commercial publishers correctly observe that public service media still enjoy the benefits of relatively stable funding. With this public money, the public service media develop digital text offerings, which compete directly with the publishers' online news products, they argue. "They therefore see public-private cooperation as public support for the private sector above all. In this context, it is difficult to develop win-win collaborations. We are seen as sponsors and not as partners," Marchand says. From his point of view, there are different possibilities for collaboration: public broadcasters can provide audio and visual content, they can cooperate on the advertising front, they can restrict themselves to limit competition, and they can invest jointly, especially in the field of innovation. "This last category is interesting because it brings goodwill to everyone and can also be 'win-win'," Marchand says.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 04

PUBLIC SERVICE FUNDING CHALLENGES

PROTECTING THE CORE IDEA OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA REQUIRES DEBATES ABOUT FUNDING STRUCTURES AND BROADER REFORMS. BUT THEY SHOULD BE LED BY SUPPORTERS, NOT OPPONENTS.

Changing user habits and appeasing unhappy commercial competitors is one thing. But the main challenge for public service media's long-term funding is still rooted in country-specific factors related to their funding base. In countries with well-funded public media and high economic performance, funding pressures tend to come from political negotiations on the prospective level of licence fees. Here, the question of what people will be willing to pay without major resistance plays a central role. This is especially the case amid rising criticism that public service media do not deliver what 'the people' – which is ultimately an imagined construct – want or need. The case in Sweden is illustrative, as Olle Zachrisson, Head of Digital News Strategy at Sveriges Radio, points out. While there was consensus on the importance of public service media among the major parties and the population, Zachrisson says that "a number of parties and people are openly critical on certain aspects. They want smaller, what they call 'sharper' public service news. Or in other words: More news, less Eurovision." Understandably, most public broadcasters want to avoid just that. They fear a further loss of relevance in people's lives when they cut down on popular sports, music, entertainment, or drama programming.

Another category is those countries where commercial income (mainly through advertising) is a significant part of the funding. Italy is a prime example. There, public service media are economically more dependent on the market and thus also on the general economic situation. Additionally, advertising revenue continues to decline as advertisers migrate online which puts additional pressure on the organisations' financial situation. Finally, there are countries where the financial pressure on public service media is driven by political attempts to undermine them. Pressure can be indirect, such as when politicians remain indifferent and funding shortfalls are not addressed, or very direct, when they openly advocate for funding cuts. Those who propose to slash budgets are most often populist-leaning and disagree with the content of public service journalism. Others are free market advocates who do not want to see too much public involvement in anything. Others again might have competing interests in the high choice media environment. In these cases, public service media must look for strategies to counter these political movements.

One example which created international headlines was the Swiss 'No Billag' initiative, a reference to the Billag firm which collects the media licensing fee. The referendum about the public funding of Swiss public service media SRG took place in March 2018 and has had consequences since (see case study [Swiss Referendum](#), p. 57). The initiative had advocated abolishing the public service licence fee; it was supported by the youth wing

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



of the libertarian Free Democratic Party (PLR) and backed by the radical right populist Swiss Peoples Party (SVP). After months of debate, the initiative was finally rejected by approximately 72 percent of the Swiss electorate. But elements of the conflict have been simmering since.³⁹

More recently, the German centre-right Free Democratic Party (FDP) suggested in May 2021 that public service broadcasting should focus primarily on news, culture, political education, and documentaries, and that the licence fee should be lowered accordingly, a suggestion that was met with strong criticism by journalism unions, other political parties, and the public broadcasters themselves.⁴⁰ An attempt by the German state of Sachsen-Anhalt to undermine the already agreed upon fee increase for public service media was struck down by the German Constitutional Court. The debate will remain.

Public service broadcasters are vulnerable to such campaigns.⁴¹ As Christina Holtz-Bacha and other scholars note, different funding models offer various kinds of levers to political actors. Licence fees usually make it slightly harder to intervene, as they are linked to the service and come directly from the public. In contrast, broadcasters funded through taxes are easier to undermine, as governments “can limit the budget for the public service corporations and thus exert a direct influence on their functioning.” In countries with a licence fee, political actors seeking to undermine public service media for ideological reasons usually resort to exploiting existing grievances as license fees are often unpopular with parts of the population. Holtz-Bacha: “Populists jumped on the bandwagon and started to attack the public broadcasting system particularly by calling its financing and notably the fee into question. In fact, in some countries, populist pressure contributed to the transformation of the funding system. The focus on the financial basis of the public service media is a convenient disguise for underlying interests that arise from populists’ overall discontent with the system.”

In countering these attempts, strengthening the bond between public service media and those they serve is key. This must happen through content, as Part 2 of this report will elaborate. But experts also point out that public service media need to repeatedly make a transparent case for the value they deliver. They have to become better communicators, more eloquent and confident in explaining and — even better — demonstrating why they exist in the first place. They cannot expect the public to understand this intuitively. Sehl and others call for a stronger evidence base, highlighting the value public service media deliver. However, to ward off potential accusations of bias, this should not only originate from the broadcasters themselves and their market research departments, but also from independent institutions. Yet, politicians have a responsibility, too. As various research has shown, the public reacts to signals from elected officials.⁴²

While it is difficult to measure the value of public service broadcasting in direct cost-benefit terms, the focus should be on pointing more strongly to the general value and broader impact of public service media, examples of which are provided by the EBU’s ‘Contribution to Society’ framework.⁴³ Still, one element of legitimacy is that funding

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



conditions must be open for public debate. For example, progressive contributions based on different income levels could be a socially just and more acceptable way to ensure that public service media are well-funded. A country where such a debate is currently under way is Ireland, where the government set up the 'Future of the Media Commission' in September 2020 to investigate, among other things, the challenges facing the public service broadcaster RTÉ. The commission considered the replacement of the current device-dependent licence fee with a household levy where households would pay according to their combined incomes or alternatively through direct taxation.⁴⁴

This has already happened in Sweden. "In 2019, we went from license fee to a special tax that everybody sees on their tax declaration," says Olle Zachrisson. The fee is based on one percent of the taxable income but significantly reduced for some households in more difficult circumstances. Sweden adopted several measures to ensure that the fee can only be used for public media and to prevent political interference,⁴⁵ but Zachrisson says that it has also made people more aware that they are paying for public service media. "Now that they see it on their tax, they have more opinions about the content." This increase in the pressure on the broadcasters is not necessarily a bad thing. "I think it's fair that people have a lot of opinions about public service media. It should be like that. If we can show that we can keep evolving, stay relevant, and really go back to impartial and independent news, people will value this. The absolute majority of the population is behind us. People in Sweden are pretty scared when they look to neighbouring countries like Denmark where they had big cuts to the public service budget. Hardly anybody here wants that."

Another element to address funding challenges and questions about the legitimacy of public service media in a changing world will be structural changes to the broadcasters. Deeper reforms are needed almost everywhere. Experts — including voices from inside the organisations — see a lot of potential in dismantling duplicate structures and creating synergies. Shifting funds from traditional media formats to digital offerings is critical to achieve and retain reach with younger generations. Getting started is tricky though, since reform debates make the broadcasters vulnerable. Also, by cutting budgets, they risk losing some of their supporters, as the controversies following the Swiss referendum have demonstrated. Part 3 of this report discusses challenges leaders are facing when trying to stop doing things.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES

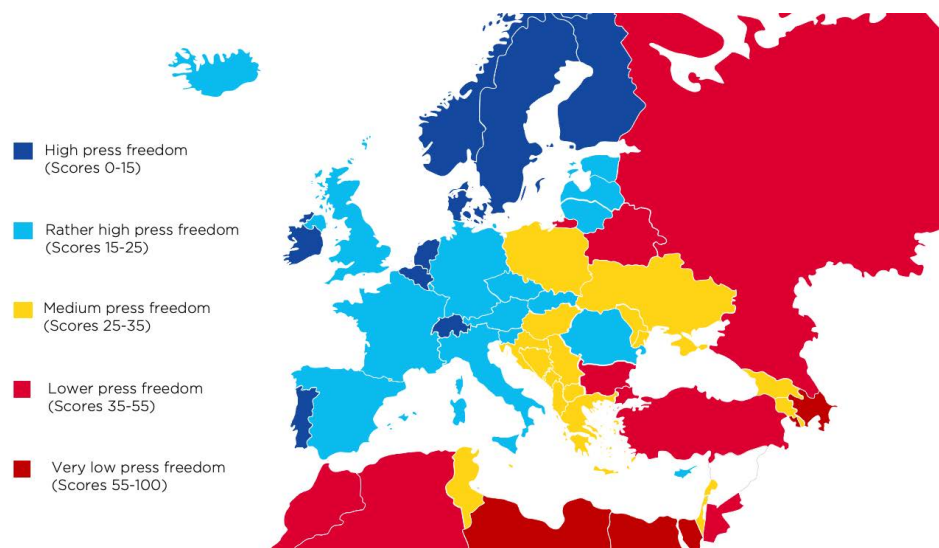


CHAPTER 05 THE EROSION OF PRESS FREEDOM

PRESSURE ON INDEPENDENT MEDIA - PUBLIC SERVICE OR NOT - IS INCREASING ACROSS EUROPE

Journalists have never operated in a perfect world of free-flowing information, even in the strongest democracies. But in recent years, press freedom and the autonomy of news organisations have been increasingly threatened. This is not just an anecdotal assertion, but based on numerous personal accounts by journalists and media managers in a variety of countries who increasingly struggle for access to information and encounter considerable hostility when doing so. Research confirms it as a structural development. Evidence can be found in publications such as *Reporters Beyond Borders*' (RSF Press Freedom Report and the European University Institute's 2021 Media Pluralism Monitor, which examines EU member states and candidate countries, and was a key resource for the European Commission's recent Rule of Law Report.⁴⁶

FIGURE 3 RSF FREEDOM OF THE PRESS INDEX IN THE EBU AREA, RSF, 2021



SOURCE: EBU MEDIA INTELLIGENCE SERVICE - DEMOCRACY & PSM BASED ON RSF 2021 WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX

The publisher of *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, described the alarming hostility towards, and its consequences for, representatives of the press across the globe in a much quoted [commencement speech](#) to students: "In the past few years, more than 50 prime ministers, presidents and other government leaders across five continents have used the term 'fake news' to justify varying levels of anti-press activity," he said at Brown University in September 2019.⁴⁷ While, according to the Digital News Report of 2020, only about ten percent of the population has followed the 'fake news press' narrative, it has been a cheap

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



strategy to raise some people's suspicions towards 'the media'. Other, more concrete restrictions to press freedom range from blocking journalists' activities and withdrawing financial support, to aggressive meddling with appointments of media leaders, censorship, and outright breaches of the law, including violations of human rights. Some experts have highlighted that the pandemic may have exacerbated threats to press freedom and the autonomy of the media, not only in authoritarian states but also in Western democracies.⁴⁸ For example, governments used the supposed threat posed by an 'infodemic' to stifle media freedom, censor the press, and intimidate journalists.⁴⁹

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro, offers a pessimistic assessment in her May 2021 report. "I see a bleak picture when looking at media freedom in the OSCE region," she writes, pointing to "gross violations of free speech and journalists' rights," as well "as blatant infringements on media freedom in a number of countries." In her conclusion, Ribeiro warns in particular about the creeping nature of these developments: "Albeit not as shocking, the many smaller developments that negatively affect media freedom and journalists' rights equally worry me — as these violations creep in slowly, and taken together form a systemic approach that silences critical voices and dismantles media pluralism."⁵⁰

The most notable recent example of an erosion of media and press freedom in the EBU's sphere is Belarus (Ranked 158th out of 180 countries in World Press Freedom Index by RSF). Freedom of the press remains restricted while state-owned media closely follow the government's line, with the remaining independent journalists subject to harassment and intimidation and reportedly worse. Hanna Liubakova, a journalist from Belarus and currently a non-resident fellow with the Atlantic Council, says that being a journalist in her home country is dangerous, but so is consuming anti-establishment news media. "The news websites that operate from abroad are in a difficult place, too. Many people in Belarus are scared to read them because they do not know if they are being watched and if this would lead to detention." The EBU's Director General Noel Curran is outspoken in this case: "Particularly since the elections last August we've seen an increasing number of domestic and international journalists imprisoned, their families also subjected to threats and the broadcast of 'confession' videos. This cuts at the heart of press freedom and democracy," he said in his BBC Lecture at the Prix Italia in June 2021.⁵¹ As a consequence, the EBU suspended the membership of BTRC, while the European Union and certain countries imposed further sanctions against Belarus. The World Press Freedom Index also ranks other countries where EBU Members operate at the bottom of the list, including Azerbaijan (167th), Egypt (166th), Turkey (153rd), and Russia (150th).

In many of these countries, concerns about media freedom are widespread. The actions of governments and their key supporters across the media sector put significant limits on independent media and in some cases freedom of speech. Another worry is the impact of wealthy individuals with distinctive political aims who have increased their investment in media companies in recent years. RSF described this concentration of ownership in a report entitled: "[Media: oligarchs go shopping.](#)"

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



But a crucial dimension of this issue for public service media is the growing number of countries which have seen the public broadcaster come under more state control. In many of these cases, audience trust has fallen considerably as a consequence. Teresa Ribero's concerns about the deteriorating situation in the OSCE region extends to this development. She sees it as a press freedom issue: "Media captures and increased state control not only curtail the independence of the media which accelerated over the last year but also threatens overall pluralism and diversity of information."

In 2021, Director of the Centre for Media, Data & Society at the Central European University, Marius Dragomir, published a particularly pessimistic account. He argues that the pure independent public media model, "the ideal form of media created with a mission to serve the public interest," has become the exception rather than the norm internationally (see [Q&A with Marius Dragomir, p. 45](#)). His analysis distinguishes between different levels of state involvement in media, economically, structurally and in terms of editorial independence.⁵² According to him, 'captured public service media', "characterised by government control over governing and/or ownership structures, and editorial coverage," increasingly proliferate.

The values underlying public service media and their legitimacy in society are challenged by various external actors, including authoritarian leaders, populist political parties and commercial entities. A high degree of independence is critical, as it makes public service media less vulnerable to commercial, regulatory, or political pressure and, ultimately, capture. According to the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021, the independence of public service media governance and funding is at high risk in 15 of the 32 countries covered (47%). In only eleven countries is the risk of public service media funding mechanisms and governance bodies to be captured low (34%). Six countries (19%) have medium risk levels according to the expert-based assessment. Of the countries surveyed by the monitor, seven are considered high risk in the category of political independence. This is assessed using indicators that evaluate the extent of the politicisation of the distribution of resources to the media, political control over media organisations and content, and, especially, political control over public service media (the seven countries are Bulgaria, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey). It should be noted that the monitor is confined to EU members states and candidate countries, so does not include some of the countries highlighted in the RSF data as having significant press freedom issues (see figure 4).

Public service media can be easy and attractive targets for governments who feel threatened by independent journalism and want to impose their world view on reporting and thus the public. Their leverage over finances and appointments to leadership roles is undoubtedly higher with public broadcasters than is the case with commercial media. But politicians have to be careful, too, because as demonstrated above, drastic interferences turn people away from media. Once reach is lost, so is influence. Also, resistance from media staff can be considerable. Many journalists have a high professional ethos and will not succumb to pressures easily. But not all of them can afford outright resistance. Also, purges of critics are common once media freedom deteriorates in news organisations.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

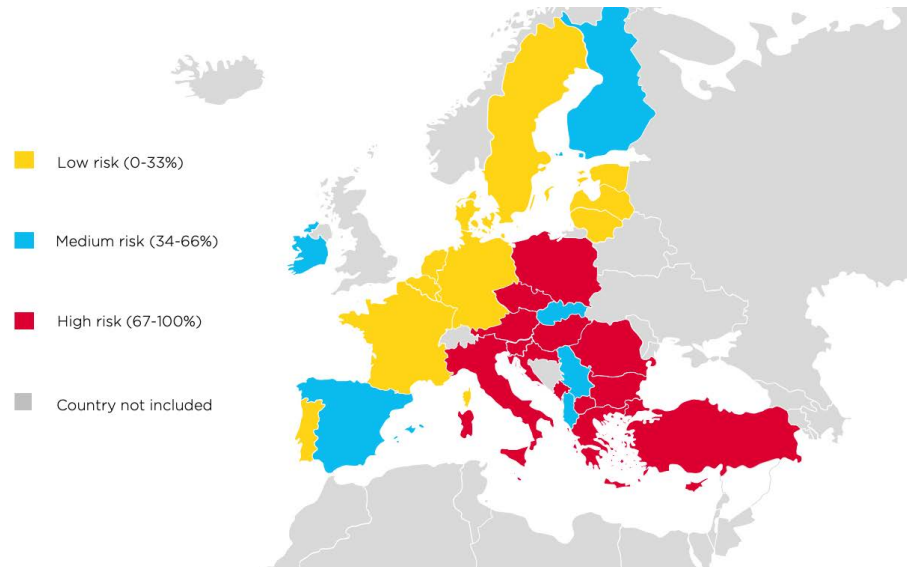
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



FIGURE 4 RISK LEVEL FOR INDEPENDENCE OF PSM GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING (2021)



SOURCE: EBU MEDIA INTELLIGENCE SERVICE - DEMOCRACY & PSM, BASED ON MEDIA PLURALISM MONITOR.

When attempting to support public service media in countries where they are compromised, international bodies including the European Union, the Council of Europe, the UN, and its related organisations and the EBU are faced with a dilemma in every case: Is this a fundamental conflict or one that time and elections will solve? Should we try to persuade or punish? Are there better chances of success if we keep countries or members within the fold, or is the ultimate sanction a possibility? Deciding the best strategy is difficult in each instance, as freedoms, livelihoods, health, and safety of citizens can be at stake if affected countries are left alone by the international community.

A crucial step is to broaden awareness. For those speaking up in these countries, international exposure is vital, as this can impact what governments do. The Hungarian journalist Péter Erdélyi argues. “It is always worth publicising the reality. These governments are very mindful of what the rest of Europe thinks of them. More awareness is important because it ultimately raises the stakes and limits their ability to move things around.” Marius Dragomir says that while the EBU cannot solve the political problems of certain broadcasters, “lobbying and advocacy that push for the protection and promotion of public service media are important tools.” The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro, echoes this: “More than ever, we need strong, independent and trustworthy journalism to serve the public interest, contributing to a more informed and active citizenry and being the watchdog that holds those in power to account. Only this can ensure a rich, pluralistic and transparent media landscape.”⁵³

Another strategy could be to support journalists generally in the affected countries, people who are committed to public service ideals and provide critical journalism and coverage. As Belarusian Hanna Liubakova says: “I think it is important is to create a special emergency programme for independent media. (...) Money needs to be delivered

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1**
- PART 2
- PART 3
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES



to support independent media and people on the ground. Some journalists are currently in jail, so their families needed financial support. Others had their equipment destroyed or confiscated and require replacements. And we are also talking about supporting newly emerging media, for instance on YouTube and Telegram. (... Once the political situation improves, there will be a revolution in media, as many new news outlets and formats will appear.”

In addition, public service media brands like the BBC or Deutsche Welle run strong international services that help to broaden citizens’ perspectives where press freedom is compromised or barely existent. Young people in particular benefit from these alternatives to established national brands, as these news services are available on popular social media such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.

Without a change of government, strong and early signals, measures, and support from political bodies such as the European Union or other institutions are important to making a difference, especially in places where the situation is on the brink. EBU Director General Noel Curran argues that the EBU has become more vocal on these issues: “We make public statements; we bring public attention to cases where we feel is interference and where the media organisation is coming under pressure. We are prepared to criticize our own members.” Still, the situation remains difficult. “There are a lot of journalists in these organisations who are doing the best they can,” Curran says. “There is nothing black and white in this area, there is a lot of grey. You have to take each organisation and each country as an individual case.”

Marius Dragomir says that even in countries with the greatest problem there are still opportunities to improve the situation. “It’s very difficult for organisations like the EBU to intervene in countries where the state broadcasters are so captured. At the same time, I don’t like the narrative that all is lost. We have to deal with these developments in a constructive way.” Leading media capture expert Anya Schiffrin has written that a range of challenges notwithstanding, public broadcasting is “still one of the best ways to ensure that at least one major media outlet is not captured and can still serve as a standard setter.”

Helping an organisation move from state media under government control to one where they are seen as impartial and trusted is possible. One example is Georgia TV. Director General Tinatin Berdzenishvili reflects on the challenge they faced: “Our public broadcaster was transformed from state television in 2005. The attitudes around us are still a bit post-Soviet Union, a lot of people think that this is state television, and we are obliged to serve the government. We are doing our best to serve our audience and explain to them: How are we different from commercial media, what are our core values? We have to explain this to officials the people and journalists.” (See [Q&A with Tinatin Berdzenishvili, p. 140](#). The Georgian strategy includes extensive internal and external communication, highlighting constructive journalism, and using best examples from other media organisations. It is an effort, and leadership needs to take charge. But it is possible – and ultimately worth it.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 06 SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

ORGANISATIONS AND GOVERNMENTS NEED TO RAMP UP THEIR EFFORTS TO PROTECT MEDIA WORKERS FROM ATTACKS

An ugly truth about attacks on press freedom is that they can be particularly effective when directed at individuals instead of organisations. Restricting access of media or influencing personnel and content decisions is one thing, but at least the organisation can fight back, also by summoning international support. It is another situation entirely when reporters and their families are personally threatened or assaulted, physically or in cyberspace. Not everyone is high-profile like Maria Ressa, veteran journalist, founder of Rappler.com in the Philippines, and role model to many, who fends off attacks by making them visible globally. In October 2021, the [Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded Ressa the Nobel Peace Prize](#) for her efforts, together with the Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov.⁵⁴ In 2018, *Time* Magazine featured Ressa [on their cover as person of the year](#), highlighting her struggles for media freedom. Others suffer in silence, often not even supported by their employers. When individuals are targeted, fear increases among those potentially affected. Self-censorship is a common reaction, others opt out of the profession entirely. A talent crisis follows.

Hanna Liubakova from Belarus gives a harrowing account of the situation in her country. "I never felt safe in Belarus, nor did other journalists. But what I saw last year, I would call a war. We were literally attacked by security forces. We were shot at with rubber bullets and targeted because of our press vests. I preferred not to wear one because it made me an easy target. More than 500 cases of detention have been reported since last year. Journalists were injured, beaten, and tortured." While Belarus is an extreme case, journalists all over the world are affected, public service media or not. In 2020, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the International Press Institute (IPI), with support from European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), recorded 126 incidents across Europe within four months alone, ranging from physical and psychological threats to legal threats and attempts at censorship.⁵⁵ The trend deepened in 2021.

The most spectacular crime in recent years was most likely the deadly car bomb attack on the Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in October 2017. Four years later in July 2021, a public inquiry into her assassination found the state responsible for her death. The report said it [had failed to recognise risks to the reporter's life and take reasonable steps to avoid them](#).⁵⁶ The recent examples of the murders of the veteran Greek crime reporter Giorgos Karaivaz and Dutch investigative journalist Peter R. de Vries highlight the ongoing danger.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



In comparison to murder, the day-to-day threats media representatives face are less visible to the public, but they can severely impact the lives of those affected. Attacks on journalists include judicial harassment, arrest, surveillance, verbal and physical abuse and violence. Taken together, they have a negative impact on media freedom as a whole. The pandemic has made matters worse. As ECPMF notes, many of these attacks have taken place around protests and demonstrations which journalists were tasked to cover over the past two years. As examples from Germany, Greece, France and the United Kingdom show, journalists and media workers were verbally harassed and threatened or beaten, leaving some of them in need of medical treatment. Other incidents have remained free of violence, but still had a chilling effect. One example is the storming of the Slovenian public broadcaster RV Slovenija (RTV-SLO) by Covid deniers and anti-vaccination activists on 3 September 2021. Breaking into RTV-SLO's studio in Ljubljana, a large group of protesters demanded airtime to share their views as well as harassing and insulting staff.

In Austria, too, attacks against journalists have increased during the pandemic, with journalists at the public broadcaster being assaulted while covering protests of Covid deniers. Speaking to Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*, the ORF's representative for journalists, Dieter Bornemann, explained the steps the broadcaster had to take to protect its staff. "They are all on the road without the ORF logo. It is extremely problematic when ORF has to hide. If we can no longer report freely without fearing for our health, then something is very wrong in Austria."⁵⁷ Austrian journalists are not alone in this regard. NOS in the Netherlands have in the past been forced to remove all branding from their satellite trucks as they were encountering threats and intimidation, with people jumping onto the vehicles and cutting cables.⁵⁸ Eric Scherer, Director News Innovation and External Affairs at France Télévisions, speaks of similar difficulties in France. "In this current environment the big names of media are not very welcome at the demonstrations. We have started to meet people without a camera or a microphone."

Often, attacks are specifically targeted at women and minorities, very often including threats of sexual violence. A recent study by UNESCO and the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) documented a strong increase in online violence against women journalists, linked to disinformation, intersectional discrimination, and populist politics.⁵⁹ As its authors Julie Posetti and Nabeelah Shabbir note, such online harassment and trolling severely affects the mental health and productivity of journalists and can spawn subsequent physical violence.

Similarly, in a recent study, journalism scholars Avery Holton, Valérie Bélaïr-Gagnon, Diana Bossio, and Logan Molyneux found that journalists are increasingly reporting online harassment as a common feature of their working lives, contributing to experiences of fatigue, anxiety, and disconnection from social media as well as their profession.⁶⁰ According to the authors, this includes acute harassment such as verbal abuse. It also includes chronic harassment occurring over time, often from the same social media users. Further, it includes escalatory harassment, which is more personalised and directly threatening to the journalists. Female journalists often experience the latter two forms.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



Political leaders in a variety of countries play an unfortunate role in this. Martin Řezníček, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of News with Czech Television says that in the Czech Republic, “female reporters [in particular] are often harassed in parliament by politicians,” with politicians for example commenting on what they wear, a development he finds very concerning. “It consumes your energy.”

The journalists who are targeted often feel abandoned by their news organisations. The UNESCO/ICFJ researchers write that “when women journalists turn to [...] their employers in the midst of an online violence storm, they often fail to receive effective responses and even face victim-blaming behaviour.” Media organisations have a moral obligation here that they often do not live up to, according to some journalists. Juliane Leopold, Digital Editor-in-Chief of German *Tagesschau*, the country’s most popular news program, says: “We have seen an extreme increase of attacks, particularly on social media. It is important to show those who are victims of harassment that they are not alone and to grant them legal support. Hate speech is extremely disturbing for its targets, often it shapes their lives. There is not enough appreciation and empathy for that.”

The Netherlands has demonstrated how to approach the issue in a concerted effort, with all media organisations coming together to highlight the issue of journalist safety ([see case study Safety of Journalists, p.60](#)). Their actions led to changes to the law to offer more protection and put in place a number of safety mechanisms. First, a coordinator for press safety was named with the intention of making media organisations more aware of the situation. Second, a hotline was established where reporters and others could report incidents. Third, safety trainings for journalists were introduced. As outlined in our case study, the initiative has had an impact, according to NOS News Editor-in-Chief Marcel Gelauff. “We managed to put it on the agenda in society,” he says. “Journalist safety is now one of the major issues, it gets support from politicians.”

As far as single organisations go, France Télévisions provides legal help to their journalists and protective equipment in the field. Austria’s ORF hire security guards to ensure their journalists’ safety, a step also seen in other countries such as Sweden. There security costs have increased fourfold in the past five years. Swedish broadcaster SVT handles a staggering 35 security issues every day, including harassment, acts of violence and threats, both physical and online.⁶¹ Reach, one of the UK’s largest commercial publishers and owner of newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror*, has appointed a Safety Editor, tasked with supporting staff who are affected by abuse and developing and delivering training for dealing with online abuse. The Safety Editor will also work with online platforms and audiences to protect against abuse and attacks.⁶²

A number of initiatives by UNESCO, the OSCE and journalistic organisations have put a special focus on the protection of women journalists, with a number of significant recommendations and an international awareness campaign led by UNESCO.⁶³ In a specially commissioned film on the issue called *A Dark Place*, a number of women journalists gave powerful testimony from their own experience.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



Researchers on the UNESCO report, Julie Posetti, Global Director of Research at ICFJ, and Nabeelah Shabbir, a Senior Research Associate at ICFJ, stress that management must support those who are subject to these attacks. “News organisations should avoid making women journalists responsible for their own protection and defence; they also should not police their speech or threaten their employment when they come under attack.” They say there is also a need to establish “formal gender-sensitive procedures and systems for identifying, reporting and monitoring of online violence against staff, including gender-disaggregated data analysis.”

In September 2021, the European Commission published a set of recommendations to member states to protect journalist’s physical and online safety. It was presented by EU Vice-President Věra Jourová as a commission effort to reverse the negative trend in media freedom in the EU, where “over 900 journalists have been attacked.” The main recommendations are: crimes against journalists must be thoroughly investigated and existing national legislation must be used to bring the crimes to justice; police and media companies must cooperate to a greater extent; journalists who are in danger must be offered protection, for example through cyber security support and national helplines where victims can get legal aid, sheltered housing, and psychological support; the cooperation among media companies, online platforms and experts organisations needs to be intensified.⁶⁴

At this stage, these recommendations are not legislative requirements, but guidelines on how states should proceed, says Cilla Benkö, Director General of Sveriges Radio and Member of the EBU Executive Board, while welcoming the move. Nevertheless, there remains “the responsibility of leading politicians to stand up for media freedom, through legislation and concrete efforts — but also to draw attention to the issue at large. Too many politicians have in recent years instead rather raised the tone towards the media and pointed out journalists as enemies.” In its submission to the European Commission, the EBU called for a strengthening of legal protections and more enforcement. Jean Philip De Tender, Director of Media: “Attacks against journalists and media professionals too often go unpunished. The European Commission’s recommendation must address the impunity of these crimes. Prompt and effective investigations and prosecutions must be carried out to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.”⁶⁵

If we were to highlight the key lessons from the concerns raised in this section, OSCE’s Teresa Ribero provides a comprehensive list in the inaugural edition of the EBU News podcast. She says that first, the culture of harassment and online bullying of journalists go hand in hand with a culture of violence including physical violence. Second, states need to break the cycle of impunity. Third, increased possibilities for digital surveillance threaten journalistic work. Fourth, media capture and increased state control not only curtail the independence of the media but also threaten overall pluralism and diversity of information. Fifth, it is important to be vigilant about emergency legislations, particularly in the context of the pandemic, since they are regularly used as a pretext to restrict journalists’ work. Strong political will and international cooperation will be needed to create a more inclusive, safe, and sustained infrastructure for media freedom.⁶⁶

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES 

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



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66 Teresa Ribero Representative on Freedom of the Media OSCE

From Eurovision News podcast October 20th 2021 <https://evnpodcast.podbean.com/e/hostility-the-growing-threat-to-journalists/>

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES





Q&A 2

DR. ANNIKA SEHL

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“PERSUADE PEOPLE THROUGH QUALITY”

What are the top three challenges for public service media?

Public service media are under intense pressure in many European countries today: First, they are increasingly faced with populist attacks. In many European countries, right-wing populist parties have gained in strength and are questioning or outright attacking public service media. Second, some private sector competitors, as well as representatives of a pure liberal market perspective, are also voicing constant criticism. In a digital media environment, there is no shortage of offerings. They argue that market intervention is therefore no longer justified, and that it distorts the market unfairly for private sector media. Third, the changed media environment, with new platforms and news providers, poses another key challenge for formerly broadcast-only organisations of public service media. They must continue to evolve within the scope of their mission and rapidly drive digital transformation within their own organisations to remain relevant in the digital age. Unlike start-ups, this can take longer for public service media as they are large and complex organisations. Especially in Southern European countries, there is still more work to be done on this note, compared to organisations like the BBC or Yle, for example, which started to change their organisations relatively early.

Has there been an increase in attacks against public service media?

Yes, definitely. On the one hand, this has to do with the fact that the political tone has become harsher in some countries. You see that with BBC during Brexit. At the same time, populist parties have recently become stronger in some countries. As a result, these attacks have increased, sometimes in alliance with neoliberal forces. Some daily newspapers — which have a vested interest in public service media not becoming too strong — have attacked public broadcasters in countries such as the UK and Germany.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Is there broad public support for these attacks? Or is only a minority keen to rein in public service media?

Surveys show that trust in public media is high overall. This was also shown in their increased use at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a news situation in which many issues were initially characterised by uncertainty, many people opted for public service media as their news sources. It is also true, however, that there are differences in terms of political attitudes. A Reuters Institute report by Anne Schulz and others from 2019 shows that people who identified themselves as being to the right of the political centre generally have lower trust in public service media than those who see themselves in the political centre or left. Similarly, the trust of people with populist attitudes in public service media is lower overall than that of people without such beliefs.

Who should be in the driver's seat here? Politicians or public service media itself?

Both. We need a broader education about what public service media are and why they are beneficial to society and worthy of paying the licence fees. That is, to provide independent, high-quality information and entertainment that reflects diversity in society so as to inform, educate and entertain the public and cultivate democracy. In this respect, it is also important to explain the difference between a state broadcaster and an independent public service media. Politicians have the task of guaranteeing the structures that ensure that public service media remain independent and adequately funded to be able to fulfil their mission. But the public service media themselves must also be active, too. This need not be so much through PR; they have to persuade people through the quality of their services. And more needs to be done to connect with groups which require more effort to reach: for instance, young people, who increasingly consume information and entertainment elsewhere, but also people who are frustrated with public service media. You have to take these groups seriously and engage with them.

There are some people who no longer want to pay for public service media because they "don't use it" or "get nothing for their money." What are some good, pragmatic arguments to convince audiences?

A first argument is that you have to see something like a license fee in a larger context. We also pay for things through taxes which we do not directly use ourselves all the time, but from which society overall benefits. At the same time, it is worthwhile explaining why public service media are organised the way they are: to preserve their independence and to ensure free access to quality information for everyone. What can be discussed, for example, is whether all households should pay the same. In Finland, for example, the contribution, a tax, is graded according to income.

Finally, it will be important to convey that the value to society of public service media cannot be measured in a direct cost-benefit ratio. This must also be clearly communicated: What would be missing if public service media no longer existed? The BBC, for example, once ran a campaign that showed what Britain would look like

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

without the BBC. In the end, it will not be possible to reach and convince everyone, but in many cases the problems of public service media are also rooted in a lack of knowledge among the population.

Where should public service media save and where should they invest?

It makes sense to reduce duplicate structures and create synergies, but without throwing regional diversity overboard. Public service media themselves are generally aware of this, but there is still a lot of room for improvement. At the same time, there must be an increased shift from traditional media to broad-based digital content, especially to reach younger target groups. Here, too, there is generally a long way to go. You can see this especially in the implementation of integrated newsrooms. We have been talking about this for 20 years, but there are still plenty of public service media that only have these in rudimentary form or not at all. Often these changes are linked to internal power structures, which can make it more difficult to make a difference and change things.

What is next for public service media?

On the one hand, there will be an increasing discussion about financing and costs and whether the population should continue to bear these. The big question here is whether public service media succeed in reaching large parts of the population using a distinctive profile. They must make it very clear what they stand for and do what those that need to monetise their products on the market often cannot and do not want to do, at least on the same scale. For example, provide comprehensive and diverse reporting, using a network of foreign and regional correspondents, and provide fact-checks, which have become even more important nowadays. Public service media should not be reduced to a core mission of providing information. Entertainment also has its place, and it is here that public service media could become even bolder in their programming, especially with regional content.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



Q&A 3

PROF. MARIUS DRAGOMIR

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“HELP BUILD SPACES FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM”

What is the situation for the free press in Eastern Europe right now?

The simple answer is: The situation is worse than it has been since the fall of communism. There was a period of media freedom after that occurred, but that was only a brief interlude. There are many reasons for this development, but the most important one is the phenomenon of ‘media capture’ whereby governments and businesses take over the media. This leads to a massively shrinking space for independent journalism. What is happening now in these countries is a very concerted, systematic, and sophisticated attack on media freedom.

How has the situation evolved with respect to public service media?

One can divide this into three periods. In the 1990s, all these countries were building their own regulatory frameworks. They had little experience with public service media and had to look elsewhere for inspiration in building these institutions. It was a period of formation and failure. The politicians didn’t really understand that public service media were supposed to be genuinely independent. Despite promises to the contrary, they often sought to control these media.

In the second period, we saw some successes, for instance in the Czech Republic, mostly due to good management, funding models which worked, and public and political support. In this period of maturity, public service media flourished also in places like Lithuania, Slovakia, and Estonia.

The most recent period is the last decade during which we have seen a deterioration of public service media across the region, mostly due to media capture. In many ways, this was very straightforward. Public media were taken over to ensure full control. This is now the situation in Hungary, for example, where the public service media is a state broadcaster, fully controlled and funded by the government. In Bulgaria and Poland, we see a similar pattern.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Can you explain in more detail what media capture entails?

Essentially, four things have to happen. The first is control of regulation and regulators. It's fairly simple. You appoint your people to regulatory bodies. The second component is the control of public service media, again, often through appointments. The third is to funnel state funding to certain media in order to control them. State advertising is a good example, because it can be used as a lever to achieve control of private media. The fourth element is to take over the ownership of private media. It doesn't have to be all of them. It just has to be enough to help you win the next election. This final step is the most difficult one. In many ways, a textbook example of these four elements at work is in Hungary, but the pattern is being replicated across Central and Eastern Europe.

Are the broadcasters in the region trusted by the public?

It's difficult to answer categorically. In most cases in Central Europe and Eastern Europe, trust is very low, but more research needs to be done to understand what trust really means in these contexts. Some broadcasters in places like Hungary are trusted to a certain extent, but that is mostly because they are the largest sources of news available. This does not mean that they are doing a good job.

What are the main challenges for public service media in the region which remain independent? And how can support for them be shored up?

Many things can be done. The basic exchange of ideas and experiences is already helpful and important. When it comes to the deeper issues, however, there are limitations. The EBU cannot solve the political problems faced by the Hungarian or Polish broadcasters. Nevertheless, lobbying and advocacy that pushes for the protection and promotion of public service media are important tools.

What about those outlets that have been turned into state broadcasters? Can anything be done to help them?

Just like the broadcasters themselves, the staff in many of these outlets are no longer independent. They often see themselves as journalists with a mission to promote the government. It's very difficult for organisations like the EBU to intervene in countries where the state broadcasters have been media captured. At the same time, I don't like the narrative that all is lost and we should just give up. We have to deal with these developments in a constructive way. One is to help build spaces for independent journalism in these countries, another is spreading the message about the value and importance of public service media. It doesn't feel like much, but we have to face reality and take the opportunities that are there.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 01

MY COUNTRY TALKS, ZEIT ONLINE

FROM A GERMAN "TINDER FOR POLITICS" TO AN NGO WITH INTERNATIONAL APPEAL



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The German version of 'My Country Talks' — '*Deutschland spricht*' — started as many projects might: a suggestion on a flip chart. Can we develop a 'Tinder for politics'? This was the question asked by an editorial team of Berlin-based *Zeit Online* in a meeting intended for their coverage of the federal election of 2017. Editor-in-Chief Jochen Wegner, originally a physicist and always interested in data solutions, considered dating apps that match potential partners by asking them questions. Shouldn't it be possible to use this principle, match people with opposing political views and have them engage in conversation?

What started with brainstorming and a couple of experiments by data scientists soon became a project under the patronage of the German President. Today it is a non-profit NGO with a publicly accessible website. More than 30 countries have adopted the approach; 200,000 people have participated. In 2021, 'America talks' debuted — it was even featured on Fox News.

The principle is simple: People are intrigued by a request to answer a few questions about their worldview, things like: Should the West approach Russia?, or, Should we accept refugees from Afghanistan? An algorithm then matches respondents with someone holding opposing views. The two are supposed to meet and discuss. At first meetings were to be in person, now this happens digitally, due to the pandemic. "When we put this online for the first time, several thousand people registered right away," Wegner recalls. The team knew they were on the right track.

Low key questions, to which people can relate in their everyday lives, seem to work best. "We don't ask: Would you like to support a democracy project? We ask them something like: Should car traffic be banned from inner cities?" Wegner explains. According to *Zeit's* experiences, about 30 percent are curious and click on something like this. "Only those who are willing to talk to others participate," Wegner says, "but this is a huge filter." It differs from one society to the next, and ultimately also reflects the views held by people who have left the public conversation altogether.

The project started with a bang. In June of 2017, 1,200 people met in locations all over Germany to exchange their views. Unsurprisingly, there was a huge echo in the media with extensive follow up coverage. '*Deutschland spricht*' soon became a household name for

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

many even outside the industry bubble, with some viewing it as constructive journalism at its best. And it became an attractive model to others, too. When struggling with its image, car manufacturer Volkswagen used the system to match managers and employees throughout the country, prompting them to talk about the company.

Initially, the team was opposed to meetings taking place via video calls for psychological reasons. They felt that people were less prone to hating each other when meeting in person. But with everyone now fairly used to this means of communication, the digital version works just fine, Wegner says. Particularly when introducing the project to the US, the team felt more comfortable with a digital solution. "We were afraid people would literally shoot each other," he says. No serious incidents have been reported anywhere to date.

Using this tool is easy. "You don't need to be the *Financial Times* to do it," Wegner says. It only takes a Wordpress blog, and technically, the effort is close to zero. Publishers don't even have to share their customer data. "Just go to [mycountrytalks.org](https://www.mycountrytalks.org), it will explain everything." The journalism side of the project is another thing. Somewhat obviously, the project needs to be prepared and extensively covered by the newsroom, otherwise the media brand will not profit, Wegner reflects. And in the end, this is what the venture intends to do, in addition to helping two people connect by finding their common ground: increase trust in the news outlet and the work of journalists in general.

'My country talks' offers many lessons. *Zeit Online* had researchers on board who confirmed that engaging in a personal conversation can significantly influence a person's worldview. "It is a small investment given its potential impact on society," Wegner says. The newsrooms benefit tremendously, too. "We have had many people participating who don't share our opinions," Wegner says. "This is a huge pool of inspiration for us as a newsroom." But there were other lessons as well. Internally, the project has radiated a 'we can do it' spirit, he says. "Our small team has moved people to an extent that I didn't think was possible before." And the good news for journalism is: It's not just about reach. "This only works with trusted news brands," Wegner says. "Every local news outlet is better positioned than just another big platform with no journalistic credibility."

The latest development in Germany: The project will not run solely on one predetermined day, but on a rolling system. Several big media houses will participate, among them northern German public broadcaster NDR. Wegner: "Our vision is to have thousands of conversations on any given day all over the world."

THE INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE FOR MY COUNTRY TALKS: [HTTPS://WWW.MYCOUNTRYTALKS.ORG/](https://www.mycountrytalks.org/)

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 02

FLIPPING THE SCRIPT, DEUTSCHE WELLE

COUNTERING “US VERSUS THEM” DYNAMICS BY PUTTING CITIZENS IN CHARGE



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“We talk, you listen” has long been the standard in journalism at large, and for political talk shows in particular: a handful of politicians or experts having a (more or less polite) discussion amongst themselves while ‘the people’ bear witness, save for the occasional question from the audience. A tried and tested template, but one that feels increasingly anachronistic in times of considerable distrust in the media. Public service media are facing accusations of being divisive or unrepresentative of all parts of society. Some characterise them as failing to hold power to account, or not providing sufficient space for the voices of those who traditionally have not been heard.

Enter German broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) and ‘Flipping the Script’ — its talk show produced for the 2021 German federal election in which the usual roles are reversed. Members of the public debate, while politicians sit in the audience, listen and ask questions. The four-part series tackles issues such as climate change, migration, cannabis legalisation and social mobility — topics that are relevant both locally and globally — with the aim of placing the concerns and views of citizens from diverse backgrounds at the heart of political debates.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



Its creator, DW journalist Aya Ibrahim, says that one aim as the show was developed was to come up with ideas that were outside of DW’s typical, traditional coverage. “I

really wanted to do something that was focused on people, that brought them into the dialogue, but also worked on the internet to spark debates.” The show also has a democratic impetus. “It is our job as journalists to create space for discussions that tackle Germany’s future challenges head on, and to provide a platform for people to discuss these challenges freely,” Ibrahim says. The show is intended to act as such a platform, a view echoed by DW Editor-in-Chief Manuela Kasper-Claridge: “Directing attention onto voter discussions, rather than politicians delivering their messages, promotes political participation and democracy, two of the values for which DW stands.”

Designed from the start as a digital-first format,¹ the show was a collaboration between different teams within DW. While recruiting politicians was, according to Ibrahim, a fairly easy task, finding debaters that were “normal, everyday people, not experts” was a taller order. Here, a social media campaign designed by DW’s marketing team worked wonders. But not everything was plain sailing. “I was surprised by some of the polarisation, especially around a topic like migration,” says Ibrahim. This made it harder to find participants who could represent the legitimate grievances and views around this topic while staying within the realm of civil discourse. “People were also really afraid of being pigeonholed,” explains the journalist. This was especially so on topics such as climate change, where potential participants were hesitant because they were afraid of being seen as climate change deniers. “It took a lot of effort from my team to convince them that we are exactly trying to do the opposite and did not want to represent them as deniers.”

Ibrahim’s team also put a lot of effort into ensuring the participants reflected the various opinions. It was important to them that the show did not add to a sense of polarisation by only showing very divergent perspectives. “It all starts at home. We build teams that are diverse,” Ibrahim says. This diversity — in their background, experience, position, and viewpoint — helps to keep an open mind. The call-to-participation campaign deliberately tried to reach people from all over the country and responses were carefully analysed to understand people’s positions in order select suitable candidates. “We tried to find people who had different opinions but who were genuinely interested in engaging in a dialogue and hearing what the other side had to say. I think with that set-up, we start moving away from polarisation and take steps towards having a respectful, empathetic debate among equals who happen to disagree, which is a healthy feature of any democratic society. Showing that that is ok, is an antidote to polarisation. Polarisation, I think, happens when people lose the ability to listen to each other, not necessarily when they disagree with each other.”

But does the format work in practice? The first episode dealt with climate change.² In it, 12 politicians from across Germany’s political party spectrum listen to a ‘Fridays for Future’ activist debating with a coal company worker about climate change. They discussed their fears, hopes, and the best way to resolve it. Both see climate change as a problem but have vastly different opinions about how Germany should fight it. This that was brought more strongly to light by questions from the politicians. The episode is a calm, reasoned debate, capped off by short interviews with the audience of politicians who clearly seem to like

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

1 IT WAS LATER ADAPTED FOR TV AND PRODUCED AND BROADCAST IN BOTH ENGLISH AND GERMAN.

2 [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=RHWQFDKLO4A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHWQFDKLO4A)

the format. Some were quite positive. “Switching sides worked very well and I think that’s an approach with a great future. We should do this more often. In any case, you get a lot out of it as a politician,” said Marcel Emmerich, an MP for the Green Party and one of the audience members.



So, can ‘Flipping the Script’ bring citizens and politicians closer together and counteract feelings of increasing polarisation and ‘Us versus Them’ dynamics? Are formats such as ‘Flipping the Script’ an effective way to strengthen trust and contribute to a depolarisation of society and improve engagement with and trust in public service media? According to Ibrahim and Kasper-Claridge, this is their hope. They see a role for innovative formats which put ordinary people front and centre in achieving this. The feedback from the show, at least, underscores their hope. As Ibrahim puts it: “The participants seemed to really like it. And they all actually continued talking in the coffee breaks. They just talked and talked.”

Right now, ‘Flipping the Script’ is a pilot project but one with potential and some important lessons. For one, “it shows public service media is not just this conservative, non-innovative block,” says Kasper-Claridge. “I can imagine that it will not just be a one-off. We have seen a really impressive number of positive interactions and comments from our audiences across all platforms. Other language departments here at DW have expressed an interest in producing a similar format for their regions. With that sort of feedback, we can definitely say it has been a success.” But the show’s genesis and evolution also speak to a different leadership culture. Good ideas can and should emerge from anywhere in the news organisation and they should be able to grow irrespective of where they originate, according to DW’s team. But for this to work, you need diverse teams with diverse backgrounds. And “you have to be much more open and less hierarchical,” explains Kasper-Claridge, who deliberately reached out to younger colleagues across departments, including Aya Ibrahim, to find fresh ideas. “Ultimately, it is a matter of trust, that your colleagues trust you and know that you mean what you are saying.”

BEHIND THE SCENES OF FLIPPING THE SCRIPT: [HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/WOZHVRNPNHY](https://youtu.be/wozhvrnPNHY)

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 03

JOURNALISM TRUST INITIATIVE

CREATING A QUALITY STANDARD FOR TRUSTWORTHY JOURNALISM

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When a few colleagues from the press freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) came up with the idea for the [Journalism Trust Initiative](#), their main motive was to strengthen journalism for the future. “Traditionally, we defend journalists, we see them as victims,” JTI project director Olaf Steenfadt says. “But actually, journalists are also part of the solution.” If politicians and media lobbies are focused solely on combatting harmful content and chasing the perpetrators, this could damage journalism as it often results in policies that curtail freedom of expression, according to his reasoning. So there needs to be an alternative strategy: “We need a counter-movement that provides solutions. We need to actively promote valuable content,” Steenfadt says.

The idea was to promote trustworthy journalism by creating a standard to which most professional, sincere media outlets could subscribe and make this evident to the audience. But what sounded like an easy task turned out to be challenging. What makes good journalism that is worth of promotion? How can this be defined? RSF considered itself well equipped to lead the effort. It is a small, non-governmental, non-profit organisation with an international remit and a focus on freedom of expression and human rights-based advocacy. But it needed media partners to build a credible and scalable project. The project began in 2018 when the European Broadcasting Union, news agency AFP and the Global Editors Network came on board.

What followed was a long, detailed and comprehensive process. For the EBU to participate as a professional organisation, it was important that the initiative was anchored in the structured process under the guidance of the European Committee for Standardisation, now a member of the JTI Accreditation Council (JTI Oversight Body), says Justyna Kurczabinska, Senior Editor of News Strategy and Development. Over 14 months, a dedicated, diverse group of participating organisations and individuals developed the final text by consensus. During a public consultation phase over 200 comments on the draft standard were received, and most were, in full or in part, incorporated in the document. It was then adopted by a majority, with one vote against and two abstentions, at a plenary session of participants in Brussels on 22 November, 2019. *

Steenfadt says he found the results rather encouraging: “There is actually a lot of agreement worldwide about the essence of journalism.” Independence, accuracy, the use of multiple sources, a variety of perspectives and broad access are some of the criteria.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

“The problem is rather compliance,” he reasons. Journalism has always been good at holding others accountable but not been particularly transparent about its own practices. “What was missing was a look into the mirror.”

Early in the deliberation process, it became pretty clear that simply targeting and labelling content wasn't the way to go. It could be a slippery slope that might lead to the censorship of material. It was decided that a better approach would be to focus on editorial management systems and develop a standard for them, as happens in other industries – to white list rather than black list. Transparency about processes was the key. Criteria concerning ownership, funding, advertising rules, correction policies or editorial standards can be set and evaluated. “We built this along the ISO model of standardisation,” Steenfadt explains. “An industry standard is the opposite of a law since it is scalable and self-regulating. It has been widely used to ensure product safety in a globalised world. You could say this is about information safety.”

JTI builds on three pillars: one is self-evaluation and certification, and the second is training and coaching – the JTI Campus. The third, and potentially most difficult, is integrating the quality signals into algorithmic choice.

For the first two, JTI's core target group are media companies. Particularly small organisations or those in markets that are less trained in developing editorial guidelines profit from following a clear checklist. What are the editorial processes, how is internal communication, what could be improved? The initiative provides easy to use training tools, and access is simple. Externally, a JTI transparency report is a suitable instrument when dealing with other institutions in a business-to-business setting, for example with potential funders or advertisers who want to reward compliance with ethical rules. Being able to certify that processes have been followed duly and to the best of knowledge can be helpful when in a legal conflict, for example.

Formally launched in 2021 with philanthropic and EU support, JTI is already gaining impetus internationally. Media organisations have come to appreciate the opportunity internationally. Steenfadt: “The feedback is super positive.” From public service media, SRG has incorporated JTI in its quality management; other participants include Norwegian NRK, Irish RTÉ, Italian RAI, French FT and Canadian CBC. All in all, more than 80 news outlets from all around the world – “from Albania to Togo” – have committed to the procedure. RSF expects the number of organisations to be above 100 by the end of 2021. Only in the US is its uptake a little slow. This might be due to American platform dominance or the ‘not invented here’ effect – or both. Steenfadt reports some interest from the US insurance industry, which is traditionally eager to make sure standards are set and followed. An interesting example of practical implementation can be found in Switzerland. SWI (swissinfo.ch), a unit of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, structured its About page on its website using the JTI standard questions.¹

Filling out the forms takes some effort though. “You can't do this in one afternoon,” Steenfadt says. Small organisations will need a minimum of two days, he estimates – when

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

¹ [HTTPS://WWW.SWISSINFO.CH/ENG/ABOUT-US/45607290](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/about-us/45607290)

the newsroom is in good shape. “Obviously it is a lot more complicated if there are gaps and problems in the processes themselves. It is usually not enough to add a sentence or two to the editorial guidelines,” he says. He is confident that outlets that feed on and distribute state propaganda won’t make it through the process — companies such as Russia Today, for example, may struggle. But he doesn’t see a problem for tabloids. “As long as they follow basic journalistic standards, they should be fine,” says Steenfadt. The successful certification of the Norwegian tabloid *Verdensgang* proved his point: “If you constantly walk along the edge of a cliff, it is important to have good processes in place.”

The third pillar of the project is the hardest to follow through on. JTI’s long-term goal is to white list the content of certified organisations using ranking algorithms on search engines and social media. The idea behind this: Instead of deleting what is bad, it makes a lot more sense to up-rank what’s valuable. According to Steenfadt, the EU would ideally require Google and Facebook to incorporate this kind of standard in their newsfeeds. “The platforms have been at the table and are interested technically. But their newsfeeds are something like the holy grail.”

Eventually, the misinformation debate will help the profession, Steenfadt reasons. “It is not enough any longer to say: ‘Trust me, I’m a journalist’.” There needs to be some proof of concept. In the end, this will make journalism better.

JTI STANDARDS DOCUMENT: [HTTPS://WWW.CENCENELEC.EU/MEDIA/CEN-CENELEC/CWAS/ICT/CWA17493.PDF](https://www.cencenelec.eu/media/cen-cenelec/cwas/ict/cwa17493.pdf)

JTI TOOL: [HTTPS://WWW.JTI-APP.COM/LOGIN](https://www.jti-app.com/login)

*MEMBERS OF THE EBU PARTICIPATE IN THE JTI INDEPENDENTLY AS INDIVIDUAL MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 04

DO IT LIKE NETFLIX WITH YLE

HOW STREAMING SERVICE YLE AREENA OUTPERFORMS ITS AMERICAN RIVAL

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You must be doing something right, if even the competition is convinced. When Finnish commercial publisher Sanomat filed a complaint with the European Union about the public broadcaster Yle's streaming platform Areena, Sanomat's biggest newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* disagreed: Areena was a good thing for Finland and its people, the paper argued in a lead story. Petri Jauhiainen, Yle's Head of Media, chuckles when he tells the story. And he has every reason to do so: market research confirmed the opinion of the editorial board. Areena has made it to number one online brand eight times in a row, and this year ranks among the most popular brands in the country, even higher than the brand name of the public broadcaster itself. And the audience data highlights this success. Areena's market share with people older than 45 vastly outperforms Netflix. With younger audiences, it is almost head-to-head, with a share of 49 percent — even though YouTube and Spotify are more popular than both Areena and Netflix with this demographic.

Yle Areena now offers an impressive 15,000 hours of video and 30,000 hours of audio content annually with drama, documentaries, news, and youth and children's programmes as its biggest genres. They are suggested to users by a combination of algorithmic recommendation and curation. The service also offers all of Yle's TV and radio channels live, and plenty of Areena-exclusive video streams which are mostly nature programmes, sports, and news events. Yle Areena is available on all major devices, including mobiles, Smart-TVs, game consoles and laptops. So, what have been the ingredients of the Finnish public broadcaster's recipe for success?

Jauhiainen and his team point to six key factors, the first one being speed. "We were an early bird in this field," Jauhiainen explains. "Yle founded Areena on 15 June 2007 as one of the first European streaming services." This was just two years after YouTube came into being and half a year before the BBC introduced its iPlayer. "We had some people at the top who really followed what was going on," he says. They started with material from their archives and a small number of episodes from TV, with a seven-day viewing window, and have expanded little by little each year. Yle's national radio stations were also available from the beginning." There has been lots of time to experiment, although "we had plenty of time to ruin it, too," Jauhiainen laughs. But it was not just attentive management that brought about the success. He names Finland's excellent digital infrastructure, with public availability of relatively cheap data packages, as the second factor. The third advantage was that Finland finances its public broadcaster with income taxes. "This means people

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

consider Areena to be a huge service available for free. Research confirms that this is one of the major reasons for its popularity,” he says.

Another, fourth success factor was the strict adherence to the customer and audience first principle. “Many of our commercial competitors here in Finland and also some public service media companies in the Nordics still tend to air their top priority series one episode per week. We have been acquiring rights and publishing all possible shows at once for years, so you can binge watch them, even if it eats into linear TV consumption.” Customers are used to this from Netflix, Jauhiainen reasons. Also, Yle tries to publish something interesting every week. “We strongly believe that people need to be free to choose and decide.”

Advantage number five is that Areena serves as the broadcaster’s Wikipedia, as Jauhiainen frames it. Every department can publish their material using the service, whether they make dramas or news, video, or audio. “If Yle has it, you can find it on Areena.” One quarter of usage stems from audio, and the share is growing. “This is a huge opportunity,” he believes. Other broadcasters chose different routes: for example, the BBC divided content into audio and video streams on their iPlayer and BBC Sounds platforms. “We have had these discussions: should we separate media forms? But Yle Areena is a strong brand and it’s easier to get people download one rather than two different apps on their phone. And in the long run, it is not public service media’s purpose to confine people to sitting in front of small or big screen. You can use Areena audio while driving or running.” As a final factor, everything is done paying close attention to quality. “Quality of content matters, of course. Documentaries, drama, good quality international content — you name it. “We are trying to keep our standards high. If you disappoint your audiences, they won’t come back.”

A cooperative company culture was decisive in this success story, Jauhiainen is convinced. “Areena also contains news, so there was no friction between different output areas in the organisation. But we also do a lot of research about what people are watching and listening.” The priorities of Yle’s audience strategy are now to focus on children and young people — and to personalise its services.

But what about media organisations that are less fortunate and a bit late to the game? Can they still do it? Jauhiainen is optimistic: “Nowadays you don’t have to start from scratch on the technical side. You can buy basic elements of systems off the shelf. It is not even that expensive. Then you need to find your own space in the market, maybe by utilising your own language and narratives, and concentrating on the needs and wants of your customers which are not yet fulfilled. What do people really want to watch and listen to, what are their habits? Streaming is a highly competitive international market, but it is not rocket science.” Importantly, from Jauhiainen’s point of view, it is also about tough decisions: “Of course it is always a question of prioritisation. You have to decide at the company level what you are to do less if you want to put more resources on your streaming platforms content and development!”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 05

BEYOND THE SWISS REFERENDUM

SWISS PUBLIC BROADCASTING: 'NO BILLAG' WAS JUST THE BEGINNING

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When the ballots were counted on the evening of 4 March 2018, Swiss public broadcaster SRG SSR triumphed with a huge vote of confidence: 71.6 percent of those voting in the public referendum rejected the proposal which would have abolished the mandatory license fee known as 'Billag' and replaced it with a model where the fee is decided by the consumer. However, SRG management could not simply relax in the aftermath of the heated campaign debate. "We had promised the public we would change," Director of Development and Offering and SRG Board member Bakel Walden recalls. "That's why on the very night of the referendum we came out with a three-pronged plan." First, the broadcaster published an efficiency program that included budget cuts of ten percent, or 100 million Swiss Francs, to be implemented by 2020. Second, original content production and investment in a new streaming platform was set to be increased. Third, the broadcaster approached commercial publishers for cooperation. All three plans have since become reality. The savings were made, the output of TV series has doubled, and several co-operative ventures with commercial media are in place. But listening to Walden, satisfaction seems a distant goal. "The situation hasn't really improved," he reveals.

What seemed to be a sound plan to appease the criticism has been met with resistance by the very people and groups who had supported SRG in the pre-referendum campaign. In particular, influential actors from the arts and cultural sector who had garnered support for SRG, were now faced with budget cuts. That did not go down well. "They are a bit disappointed because we are keeping our campaign promises," Director General Gilles Marchand says. "Many people have fought to maintain the public service and the status quo. Sometimes with a certain romantic nostalgia for a simpler, more linear society. But we can no longer guarantee the status quo. And as a result, they blame us because they feel that they are not being rewarded for their efforts during the campaign." He sees only two possible reactions: "To constantly re-explain the media context in which we work, and to put these people in touch with the new offerings that we are developing, especially at the digital level."

At the same time, conservative forces have been regaining their strength. They are toying with the idea of another referendum, along the lines of "cut Billag by half." According to Marchand, this makes for a rather complicated political cocktail: "On the one hand,

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

there is a new generation of politicians arriving. They are digital natives and sometimes have difficulty understanding how public service media works and the costs of broadcast productions,” he says. But it is also the content that provokes some opposition, particularly in parliament. “This is not only a left-right issue. It is a matter of themes,” Marchand explains. Some were annoyed by the prominence of topics such as climate change, diversity, and gender.

SRG SSR employs 6,700 people and broadcasts in all four Swiss language regions with a federalist structure. Management is convinced they have gone down the right path, particularly regarding cooperation. Commercial media outlets can now use audio and video produced by SRG for free, as long as it is appropriately credited. SRG also offers curated radio news to others. And then there is the login alliance ‘one log’, which encourages registration as required by commercial publishers which see it as a route to subscription income. “We can’t force people to register, but with some platforms it is perceived as common practice, for example with our streaming platform,” Bakel Walden says.

SRG now battles on several fronts to stay ahead of the game in this debate. The first goal is to maintain and gain legitimacy with the public. According to Gilles Marchand, this manifests in three dimensions: “The capacity to reach the whole society. The capacity to demonstrate a difference compared to the private media. And the capacity to play a constructive role in the national media ecosystem.” This means investing in culture in a broad sense and guaranteeing that the cultural and linguistic diversity unique to Switzerland is properly represented in its output. The broadcaster diligently ensures that different views are represented with close monitoring and data collection and maintains strict social media policies to maintain these standards.

Both the French (RTS) and German (SRF) parts of the broadcaster seem to be doing quite well in the trust department, particularly in 2020. Brand trust numbers were up at 76 and 77 percent respectively, according to the 2021 Digital News Report.

Second, SRG is implementing internal reforms and including unions in the effort. Shrinking resources might help here, since smaller budgets tend to increase the need for collaboration. Third, the broadcaster is trying to develop its reach to younger audiences, with special offerings on third party platforms and more online streaming. SRG’s new streaming platform ‘*Play Suisse*’ offers access to fiction and documentaries from all SRG units with systematic subtitling in the national languages. Management is proud of this. Marchand: “This is a project that addresses both the legitimacy of SRG in terms of cohesion, diversity and new digital uses.” According to Walden, 300,000 customers were using the streaming platform in the summer of 2021.

Fourth, the aim is to stay attractive as an employer. This is a challenge, as competition, particularly for data savvy recruits, is fierce. “The salaries we can offer for these scarce digital talents are sometimes close to embarrassing and definitely very well below market prices,” Walden says. “Fortunately, we can now offer a much more attractive and flexible work environment, thanks to changes inspired by the pandemic.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Marchand seems concerned about the efforts another referendum might require, although he and his team are prepared to make two central arguments: “On the one hand, in a globalised society that tends to standardise, it is important to keep a generalist media that is interested in regional realities and that supports diversity. On the other hand, in the face of the wave of social media and their aberrations, I believe that it is essential to strengthen the media that invest in journalism.” This has to do with the quality of democratic life. “I trust that the Swiss people will ultimately accept these arguments. But the process will be difficult and exhausting.”

SRG SSR turned 90 this year, and management intends to have every reason for a big centennial celebration in 2031. Marchand envisions: “By then, we will have developed the concepts of personalisation and recommendation with public service values at the core.” Walden says: “We need to reform aggressively. You will never be applauded by everyone.” Public service media has the advantage of operating on a mission and can provide some stability compared to private media, he adds. “So, there’s plenty of room for optimism, too.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 06

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS AT NOS

SOMETIMES THE ONLY THING THAT WORKS IS A LAW - AND SOME ENFORCEMENT

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When Dutch public Broadcaster NOS removed the company logo from its broadcasting trucks, arguing this would help protect their journalists, it made international headlines. This decision was viewed as a spontaneous reaction after protestors in several European cities had taken to the streets in opposition to their governments' anti-Covid policies. Some of these protests resulted in violence, with reporters specifically targeted by those expressing their anti-elitist sentiment with aggression. But what looked like a capitulation to attacks on press freedom was actually part of an ongoing project intended to increase journalists' safety.

"It came out of a survey that was conducted in 2017," NOS News Editor-in-Chief Marcel Gelauff explains. "The results were quite shocking. 61 percent of those surveyed said they were dealing with violence and or harassment on a daily basis." This of course included harassment on social media, where journalists have experienced massive attempts at intimidation. "Many colleagues have stopped using social media as a result." But there was also physical violence. "People would damage our trucks," Gelauff says. The number of attacks has increased as a result of populism, he suspects, with the 'fake news' rhetoric of the former US President, among others, being taken up by right wing politicians. "Trump and his approach caused a lot of harm, even here in the Netherlands. When I said in a talk show that I expected all politicians to support journalism for democracy I was accused of being partisan," Gelauff says. Something had to be done.

An initiative started by the Dutch Union of Journalists and the Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief brought together representatives of media companies, journalist associations, unions, the department of justice, and the police to discuss potential strategies. One of the first moves was to make sure that attacks against journalists were considered a crime and liable for prosecution. "We tried to achieve a special status for journalists," Gelauff explains. But that turned out to be tricky, particularly given that in most countries, 'journalist' is a profession which doesn't require a certification or specific qualification. It became a lot easier when the Secretary of Justice suggested, in Gelauff's words: "Someone who looks like a journalist and acts like a journalist is a journalist." Now there is a Dutch law making it easier for journalists to hold perpetrators accountable.

Another important measure was to secure a budget for the effort. EUR 300,000 per year was not huge, but a start. The money was granted for three years initially, and it was used

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

to pay for a number of things: First, a coordinator for press safety was named with the intention to make media organisations more aware of the situation. Second, a hotline was established where reporters and others could report incidents. Third, safety training for journalists was introduced. All of this was launched in November 2019.

Gelauff seems to be quite content with progress so far. “We managed to put it on the agenda in society,” he says. “Journalist safety is now one of the major issues; it gets support from politicians.” And apparently the effort has paid off for journalists. “The survey was repeated six months ago, and results have improved,” he says. This doesn’t mean the situation for media employees has improved. Pressafety, the body set up to monitor attacks and conduct survey, collected around 150 complaints in 2020 alone. “But more and more journalists have recognised the power of this. It is so important to make visible what happens to us,” Gelauff says — and to systematically follow up on the complaints.

Just as important is building up trust with the broadcaster and the audience. This seems to work well with the vast majority. Trust figures for NOS News were at an impressive 80 percent, according to the 2021 Digital News Report, with only 7 percent saying they did not trust the broadcaster. And some of those people might still be open to debate or constructive dialogue. Gelauff recalls: “We had a number of demonstrations here right in front of our building in Hilversum. I went out to have a discussion with the participants. I wanted to be transparent with them and address their issues. As a result, the demonstrations faded away.” But sometimes the only thing that works is a law; a law that is enforced. “Having a discussion with people who attack our reporters is just not feasible,” Gelauff says.

Sadly, in some cases even law enforcement doesn’t help. On 6 July 2021, well-known Dutch reporter and TV anchor Peter de Vries was shot five times after leaving a TV studio; he died on 15 July aged 64. The journalist, who was famous for his investigations in criminal cases involving the country’s organised crime scene, had worked with a key witness in a case against the most wanted Dutch criminal. Police told de Vries in 2019 he was on that person’s hit list, but the reporter refused personal protection. The issue of journalist safety has since only gained prominence.

DUTCH PRESS FREEDOM WEBSITE: [HTTPS://WWW.PERSVEILIG.NL](https://www.persveilig.nl)

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

WHAT'S NEXT?

What's next in
**CONNECTING WITH
AUDIENCES AND THE PUBLIC?**

PRESS ENTER

PART 2

WHAT'S NEXT IN **CONNECTING WITH AUDIENCES AND THE PUBLIC?****THE BATTLE FOR ATTENTION: BETWEEN INFORMATION ABUNDANCE AND NEWS AVOIDANCE**

For public service media, being an indispensable force in their audiences' lives is the best insurance against losing political, societal, and thus financial support. This is challenging in a high-choice media environment,⁶⁷ where many people suffer from information overload and have plenty of opportunity for distraction. Indifference or even conscious news avoidance might be a more severe problem than a lack of trust.⁶⁸ Additionally, amid an abundance of platforms — a few of them powerful monopolies — it is increasingly hard for even the most trusted brands to capture audiences' attention and have them access their products directly rather than through third party content providers. It is essential for public service media to build up or shift audience loyalty from their established linear services to digital to remain relevant for the next generation of viewers, listeners and readers.

This doesn't mean that everything was rosy in the days of powerful linear broadcasting. While societies have changed rapidly, public and private media haven't kept up as they should have. Populations have become more ethnically diverse, and long neglected members of the audience, especially women, have raised their voices. Newsrooms, in contrast, have stayed the same or become even less diverse, at least in terms of social background, with most journalists now graduating from academic degree programmes. Under-representation of different parts of society erodes the legitimacy of media. This is a particular challenge for public service media, as they are legally mandated to be universal and reflect society accurately. To the alarm of traditional media, social networks have filled some of this vacuum, providing spaces for those who didn't feel seen and listened to before. This has opened up the public arena to new actors.⁶⁹ It is easy to blame Silicon Valley conglomerates for lost audience connections, but some of the dilemma is in truth homemade. Rory Coveney, Director of Strategy at Irish RTÉ, says: "We need to explain our concepts more, we need more fairness, more diversity. This is now more important than ever."

Ironically, populist leaning critics of the media have accused the broadcasters of the opposite: they feel journalism pays too much attention to the 'fringe' interests of a diverse crowd but ignores the so-called majority: people who live outside metropolitan areas, have no academic degree, and hold more conservative views than the average journalist. There is some truth to this. Big media brands — public service or otherwise — suffer from too much homogeneity in their newsrooms. Leadership in particular is largely made up of white, university educated urbanites, a group that tends to be politically left of the middle.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



Public service media will have to include and cater to both. On the one hand, there are the audiences that have never felt served by traditional media, because they weren't met respectfully as equals but described from a privileged, somewhat elevated perspective. On the other, there are those who feel they belong to a silent majority that isn't featured enough in a news output that emphasizes the spectacular and exclusively bad news.

If there is a role for public service media, it is to provide the social glue for increasingly fragmented societies. These societies might not actually be more polarised, but they can often feel that way, thanks to the amplifying effects of social media and a public arena that is no longer fully in the hands of the traditional gatekeepers.⁷⁰ Kai Gniffke, Director General of German SWR, is quite clear on this: "The biggest challenge is to keep society together. How can we reach those who opted out of the conversation? How can we serve the public and keep them in the conversation, across all ages and socioeconomic groups?" To find the formats that can achieve this is a challenge, also because expectations and media consumption habits vary widely among age groups. Lucy Küng, media advisor and Senior Research Associate at Reuters Institute, says: "Public service media still has tremendous value. The challenge is to create unique value to the people who are paying. Public media has to figure out: What role do we want to play in our audiences' lives? There are more and more alternatives out there."

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 07 PUTTING AUDIENCES AT THE CENTRE

JOURNALISM NEEDS TO MOVE FROM GUT FEELING AND DATA ADDICTION TO SOLVING THEIR USERS' PROBLEMS AND REFLECTING SOCIETY IN ITS DIVERSITY

The awareness about these shortcomings is high among public service media leaders. Helje Solberg, Head of News at Norwegian NRK, admits: “We need to be closer to people’s lives. We need to find out what are the topics in people’s lives?” Fran Unsworth, Director, News and Current Affairs at BBC, says that the focus on people’s needs drives — and should drive — the strategy. “We really try to put the audience at the heart of our decision making.” And Dmitry Shishkin, independent consultant and a former BBC manager, advises his clients to be obsessed with audiences: “Do everything for audiences’ sake, not for internal politics’ sake.”

What sounds obvious is hard in structures where careers have been forged in silos and some journalists have worked more on expanding their networks into the influential circles of politics and business rather than connecting with ordinary people of all generations and social classes. Pascal Doucet-Bon, Deputy Director of News at France Télévisions, one of Europe’s biggest newsrooms, is rather self-critical: “We have a hard time reaching the 15 to 40-year-olds. It is an emergency! We are not very good at serving the less educated, the poorest classes, people in the countryside, except on the regional antennas of France 3 and the ‘Ieres’ [overseas territories]. They think we are too Parisian, too bourgeois, that we use complicated vocabulary. We have a problem with our newsroom. 95 percent of journalists come from the bourgeoisie. (...) I think we missed something in the 1980s, we didn’t see that we were losing part of the population. We missed something on recruitment of journalists of different origins and on the capacity to listen to all the French people and give them a voice. Maybe we let demagogic media do it.”

SVT’s Head of News and Sports, Anne Lagercrantz, knows from research that Sweden faces some of the same challenges: “People with a conservative moral view is one of the groups which don’t feel represented enough.” Lagercrantz leads a division with 900 people; her team offered seminars on the topic. “This has been successful and a lot of fun. We took different pieces of news we published and discussed: how can we provide more perspectives? We are trying to question our own mindset.” A common complaint made by these audiences is that programmes imply viewers should pity everyone and neglect people’s own responsibility, she explains. “One response could be to ask interviewees: ‘What could you do to change this, how did you end up in this situation?’”⁷¹

SVT has spearheaded many successful initiatives which have been replicated by other broadcasters. In the past few years, the Swedish media organisation has expanded its

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



reach with young audiences (see below, decentralised coverage away from Stockholm and introduced the 'Fika' concept, which was mentioned as best-practice by several of our interviewees. 'Fika' is the Swedish word for coffee break, and within this initiative journalists met ordinary people all over the country for non-confrontational, exploratory interviews with a focus on listening.⁷² This demonstrates how making a meaningful shift requires primarily a change of mindset.

Douglas Smith is one of the world's thought leaders on programmes that help senior journalists and media managers adapt to today's realities. In his extensive work with primarily American and European media organisations, he has observed a structural problem: "I am surprised by the difficulty that journalists seem to have in getting beyond that image of the public intellectual who knows best what's good for the public, the difficulties to interact with real people to know what is going on in their communities. The general public is an abstraction not based on reality." He is a strong advocate of putting the needs of different audiences first. Martin Řezníček, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of News at Czech TV agrees: "I think that leaders in public service media should not be teachers. Leadership used to be convinced of its own truth. We were very often too distant from what the audience wanted. But this not the same any longer than it was 20, 30 years ago. The audience is changing, and public service media should be as well."

That audiences have changed is only half of the truth. Many of them have always been there — for example, women — but media have largely ignored their different needs and user habits. Consuming political and business programming that primarily quotes men and tells their stories of success and failure might feel pointless to many women who are shouldering an array of responsibilities in their jobs and at home. At least this is the most prevalent explanation as to why women are often less interested in news than men.⁷³ Female audiences miss role models and content that is related to their everyday lives.

Bakel Walden, Director of Development and Offering and board member at SRG SSR, describes a scenario with which most public service media news departments should be familiar: "We have a deficit with female audiences. We are very strong in news and sports, but that's where the majority of customers is men." SRG has a diversity board which develops strategies for gender representation. The broadcaster also joined the BBC's award-winning 50:50 project, which seeks to increase female representation across all programming. The project has become an export hit and is now used in other industries as well. But audience neglect is not just about gender. Walden: "38 percent of people in Switzerland have a migration background; one quarter doesn't have a Swiss passport. That's why we are very focused now on portraying the country as it is."

While the 'why' has been uncontested, the 'how' and 'what' are harder to come by. One reason is that audience needs and preferences are not easy to decipher. Journalism can do and does many things, but people are not equally happy with every discipline within which media compete. A telling survey in the 2019 Digital News Report (see figure 5) revealed that while most of those questioned felt journalists were doing a good job

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

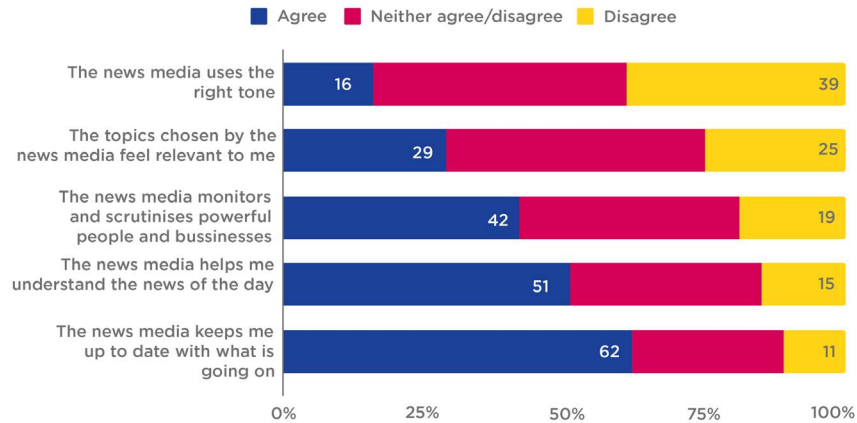
ABOUT

REFERENCES



keeping them up-to-date with current affairs, they were much less enthused about reporters' abilities to explain and investigate or to select topics that really mattered in their lives.⁷⁴ The worst rating was reserved for the tone media uses. Only 16 percent perceived tone as adequate (see infographic).

FIGURE 5 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE NEWS



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2019; POLLING BY YOUNG&Rubicam

And there is another caveat: While people might say that they are interested in politics and business and like neutral analyses and long reads, their actual news consumption behaviour often reflects something entirely different. An example: in the years following the 2016 election of US President Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum, news consumers consistently said in high numbers they were fed up with everything about these two topics. However, newsrooms reported that it was exactly these topics that were among those most in demand. Audience choices are often shaped by supply more than demand. A story at the top of the website and promoted on social media is more likely to capture attention. We can only speculate: Do media cause users to feel dissatisfied with their own behaviour at times? For example, they might indulge in click-bait and feel bad about wasting time afterwards. User data provides some useful — and often underutilised — insights into what audiences might want, but data does not give the full picture. Those who tune out because they are fed up with the alarmism cycle, and those who have not even tuned in for whatever reason, are not absorbed by newsroom metrics.

As Lucy Küng puts it: “The data dashboard is a proxy to put content creators in touch with content consumers. That misses the real point, because in the end media’s job is not about catering to the audiences’ interests. It is about finding out what they need. As management theorist Clayton Christensen outlined: ‘What job are they doing for people?’ Understanding audiences cannot be subcontracted to the audience part of the organisation.” Christensen developed the theory of disruptive innovation, laid out in his famous ‘The Innovator’s Dilemma’. He also provided useful insights for the media industry, framing the relationship between the audience and the media in succinct terms: “The basic idea is that people don’t go around looking for products to buy. Instead, they take life as it comes and when they encounter a problem, they look for a solution — and at that point,

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2**
- PART 3
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES

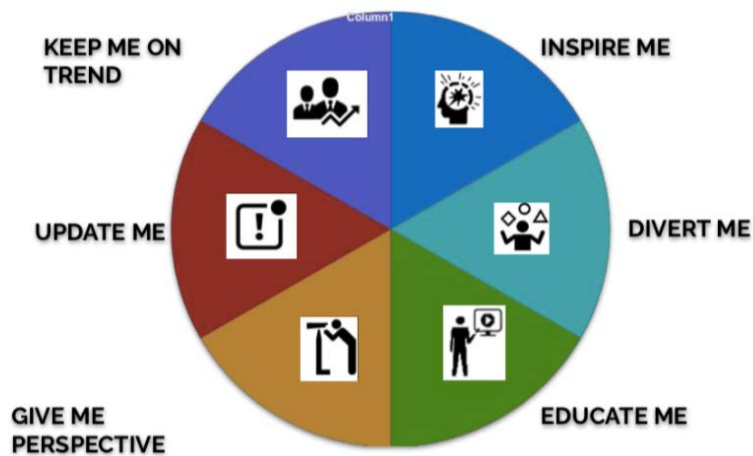


they'll hire a product or service," Christensen wrote in an [article for Harvard's Nieman Report](#).⁷⁵ Understanding this distinction should be a significant component of what newsrooms call an "Audiences First" strategy.

In journalism, too, there can be a mismatch between what people need from media and what media deliver. To capture this, the BBC developed a user needs model (see figure 6). The assumption is that news consumers expect quite a bit from journalism: They want to be informed about current affairs, educated, inspired, diverted, given perspective and be kept on trend to be able to keep up with conversations among peers.

FIGURE 6 BBC USER NEEDS MODEL

Customers' user needs over internal goals



SOURCE: BBC

Dmitry Shishkin, a former BBC manager, champions the model: "People expect much more from journalism than just updates. But most of what newsrooms do is update audiences." From his point of view, it does not hurt to look to big tech when developing products that serve people's needs. Shishkin: "Organisations such as Netflix, Amazon, Uber, and Spotify have other problems, but at least they know what they are doing for their audiences." NRK's Helje Solberg agrees: "The platforms have set user expectations at a very high level. If we are to become important in people's lives, we have to meet those expectations." Solberg and her team don't shy away from data. In her organisation, all units have specific goals to reach younger and broader audiences, "and we measure it. This is a very clear strategic narrative," she says. There are days when she envies what many commercial publishers in the Nordic region have been implementing for a long time. Solberg: "Commercial media are ahead of us, they have more data, they are able to curate journalism better than us, having more insight in what resonates with the audience and what doesn't."

Being data-informed, as opposed to data-led or even addicted, has been a prominent narrative in the industry in recent years. Commercial media that depend on selling subscriptions are constantly trying to optimise their ability to understand and anticipate the ⁷⁶interests and behaviours of their current and potential users. Data scientists are in

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2**
- PART 3
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES



high demand in many newsrooms. Gilles Marchand, Director General of Swiss SRG SSR, has a note of caution for those who hope to copy their private competitors' methods: "It is a mistake to think that public service media's success, its *raison d'être*, is measured by its quantitative performance. (...) It is clear that people can consume a lot of content without being very attached to it. The emotional relationship, the feeling of lack in the case of disappearance, has nothing to do with market share or the penetration rate. Public service media must focus on what makes them special in this new society and not on prime-time audiences alone."

This means serving audiences by using all kinds of journalism, as well as fact checking and verification. It entails investing where other players are withdrawing for financial reasons: in local or foreign news, in specialist correspondents, and in serving groups that would otherwise go unserved or underserved. Public service media's responsibility should also be to support the industry as a whole, as SRG has done through their public/private co-operation. Shishkin is adamant about this: Public service media needs to be open; it is uniquely positioned to provide infrastructure that others can use, he says. "Lifting the level of journalism to a higher level for the public good, helping the sector itself to get better, this should be the goal." After all, the public pays for it.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 08

HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY TO SERVE THE PUBLIC

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA NEED TO REGAIN AUTHORITY OVER TECHNOLOGY. THEY NEED TO DEVELOP THEIR PLATFORMS INTO AUDIENCE MAGNETS WITH PUBLIC SERVICE VALUES

Media houses are technology power houses — or at least, they used to be. Sophisticated broadcasting technology and printing presses, the capacity to report from war zones long before the internet and email were invented: this and much more shaped the self-confidence of a sector that today appears riddled with self-doubt. One reason is that its authority over technology is gone. Giant platform companies with powerful business models and user-friendly solutions to daily challenges are enthralling people of all ages, forcing all media to compete in environments they neither own nor control, or in some cases even understand. To complicate matters further, operating within the scope of these platforms means on some level buying into their values, which can be problematic to say the least.

So, it is high time for public service media to recapture authority over technology and harness it as part of the solution. Opportunities could range from using artificial intelligence to assist production processes and audience engagement, to the development of user-friendly platforms and products that people genuinely want to use. Media need to become much more technology savvy, as quite a few of our interviewees pointed out. Rory Coveney, Director of Strategy at Irish RTÉ, sees a unique opportunity to provide guidance and value-driven content to an audience that struggles with distraction and information overload: “We need to move to personalised public media services. This might sound like a contradiction. But people need to be able to personalise their version of RTÉ.” That does not simply mean getting rid of TV and radio though, Coveney says. “Digital needs to be a companion to our linear business. People still have a huge need for linear consumption, it is by no means one or the other.”

NRK’s Head of News Helje Solberg is adamant about standing up to the Silicon Valley monopolies. Solberg: “We need to be less dependent on third party platforms. Distribution is important but destination is paramount. It is much more important to us to succeed on our own platforms. If we become too dependent on others, our ability to deliver value will be reduced.” NRK is discussing this with private Norwegian players. The three media companies NRK, Schibstedt, and Amedia agreed in the summer of 2021 that they would not be part of Facebook News. “This is an important discussion for us: We live in a world of platforms. They are here to stay, and there is no turning back. But we need to be extremely conscious of why we are on these platforms and what we want to achieve. We need to use the platforms to our benefit, and we must not give up our greatest strength: our independent autonomy. Facebook News is a personalised news experience and a

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



dedicated place for news on Facebook, and our goal is to create a trusted place for the most interesting and important stories of the day. This is our position. We must not give it away to Facebook.”

Solberg would most likely find an ally in Thomas Hinrichs, Director of Information at BR in Germany. He says: “Public service media were too late in spotting the challenges of third-party platforms. Now, American and Chinese companies dominate access to audiences. Our job is to create our own platforms and entice audiences from there. Marty Baron once said ‘we have to become a technology business’. We need this mindset. Technology changes journalism. If we don’t adjust, we will lose our audience.” Baron, who was Editor-in-Chief of the Washington Post until the spring of 2021, had the advantage of Amazon’s Jeff Bezos being the Post’s owner since 2013, and bringing with him large resources and an expertise in technology. But it is not only about money, it is also about foresight and determination. “Engineers are first class citizens with us,” Baron said, recognising the need for editorial and technological staff to have a common purpose.

For some in public service media, the focus on technological innovation is well underway across a range of projects, from storytelling opportunities via the development of proprietary platforms to the use of artificial intelligence, editorial intelligence, marketing, and distribution. Those public service media that experimented early with developing their own streaming platforms are now reaping the benefits. Finnish Yle, for example, outperforms Netflix in the Finnish market with their platform Areena ([see case study on Areena, p. 55](#)). They are a close number four on all digital platforms for young people, too – after YouTube, Spotify and Netflix. But success stories like these can present their own challenges. Finland’s biggest publisher, Sanomat, has filed a competition complaint with the EU Commission, trying to curb the influence of Areena (see Part 1 of this report on the political and economic environment for public service media).

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



Estonian ERR was late to the streaming game but boosted engagement during the pandemic. They launched their platform in April 2020, and Director General Erik Roose is happy so far: “Within one year, all statistics showed that that step was very much needed. It has been a huge success. The brand awareness in Estonia is now bigger than that of Netflix. Ten percent of the population consumes it weekly; the vast majority is the younger generation.” In the beginning, ERR’s TV editors-in-chief were very reluctant to put shows on the streaming platform before airing them, he recounts. “But we didn’t lose any users; instead, we gained audiences.”

Gilles Marchand, Director General at SGR-SSR, considers SRG’s new streaming platform ‘Play Suisse’ to be the broadcaster’s most innovative project. It offers access to productions from all SRG units with systematic subtitling in each of the Swiss national languages. Marchand: “This is a project that addresses both the legitimacy of SRG – cohesion and diversity – and new digital uses.” Smaller countries with non-English native languages tend to profit from the fact that their audiences appreciate content in the local tongue.

While some public service media have been frontrunners in digital first integration — the Dutch NOS merged TV, radio and digital in 2005 — others still face opposition from private media and political adversaries. German SWR's Director General Kai Gniffke: "We need a paradigm shift. Our content platform is as important as our linear program. Our opponents want us to keep out of digital, but that's impossible if they want reforms at the same time." Gniffke remains realistic about the users though. "I'm not naive, I know we won't make it work by waiting for everyone to come to our platforms. Some people are on Instagram and YouTube all day and they still pay their license fee. We need to serve them, too."

The potential impact of artificial intelligence in the newsroom and in the media generally is only beginning to be understood and appreciated. The 2019 EBU News Report provided in-depth insights into the possibilities.⁷⁷ In the multi-language European context, the use of automated translation will open many opportunities — which should improve the number of languages covered in sufficient quality. 'A European Perspective,' an EBU project launched in July 2021, highlights what can be done on business-to-business and business-to-consumer levels (see case study 'A European Perspective', p. 151). It also shows the potential use of the technologies with news content for public service purposes in a significant collaborative effort.

Uli Köppen, Head of AI + Automation Lab, Co-Lead of BR Data at German BR, thinks that public service media are uniquely positioned to follow through with projects that need scale and long-term commitment, something commercial media cannot shoulder: "Infrastructure development is interesting; there are no ready-made solutions for that. I'm talking about data, modular content management systems, recommendation engines." Public broadcasters can also be role models in discussing and embedding ethical values in the use of artificial intelligence. BR's ethical rules for how to use AI, and what to do and not to do with it, could serve as a blueprint for private media as well (see case study BR's 'Algorithmic Accountability Reporting and Ethical Guidelines', p. 97).

An award-winning project by Sveriges Radio, which used a public service value algorithm at its core, is another example of value-driven technological innovation. It combines machine learning and digital product development with a debate about editorial news judgment, something long overdue in newsrooms which are ready to move towards the future (see case study SR's 'Public Service Value Algorithm', p. 100).

With misinformation and deep fakes likely to become more prevalent as technology advances, AI-powered fact checking will also assume an important role in the newsroom of the future. "This will be a major part in proving our relevance," Eric Scherer, Director News Innovation and External Affairs at France Télévisions, says. The news division has invested in a video fact-checking unit; a new tool called 'Les Reveleurs' will help verify the authenticity of film material with artificial intelligence. "I hope we can share these tools with EBU members," Scherer says.

Benoît Balon-Perin, Innovation and Workflows Manager at RTBF and Chair of the EBU

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



News Committee, highlights the opportunities technology holds: “Journalism doesn’t evolve by itself. It is the technology that drives it forward. Journalism is the same as it used to be: find news, verify facts. But with new technology we can reach more people, we can tell stories better. You can do very good things with technology, and bad things.” BR’s Thomas Hinrichs emphasizes how technology has increased efficiency: “We can produce with a lot less resources now. Building up a network of regional correspondents for example used to be prohibitively expensive.” But there’s a downside, too. “On the other hand, we used to have ten years for technology change; now, we have two,” Hinrichs says.

Dmitry Shishkin thinks that technology can also help public service media to serve niche audiences that would otherwise be partly or entirely neglected. Synthetic media, for example, could be used to create interesting and helpful content in minority languages. “Avatars can present news in languages that would never work commercially. Commercial players would not be able to invest in something like this.” The core of public service media should be about educating audiences, he says. In his view, virtual and augmented reality have a lot of potential to educate, for example to create material for people who are physically challenged and cannot travel easily or even leave their homes. “Why don’t all public service broadcasters team up and create that?” Shishkin asks. “Innovation around public spheres needs to happen in that space.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 09

THE MANY FACES OF NEWS AVOIDANCE

TO BATTLE NEWS AVOIDANCE, JOURNALISM NEEDS TO CHANGE. IT NEEDS TO FOCUS LESS ON POLITICS AND POLARISATION AND MORE ON SERVICE AND SOLUTIONS.

Too much, too negative, too noisy, too biased — these are some of the reasons people give for why they avoid the news. In the Digital News Report, approximately one in three of those surveyed admitted to belonging to that group. The rate increases among young people and when political conflict becomes particularly heated, as was the case in the UK around Brexit in 2019.⁷⁸ While this finding contrasted with users' actual behaviour on news sites — Brexit-related news items were among the most sought-after in the UK at that time — figures like these should be alarming to newsrooms. Once people have formed a negative opinion about news, they are less likely to subscribe or pay for news content and might abstain from news consumption altogether. From a social perspective, this is perhaps even more concerning. Regular consumption of and interaction with news is fundamental to a healthy democracy. Research shows that when people don't have access to journalism that matters to them, they are less likely to vote and to run for office.⁷⁹

Those who avoid the news do not show up in audience metrics. This is why modern newsrooms might be tempted to overdeliver on the types of stories that have proven to be successful in the past, while neglecting to analyse which audiences they are not reaching and why. Researchers have recently begun to look more closely at the causes of news avoidance.⁸⁰ The reasons that so many people consider consuming news a waste of time or even detrimental to their well-being are content-related and psychological, but also structural.

First, researchers say there is a clear link between the independence of a country's media system and news avoidance. More people turn away from journalism in places where the state or influential individuals are perceived as controlling the media. This was demonstrated by Benjamin Toff and Antonis Kalogeropoulos in their award-winning research, "All the news that's fit to ignore".⁸¹ This is quite rational behaviour, as they expect news to be biased and low in value. Freedom of the press and a healthy, pluralistic media system are thus essential for citizens to be willing to engage with what is happening in their country and the world.

Second, women and younger generations are on average more likely to avoid the news. This may be because they don't perceive the content to be relevant to their lives or don't feel included by the prevailing tone (see above). Newsrooms therefore need to take into greater account the lifestyles and typical behaviours of targeted audiences when planning and scheduling content and formats. In many countries, linear radio has done an outstanding job at that.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



Third, news journalism puts many people in a bad mood. According to the Digital News Report, half of those who routinely avoid news cite this as a reason. A constant assault of negative news and stories depresses many to such an extent that they feel robbed of their agency. “There is nothing I can do about it,” was one of the justifications for news avoidance. Constructive and solution-oriented journalism seems to have the opposing effect of helping people become more aware of their ability to influence the course of events. Focusing more on these types of reporting will likely enable public service media to attract one audience everyone is desperate to reach. NRK’s Helje Solberg: “Solutions journalism resonates with young people.”

Fourth, when it comes to content, there is a mismatch between audience needs and interests and news production. In most newsrooms, political journalism is still considered to be the most prestigious beat, and it attracts the top talent. But when news avoiders are asked which kind of journalism they consider most valuable, other subjects top the list, such as health and science reporting, and local news. Stephanie Edgerly of Northwestern University made this point in her 2021 research, “[The head and heart of news avoidance](#)”.⁸² She also found that news avoiders tend to be less politically inclined and less competent at navigating the news. Media consultant Douglas Smith observes: “Culturally, journalists have a deep and admirable affection for breaking news and investigative journalism. But actually, the kind of journalism that is probably the most powerful foundation for sustainable journalism going forward is service journalism — which used to be at the bottom of the hierarchy.” This resonates with newsroom data as to which topics generate subscriptions: they often revolve around health and financial advice, and research on how to raise children or navigate conflict in relationships. The common distinction between hard news and soft news might reveal more about those who produce and distribute news than their audience.

Fifth, people avoid journalism for very different reasons; some can be influenced, others cannot. Kiki de Bruin and colleagues at the University of Amsterdam developed a typology of news avoiders. They came up with eight characters: The sensitive, who suffer from exposure to bad news; the suspicious, who are sceptical of media; the disinterested, who are indifferent to current events; the specialists, who are not interested in anything other than their topics of interest; the mindful, who are primarily concerned with mental balance; the busy, who have enough to do between their professional and personal commitments; the hedonists, who primarily care about enjoyment and well-being, and those who have not learned to use media either at home or at school.⁸³ Some of these typologies can be enticed with certain offerings; others are much harder to reach. Newsrooms should seek to understand the causes of news avoidance first, before judging those who avoid news journalism.

According to Maïke Olij, an independent researcher based in the Netherlands, news avoidance has a very different connotation for journalists and the public. “For journalists it is a bad thing,” Olij explains, “they say, you have an obligation to consume news when you are a citizen in a democracy. But often, news consumers who are news avoiders are

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



actually making a very conscious choice. They feel it makes them a better person to avoid certain news at certain times, in the same way you might limit the intake of food that is not good for you.” Her research, which was commissioned by Dutch broadcasters NOS and NPO, reveals that many people find it extremely difficult to strike a balance in a high-choice news environment. They believe there is too much news out there; at the same time, they feel a social responsibility to be informed, thinking: “I should know this.” Olij says, “It is not black and white; they don’t avoid news full time.”

From this perspective, news avoidance might be an indicator of healthy scepticism and therefore conducive rather than dangerous to democracy. Olij: “When news avoidance increases, it might be a signal that people are becoming more news savvy and more confused at the same time. News avoiders could also be very strong news consumers.” From this perspective, media companies are missing the point if they focus too much on reach. “We could ask, is it okay to watch the news once a week; should we be happy if the numbers go down a bit?” Olij says. “This leads to important debates: What is journalism, is it a business model, or is it a public service?”

This is a challenge that needs to be tackled at the demand as well as the supply side. On the one hand, newsrooms could develop products that help people to find the right balance that fits them individually. The personalisation of content and services is helpful to this end. On the other, it is also about producing the right quantity, especially where resources are scarce and need to be invested carefully. “It could start with labelling very clearly what is what,” Olij says. A differentiation could be made between what is important to know, what is nice to know, and what is helpful to know. Some might profit from slow journalism. “Different audience groups need different material.” She suggests that newsrooms should look more carefully at the psychological needs of people. “Some really do have nightmares about certain news stories.”

Swedish TV’s Director of News and Sports, Anne Lagercrantz, is convinced that constructive journalism will form a major part of tackling this problem. “Journalism needs to be curious about what will happen tomorrow. It affects how we interview people: Are we confrontational or are we curious? The tone of voice is important: how do we set up parameters for a debate? We struggle with it quite a bit, because we sometimes fall into old patterns, but the audience enjoys it.” SVT’s editors are required to include one constructive piece each day in the major nightly news format, and local news teams are expected to provide constructive angles in a third of their more in-depth reporting, Lagercrantz says. “We offer training, we measure. We are seeing such a difference now, compared to a few years back.”

While Irish RTÉ’s project Brainstorm is not explicitly categorised as constructive journalism, it has all of the hallmarks (see case study ‘RTÉ Brainstorm’, p. 103). In Brainstorm, RTÉ partners with universities and academics eager to publish their latest findings as a general news story or feature, which is cost effective for the broadcaster and resonates strongly with the public, particularly younger audiences. This type of

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



explanatory content is more likely to draw higher educated viewers, but it still holds the potential to gain new audiences.

In Europe, the Constructive Institute in Aarhus is leading the effort in developing alternatives to the prevailing forms of journalism: confrontational and breaking news.⁸⁴ “In this traditional approach, we news people have had the bad habit of borrowing our mindset and vocabulary from boxing and warfare,” says founder and Director Ulrik Haagerup, who served as executive director of news at Danish Public Broadcaster DR for ten years. “How can we stop automatically giving the most airtime to the most extreme, the loudest, the rudest, and the ones with most likes?” In a project called ‘Good Fight’, the Constructive Institute taught workshops to 120 political reporters around Denmark on how to cover elections constructively, and prepared political candidates to debate difficult dilemmas by focusing on their own ideas and solutions. Haagerup was baffled when the following ‘Constructive Debate’ was sold out within a few hours. 530 people turned up, lured by an invitation which read: “Do you like politics, but are sick and tired of politicians yelling and media focusing on conflict? You are not alone. But maybe together we can find ways for it to be different.”

In highly politicised environments, constructive journalism might even be the best way to avoid a situation where political discourse is framed by its participants as one of conflict or where state control of media has limited general discussions. Tinatin Berdzenishvili, Director General of the Georgian Public Broadcaster 1TV, regards constructive journalism as a way to raise the public’s appetite for balanced and rich reporting which provides solutions rather than just mirroring the battleground (see [Q&A with Tinatin Berdzenishvili, p. 140](#)). Her organisation will send eight journalists to Aarhus to become ambassadors of a new kind of journalism.

There remains a group which, because of social class, ethnic background, or education or literacy level, remains hard to reach. This group does not often seek out news and information sources, and may find it more difficult to follow and appreciate the content when they do. In contrast to early hopes and expectations, research suggests that the internet has increased rather than diminished the information divide. Despite the variety of options available, it is mostly still the wealthy and well educated who make use of them, while those who were previously excluded may find themselves even more excluded now. In bygone times, many people were at least occasionally exposed to journalism, perhaps while skimming through a tabloid at lunchbreak or on the train, watching the evening news while eating dinner or listening to the radio in the car. The constant availability of alternate forms of information and entertainment, thanks to content heavyweights such as Netflix and Spotify, as well as chat, shopping, and gaming platforms, seems to have drowned out the news for some. People now have to consciously seek out news sources, and many choose not to do so.⁸⁵

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 10 REACHING OUT TO YOUNG AUDIENCES

YOUNG AUDIENCES WANT TO BE INFORMED AND ENTERTAINED WITH DEPTH, DRIVE AND HUMOUR. THEY WANT TO BE MET RESPECTFULLY, IN A FRIENDLY MANNER, AND BE TREATED FAIRLY.

If news avoidance is occurring among all audiences, it is even more prevalent among young people. According to a study about the German market titled '[#usethe news](#)', only one in two young people consider it necessary to stay up-to-date about current affairs. The researchers concluded that: "Journalism often lacks a connection to young people's everyday lives."⁸⁶ Furthermore, the digital divide seems to be becoming more pronounced among younger age groups. As another German [study](#) revealed, younger people with less formal education score much lower in media literacy than older participants with comparable school degrees.⁸⁷ From a societal perspective, this should be reason for concern. It will form a major challenge for media organisations, and public service media in particular, whose very survival depends on establishing and maintaining their legitimacy with the next generations.

The news consumption habits of digital natives differ considerably from those of the preceding generation. According to the Digital News Report 2020, 84 percent of people under 25 do not go directly to a media brand's website, but receive their information from what social media, search engines and news aggregators flush into their timelines or onto their screens via push messages. This makes it harder for media brands not only to reach young audiences but also to build brand loyalty. Irish RTÉ's Rory Coveney says: "While trusted media brands are hugely important, young people are more loyal to content and programming than necessarily to brands. You have to get your content right."

But what do we know about young people's media consumption: what do they like, what do they ignore, when do they tune in and when do they tune out? Judging by how much and how long the topic has preoccupied newsrooms, research on this is scant. The EBU has done plenty to capture and analyse the preferences and habits of children and young adults in the context of its [Young Audiences initiative](#).⁸⁸ This report will not repeat its findings at length. Suffice to say, this study reveals several insights which echo the findings about news avoiders in general.

Importantly, many young people are interested in the world around them — but not always in what seasoned politics and feature editors find exciting. Those who enjoy journalism like to check out the local news. Anything to do with climate, environmental protection and science is sought after, at least by those with a higher education. Former CBC Editor-in-Chief Jennifer McGuire says: "Public service media has to start connecting to content that is relevant to the generations they serve. Climate change is under covered, for example." Mainstream media needs to understand these trends. "It's not just politics, it's not just the economy, it's not just war. There's a lot going on in society."

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



What unites all younger users is a preference for lighter content. According to the German #usethenews study, 'funny and strange' is consistently well received. In any case, humour is a pretty sure way to reach generations Y and Z — those who came of age at the turn of the millennium and those born around that time.⁸⁹ But beware: this is not necessarily the kind of humour that some seasoned journalists and editors might consider funny. Fairness is important with young people; many of them do not appreciate jokes at the expense of those with less social standing. In the humour department, the same applies as when using uncertain sources: If in doubt, leave it out. (See Q&A with Nic Newman, p. 92)

NRK's Head of News, Helje Solberg, shares some general insights: "We know quite a lot about what the concern of young people is. They are very value driven. They want to understand the society around them. They are interested in foreign news. Climate journalism is their number one interest. Tolerance, diversity, anti-racism, all this is very important to them." Younger customers also enjoyed podcasts and visual formats. "We need much more visuality in our digital journalism," Solberg says. Another expectation of the younger generation might be much harder to fulfil by newsrooms that have grown used to the factual language of impartial reporting. "Young people trust us and say that we deliver high quality journalism, but they also say that we are too distant and a bit boring. We are conscious about keeping the high trust (...), but we also want to appear a bit warmer, more engaging, a bit more courageous," Solberg says. "When we have stories with young people written by young people, that has more traction." That is why NRK established a unit exclusively staffed by young journalists who only serve that audience.

German BR listened to young employees who had an idea that initially sounded somewhat off beat: Rent an apartment in Munich and film a cast of young flatmates who discuss news topics, they suggested. The 'News WG' became a big hit, particularly with young women, an audience BR had previously had trouble reaching, as Director of Information Thomas Hinrichs explains. "This was disruptive. We have 110,000 subscribers to the format now, many of them women younger than 30 who want to be informed by their peers. And it is actually cost-efficient: renting a studio for one evening costs as much as the apartment per month." This does not mean BR has all its problems solved. "We have trouble reaching non-academic and hedonistic milieus with our formats, that's what we have to work on," Hinrich says. The latter group reject any type of conventions and societal expectations; attracting them to news content is particularly tricky.

With young audiences, there is no way around influencers, but they don't have to be Instagram marketing heroes. When the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter had Greta Thunberg manage the news desk for one day in 2020, several thousand digital subscriptions poured in within 24 hours. Celebrities help to increase reach and get messages across. But to appeal to young audiences, they need to come across as relatable human beings, not as officials. Having the movie star talk about politics and the politician talk about movies can make both more credible. Young people can easily distinguish between genuine authenticity and staged approachability.

Also, diversity counts — and not just as a box-ticking exercise. Young people expect a program or brand to portray the world as they experience it. This includes language that is both casual and respectful and content that has something to do with their everyday

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



lives. A joint study by market researcher Flamingo and the Reuters Institute concluded that news should be useful and fun to be attractive for generations Y and Z.⁹⁰ Constructive journalism which opens up their world with different perspectives is particularly well received by young people. The success of science-driven formats such as RTÉ's Brainstorm or the German (print!) magazine *Katapult*, which relies on infographics and social sciences content, prove the point.

Needless to say, journalism catering to young generations must be easily accessible and intuitive to use. While Amazon, PayPal, Spotify et al have set the gold standard in user-friendliness for all generations, younger people will be particularly unforgiving. This is about technology and platforms, but also about content. The interactive infographic with three bullet points will almost always beat the 1,000 words of editorial; the snappy video will land better than a drawn-out documentary — unless it is high quality and highly engaging. Complexity used to be a sign of quality; today it must be justified.

Swedish TV has experienced some success with younger generations. SVT is now by far the number one digital news choice for Swedes between 20 and 39 years old. In 2021, 26 percent of this age group named it as their preferred destination, compared to only nine percent in 2017. A targeted video strategy has been at the core of these gains. Kristian Lindquist, Digital Program Manager, [lists the key components](#): first, clarity in the promise — young people expect to know exactly what they will get and how much time it will take. Second, a particular, ideally surprising angle — “we see that the audience drops off and stops watching as soon as a video starts to idle.” Third, the option to watch the video on silent so as not to bother others, for example on public transport. Fourth, going live fast in breaking news situations; and fifth, the importance of the right tool — traditional broadcasting equipment often cannot deliver the quality and speed that young viewers appreciate.⁹¹ Lindquist emphasizes that there is no time for complacency: “Through focus groups, we know that the younger audience appreciates that we portray the whole country and that we are credible and reliable. But they also think that our videos are paced too slowly and take far too long to get to the point.”

The competing German public broadcasters ARD and ZDF have developed ‘funk’, a digital content network for 14- to 29-year-olds that is proving to be quite popular ([see case study ‘Funk’, p. 105](#)). Funk’s Nicola Staender says: “We have to think realistically about how to approach these new groups and also see the platforms as an opportunity. Actually, it is not the target group that is difficult, but the changed user habits. Who do we reach with which topics, with which format and on which platform, and where do we have to improve? These are the important questions.”

A smart social media strategy is essential for reaching young people in the third-party platform driven environment. Germany’s leading news department ARD Aktuell has been very successful on certain channels, namely Instagram and TikTok. Their Editor-in-Chief Digital, Juliane Leopold, describes the strategy in a case study ([see case study ‘The Social Media Strategy of Tagesschau’, p. 146](#)). France Télévisions also tries to reach

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



young people on Twitch, “with some success,” according to their Director News Innovation and External Affairs, Eric Scherer: “We even interviewed the French Prime Minister on Twitch.” They have also done things like showing behind the scenes of the main newsroom. Young people use their own vocabulary and grammar, he says, and they are interested in solutions. “We have launched a new environmental news service for younger people, solutions to fight climate change, with German public broadcaster WDR.”

Kai Gniffke, Director General of German SWR, thought extensively about how to foster innovation when he commenced in 2019. SWR’s ‘X-Lab’ has developed into a prime space to develop formats. “We started a pitching process where we push the development of formats that we need to reach our development goals. We supported 60 new format ideas in 18 months,” he says. Much of those did not have any connection to linear programming, he says. “There’s a lot of fresh and cool content among it. For example, the talk format ‘Five Souls’ on YouTube, where young people from migrant communities talk about daily life with a perspective that is hard to understand for those outside of their communities. They ask questions like: Would you tell your mother-in-law that her cooking is awful?” Gniffke was particularly pleased with the results of the Instagram project, ‘*Ich bin Sophie Scholl*’ about a Munich student who was executed by the Nazis for distributing political flyers. “We had more than 800,000 subscribers for this. It is proof that young people enjoy relevant content. This wasn’t cheap. But this is serious journalism.”

Martin Řezníček, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of News at Czech TV emphasizes that encouraging young people to contribute themselves is also an important loyalty creating strategy. “We built a webpage for people’s videos; we verify newsworthy video and then publish it. This is a big revolution in public service media. You can have live shots from anywhere now with your phone, you don’t need trucks anymore, you don’t need hours to get there. It shows people we are on their side.” This tactic will most likely help reach all generations. Research done by Norwegian NRK has established a connection between serving young audiences and those who are older but less educated. Head of News Helje Solberg: “There are indications that we see many of the measures that help us to reach younger audiences will also help to reach broader audiences.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 11 NOURISHING TRUST

CONTRARY TO A PREVAILING NARRATIVE, PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA HAVE ENJOYED HIGH LEVELS OF TRUST IN RECENT YEARS, PARTICULARLY DURING THE PANDEMIC. NOW THEY NEED TO CAPITALISE ON IT.

Public service media does not have a trust problem: it has a trust challenge. The pandemic showed that trust in media is not in terminal decline and that it can in fact grow. But as the 'Trust and Democracy' data shows, there still is a major problem of trust where public service media is perceived as weak or compromised. Trust in media is also significantly impacted by the divides in society. The media features in that very debate, as has been seen in the US and some European countries. On average, though, the pandemic has proven to be a trust booster. Even young audiences felt they were best served by resorting to traditional brands when trying to find out what to do and what not to. Covid-19 can be seen as a renaissance for journalism, and many newsrooms rose to the challenge.

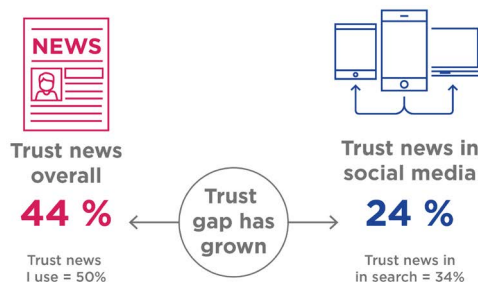
This has come as a relief to many media leaders. "Trust is the core currency of a public broadcaster," Rory Coveney of Irish RTÉ says. NRK's Head of News, Helje Solberg, is excited about the figures from Norway: "During the pandemic we have seen record audiences. For the first six months we reached 92 percent of the population every day. 86 percent say they trust NRK. The pandemic is good for trust in news in the coming years. We are in a very good position."

For broadcasters in markets where public service media are widely accepted, such as Norway, this is very good news. For those who suffer from political attacks it could serve as life insurance. Martin Řezníček of Czech Television: "Trust has been stable for quite some time, and it is quite high. We have one of the highest audiences in Europe. We were praised by experts on how we covered the Covid-19 crisis. Our TV Council would never praise our coverage, but the public did. Our commercial competitors' market share has gone down." This is a good basis to work from, but Řezníček is realistic. "There is a part of society that is prone to populism and easy solutions, and they will never like us. Still, it is our duty to extend our hand to this audience. They pay their license fee as well."

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2**
- PART 3
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES

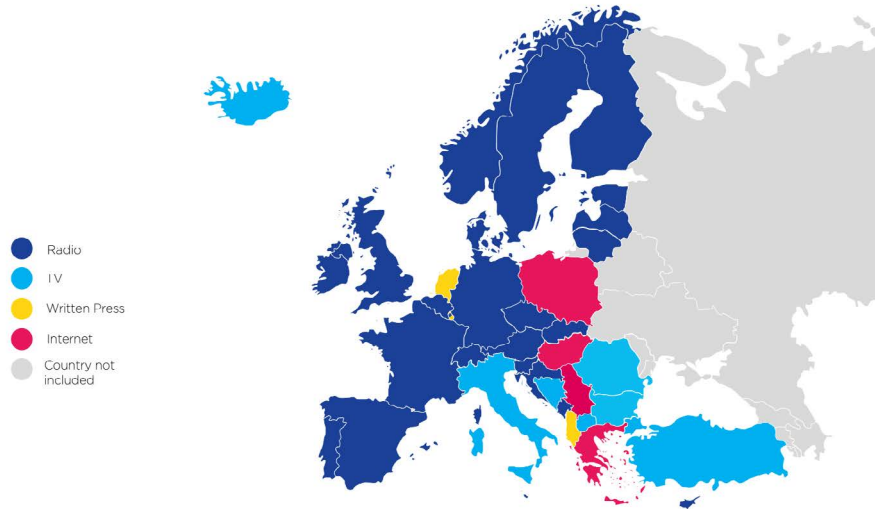
FIGURE OVERALL TRUST IN NEWS IS UP-REVERSING RECENT DECLINES

Proportion that trust most news of the time is up six percentage points while trust in distributed environments stays at similar levels to last year



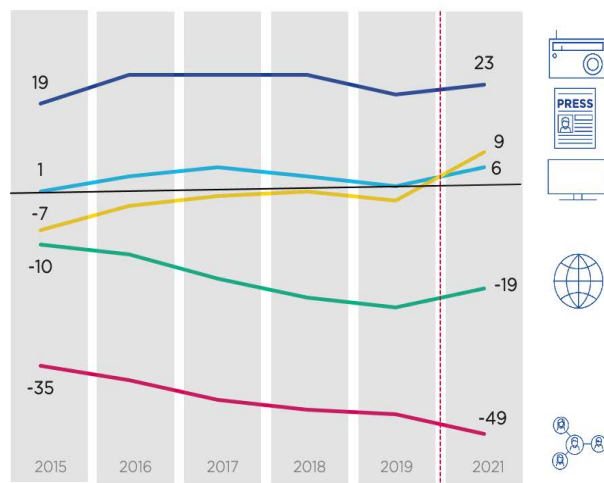
SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2021; POLLING BY YOUNG&UPM

FIGURE 8, MOST TRUSTED MEDIA IN SELECTED EBU MEMBER STATES (NET TRUST INDEX 2021)



SOURCE: EBU MEDIA INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, 2021

FIGURE 9 DEVELOPMENT OF TRUST IN MEDIA ACROSS EU MEMBER STATES



NET TRUST INDEX =
'% of people who tend to trust' - '% of people who tend not to trust'

NOTE: SURVEY RESULTS AT EU LEVEL REPRESENT A WEIGHTED AVERAGE ACROSS EU MEMBER STATES, APPLYING OFFICIAL POPULATION FIGURES PROVIDED BY EUROSTAT. UNTIL 2019: DATA INCLUDES UK (EU28); FROM 2021: EU 27 ONLY. COMPARISONS SHOULD BE DRAWN CAREFULLY DUE TO THIS AND CHANGES OF METHODOLOGY IN A RANGE OF COUNTRIES BECAUSE OF THE COVID-19 SANITARY CRISIS. NO SURVEY DATA IN 2020.

SOURCE: EBU MEDIA INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, 2021

Research shows that trust in media is very much linked to trust in institutions and the political process.⁹² When there are contested elections or heated public debates on certain issues, trust tends to drop. It is comparatively high in countries with strong public service media that are fairly independent from political interference and lower in markets with a lower quality media landscape. This is analysed at length in the [EBU "Trust in Media 2021"](#)

[Report](#).⁹³ Trust in radio has always been exceptional in the majority of markets (see figure 8). But traditional media in general has profited from consistently low levels of trust in social media and search engines, namely Facebook and Google (figure 9). Media coverage of the Silicon Valley monopolies' behaviours has certainly contributed to this effect, as has disturbing individual activities on certain platforms.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



That's why Pascal Doucet-Bon, Deputy Director of News at France Télévisions, is less euphoric about the rise in trust numbers: "I'm not sure the situation is so shiny. Maybe trust has increased by default. The population increasingly distrusts social networks, private news channels and opinion radio. Public service media is perceived as the safe haven. I'm not sure public support is enthusiastic. It is good for us to see the results, but I say: be careful. We shouldn't be overly optimistic." Being careful for France Télévisions means investing in fact-checking, images certification and transparency ([see case study 'NosSources', p. 108](#)).

In France, trust in media dropped massively during the 2018 yellow vest protests. This contributed to it being one of the least trusted markets in the Digital News Report sample, with only about one in four French people saying they trusted the media in 2020. This share rose by seven points during the pandemic but was still only at 30 percent in 2021. France Télévisions scored better with 62 percent, but still lower than most of its European public service media peers. Eric Scherer, Director News Innovation and External Affairs at France Télévisions, is worried: "People are no longer sharing the same reality. We have a professional way of covering news that seems to have lost some appeal. It used to be that when you wanted to be sure about the news you went to the public service. Not anymore. (...) We need to defend our status in our own country. We need to show that we are not a state media but a public media as in a common good service."

Transparency is also what Czech TV had in mind when navigating the Covid-19 challenge. Martin Řezníček describes: "We couldn't invite people to the studio, we invited people to our parking lot. Every Friday we went to a particular region. We invited people on stage, let them say what they think. We talked to people openly. We did not want to be in a glass bubble."

Establishing trust is also at the core of the Journalism Trust Initiative, a project conceived and led by Reporters Without Borders, the EBU and news agency AFP ([see case study 'Journalism Trust Initiative', p. 52](#)). Here, the concept of trust moves beyond content to have news media scrutinise and report on the structures and processes that make them trustworthy. Eventually, the trust rating is intended to affect algorithmic choices by providing a standardised quality indicator based on the ISO standardisation system.

One strategy to increase trust is to get closer to where people live. Regionalisation efforts like those undertaken by BBC and SVT might not only help to reflect society more realistically but also help people trust journalists and relate to the news ([see Q&A with Fran Unsworth, p. 95](#)). German BR has also promoted local coverage. Thomas Hinrichs says: "We invested in the regions. Now we can reach every location in Bavaria within 60 minutes. We want to show people we are there." Dmitry Shishkin thinks that with the uptake in digital journalism, a lot of potential could be unlocked with hyperlocal media. "If you are bringing value at neighbourhood level, this is how you build trust and help people solve their problems. Don't get overwhelmed by big issues, start small."

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



For Douglas Smith, who has led digital transformation programmes for regional newsrooms, local journalism is not only about re-establishing trust with audiences. “It is the most powerful way to revitalise society, to rediscover and give meaning to communities. Society has shifted from a world of friends, families, and place to a world of markets, networks, and organisations. That shift has left a vacuum locally. Place has lost a lot of its actual historic meaning; local journalism has an opportunity to restore shared purpose in place.”

One positive effect of the debate around distrust in media is that independent newsrooms all over the world have engaged in a broad array of activities to build and enhance trust, ranging from fact-checking and transparency initiatives to engaging the public and running and supporting media literacy campaigns. This has been long overdue. It may not make much of difference to those parts of the population that resort to increasingly radical means of attacking the press or populist politicians who use distrust in investigative and critical media to benefit their campaigns. Media should worry about trust, but should invest even more of their energies in improving their journalism. After all, healthy scepticism, rather than 100 percent trust in authorities, is a fundamental requirement for a lively democracy.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



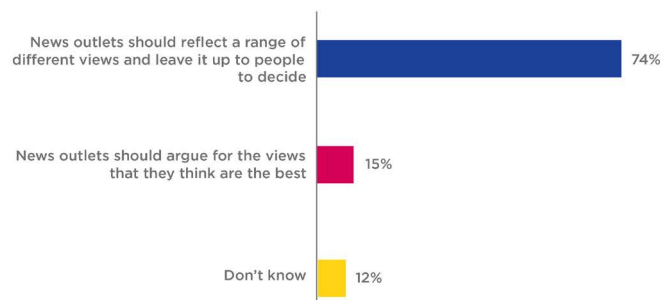
CHAPTER 12 STATING THE CASE FOR IMPARTIALITY

IMPARTIALITY IS THE LIFEBLOOD AND LIFELINE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

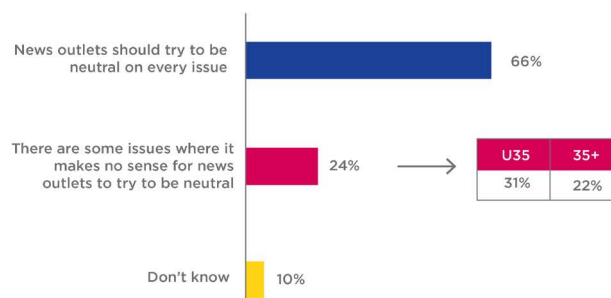
According to research, there is almost no doubt: Audiences prefer impartial news by a wide margin. As set out in the Digital News Reports of 2020 and 2021, the share of those who like to be presented with facts and different points of view varies among countries, but averages at 74 percent. This holds true even for the majority of young audiences, who are often suspected of rejecting the notion of journalistic neutrality. The preference for unbiased journalism is particularly pronounced in countries with strong public service media, which are also the most adamant about impartiality. It forms part of their job description. While commercial media can decide to focus on particular audiences, public broadcasters are obliged to serve all of society. According to Fran Unsworth, Director of BBC News, “being an impartial news service people can trust in this age of disinformation” is the very reason for public service media’s existence.

FIGURE 10 & 11 AUDIENCE VIEWS ON IMPARTIALITY

Still a strong commitment to **ideal** of impartial and objective news



Younger groups are more likely to want news organisations to take a stand on **some issues**



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2021; POLLING BY YOUNGOV

Erik Roose, Director General of Estonian ERR, is clear about what this means. “Every Estonian citizen owns us. Still, everyone has very different expectations; often, if I fulfil one then the fulfilment of the other is impossible.” Minorities demand representation, business people think there is not enough business coverage, others suggest there should be an hour of programming in a particular language, as Roose describes. Given that it is

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2**
- PART 3
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES

impossible to meet all expectations, there is only one way forward: “We must be the central point where we protect the common ideas, not narrow perspectives. To be neutral is like standing in the central plaza of Sarajevo at the height of the war with all snipers shooting at you. This is the only place you can be.”

This feeling of being under constant attack might sound familiar to many public service media organisations which struggle every day to remain impartial but are continuously being accused of taking sides. “Public service media have become part of the culture wars,” Alan Rusbridger, former Editor-in-Chief of *The Guardian* says. Rusbridger spent his career as a journalist in the private sector, but is outspoken about the BBC needing to be defended from attacks by the political right. To him, the business model of public service media — their funding coming from the taxpayer — is the only guarantee that quality journalism will survive. This applies even in areas that have become news deserts because all private publishers quit. “What do you want to tell people in these regions later? ‘It was a tough business, sorry, it didn’t work out?’” he asks. “Public broadcasting doesn’t have to hunt for sensation; it can be as serious as it wants to be. Looking at the UK, I can say: This is an important role.”⁹⁴

Accusing broadcasters of being partisan is a strategy commonly used by populists to question their legitimacy, and bears resemblances to the weaponisation of the term ‘fake news’ by former US President Donald Trump and his supporters. Former CBC Editor-in-Chief Jennifer McGuire says: “There is perception of bias, and then the question: Is there bias? There was always this feeling held by some that CBC was leaning to the left. We did a number of studies, and it turned out not to be true.”

Still, the concept of impartiality leaves room for interpretation. Is it sticking to the facts and excluding opinion? Is it ‘both sides journalism’ which presents opposing views at all costs? Is it about allotting the same time or space for different views, however absurd they might be? Most journalists would agree that defending democracy is at the core of their profession, which makes it counterintuitive to provide airtime to forces that explicitly denounce the concept. But where does the boundary lie? Younger people in particular think that there are some issues where neutrality doesn’t make any sense (see infographic), such as racism and climate change. Interpretation remains tricky, even in these cases. Juliane Leopold, Editor-in-Chief Digital at ARD Aktuell says there is always the issue of being selective: “News curation means selection. If you present it all, there is no curation any longer.”

That is why broadcasters such as the BBC have introduced the concept of due impartiality. This qualifies the concept of total impartiality; in the wording of the British regulator Ofcom, “‘due’ means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme.” It “does not mean an equal division of time has to be given to every view, or that every argument and every facet of every argument has to be represented.”⁹⁵ In line with this concept, a publisher that does not provide space for deniers of climate change or Covid-19, for example, can still be considered impartial. There are a few issues where

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES 

journalism cannot remain neutral, if it does not want to endanger its very foundations — a firm commitment to democracy being the most important one.

Nevertheless, even adhering to due impartiality can be challenging in newsroom life. The social media presence of journalists is particularly difficult to navigate for many publishers. On the one hand, they profit from the strong personal brands of some of their correspondents; on the other, they require news staff to be neutral ([see case study 'BBC's Social Media Guidelines', p. 110](#)). Bakel Walden, Director of Development and Offering at SRG SSR reflects about the conflict around impartiality. “We pay attention to this meticulously, we tick boxes. We also monitor social media. And still, theory clashes with reality at times, because journalists are also expected to raise their profiles on these platforms. This leaves them open to attack, and we don't have a solution for this yet.”

Some feel that the nature of communication on social media will impact people's views on journalism, particularly given that it tends to be the noisy voices that dominate these spaces. RTÉ's Rory Coveney: “Impartiality was once a very well understood idea. In the social media world, it is something many people avoid. They surround themselves with viewpoints that mirror their own. You can't assume that people understand what impartiality means anymore.”

Asking journalists to stick to the facts is easier said than done. Gilles Marchand, Director General of SRG SSR, says: “If we take the case of Covid-19, the public service broadcasters were initially praised for the quality of their journalism. But quickly, our journalists were being targeted by opponents of the prevention measures. We were associated with the authorities because we described the progress of the virus and its consequences and were very strongly attacked as a result. It's a bit like climate change. There too, the simple fact of describing the situation provokes strong reactions from part of the population.”

For SVT's Anne Lagercrantz, it is very much about being transparent about choices: “We need to avoid false balance.” Her newsroom discussed this a lot in relation to the 2020 American presidential election, including publicly: How to cover a lying president? Lagercrantz: “One conclusion is: transparency. We need to better explain journalistic choices. For example: Why do we choose to give airtime to someone who endorses Trump's lies?” France Télévisions started its project ‘NosSources’ to live up to the promise of increased transparency ([see case study 'NosSources', p. 108](#)). Their audiences now receive more background on who experts are and the reasons why they are consulted in certain contexts.

Martin Řezníček of Czech TV describes his approach to avoid false balance: “I view it as keeping a distance. I dive into topics as much as I can, but then I step away. This does not mean bringing on one person with a view, and the next person with a different view, and giving them both the same airtime even with false narratives. (...Let me put it this way: if one person says the earth is round and the other says the earth is flat, it would be strange for us to give them same time.” In a country like the Czech Republic, with nine

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



parties in parliament, every group needs to feel represented, he says. “What you can do: differentiate between political representatives and experts. Politicians you can’t avoid. But you do not have to give the floor to experts who we know will present lies. That is our editorial freedom.”

Former Editor-in-Chief of CBC Jennifer McGuire advocates a clear separation of facts and opinion. “I embrace opinion as part of discourse. But I think there must be a firewall between that and straight news reporting. Opinion pieces must be labelled as such. We need to be an honest broker. (...Some members of our board said: Journalism trends left by default, because we represent voices that won’t otherwise be heard. In terms of political bias, we are most careful. Are we really covering the more conservative views in a meaningful way?” According to Bakel Walden, SRG struggles with the same issue: “Where do we have room for dissenting voices? Where do we find journalists with a conservative, right-leaning view?”

This may also entail a structural challenge. Many media leaders acknowledge their newsrooms are populated with social-sciences-educated journalists from urban backgrounds, people who more likely to lean towards the political left or green parties. However, simply ticking boxes for political diversity in hiring decisions will be a tricky issue for public service media. Views will vary from issue to issue — and they might change. One potentially easier option is to stay away from too much opinion and leave this to private media. ERR’s Erik Roose: “If you start to support different opinions, it is very hard to stop, and to maintain trustworthiness. (...) We are not part of politics, we don’t prefer some parties to others; all positions that are legal are allowed and available, we should not take too active a role as opinion leaders.”

Those who need a to-do list on this topic might well use that of Pascal Doucet-Bon, France Télévisions’ Deputy Director of News. His summary of what public service media need to do: “First, serve democracy by being the place for debates, not for clash; second, be a trusted third party in the war against misinformation and in media education; third, be transparent about our working methods and our possible mistakes, be adult enough to say we were wrong and apologise; fourth, reach a younger audience than that we reach through television; fifth: offer a more realistic vision of society — no, the world is not as bad as we are used to showing it. We need more ideas for solutions and constructive journalism. And this should go without saying: we need more ethno-diversity.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



REFERENCES

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES 

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES 



Q&A 4

NIC NEWMAN

Senior Research Associate at the Reuters Institute, Oxford, and Lead Author of the Digital News Report

“80 PERCENT OF PEOPLE WANT NEWS TO BE IMPARTIAL”

What surprised you most during your research for this year's Digital News Report?

I'm surprised how younger social networks like Instagram and TikTok are taking off for politics and news. They were originally used for fun and entertainment, but with Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter, this seems to have changed. Also, the role of the influencer is a growing story. It will be interesting to watch what media companies do on that note.

You have conducted research on young audiences quite a bit in recent years. What are your findings?

Our data on 18-to-24-year-olds is becoming much clearer. They have very different expectations and attitudes compared to the under 35s group, partly in terms of formats and platforms but also agenda and tone. Many young people feel that the media is unfair to them. Also, they want news to be more fun, which is really hard for public broadcasters to get their heads around. What works for them is informality and personality. But those things can also be very dangerous; they can undermine trust in news organisations.

Which findings in the Digital News Report speak to public service media in particular?

There is a lot of good news in the report for public service broadcasters, and some bad news too. Trust is higher in times of crisis, including in the digital operations of public service media. It increased by far more than it did for commercial broadcasters and other commercial providers. All the digital trends accelerated with Covid-19, which is also a downside because it is harder for public service broadcasters to break through online. The next few years will be really challenging.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Trust is up, but at the same time attacks are on the increase. What is your take on that?

Small partisan groups are very vocal. They feel that the coverage is biased either to the left or the right. It is a pretty small group in total; on average, we are talking about ten percent who say they distrust public broadcasters. Twitter is inflamed with politicians' narrative against public service broadcasters and liberal elites. And then you have the mainstream commercial media who feel that their commercial objectives are threatened. It is incredibly difficult to counter, people who are against something tend to be much more vocal. So, you need to mobilise people who value public service to speak out, too.

You studied fairness of journalism this year. What's the audience's perception of fairness?

Politics is key, and there are dramatic differences in trust along political affiliations. People on the right in the US, Germany and Nordic countries say that the media is against them and thus unfair. Region was also a major contributing factor: the sense of being left behind is more prominent in regions such as the Eastern part of Germany or the Northeast of England. What surprised us a bit: generally, women did not feel unfairly treated by mainstream media.

The report confirmed that most people would like news to be impartial, but in their news consumption, they click on opinion. What have you learned?

It is reassuring that 80 percent of people want news to be free of bias and impartial. They like opinion, but they want the facts to come before opinion. The problem with new digital media is that there is often little scope for context. Broadcasters are increasingly taking sides and people are drawn to these biases.

Many young people say impartiality never existed anyway; everyone has a perspective. Our findings don't confirm this notion. We didn't find much difference in age groups with the impartiality question. What differed slightly were responses to the question: should media be neutral about every issue? Young people want their brands to share their values more. Many young people feel comfortable with *The Guardian's* commitment to climate change coverage, for example. The debate is shifting a bit, more people are saying the media cannot be neutral about democracy, racism, climate change. But even young people say: we should hear the other side.

As someone with extensive experience in public broadcasting: In which areas are public broadcasters slower than commercial media, and what are they better at?

When I was involved in start of the BBC's news website, it was all about speed. You had to be first. But on the internet, there is always someone faster. Now, it is about being right, reasonably fast and offering verified information. Public service media have become quite good at this. The future media environment is changing. Commercial companies with subscription models will do more with opinion; other organisations will go for a limited reach that gets clicks. Public service media need to fill the gap. This might sound slightly unsexy, but these changes in business models will increase

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

the need for public service media. Bureaucracy within public service broadcasters can be frustrating and makes innovation hard, but when they put their minds to something, they can shift the market and have a huge impact. They have the size and scope to bring the nation together.

What should public service media stop doing?

This is a really hard question. You have to serve your audiences. You need to think harder about where you are overserving. And you have to find a way of doing stuff more affordably, and investing more in the future.

If you had to offer one piece of advice to a public service media organisation, what would that be?

Do more things that bring people together, the big moments. Cover foreign news. Articulate your message much more clearly: we are efficient and still relevant.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



Q&A 5

FRAN UNSWORTH

Director News and Current Affairs, BBC News

“WE TRY TO PUT THE AUDIENCE AT THE HEART OF OUR DECISION MAKING”

What do you see as the biggest current challenges for public service media?

One challenge is how to stay as relevant as they have been, despite the huge growth in the video market in particular which erodes loyalty to public service media. How to maintain audiences is the biggest issue. Another one is how to deal with hostile governments which don't understand the role public service media has to play. Explaining to them how important those media are, that they are playing a vital role on behalf of the public. And the third challenge: Having enough money to spend.

What have the BBC's strategic responses to these challenges been?

First of all, stating the case for news. That we are an impartial news service people can trust in this age of disinformation. You need to make sure that you are putting universality at the heart of what you do, making sure you are serving all audiences, not just a particular demographic. We really try to put the audience at the heart of our decision making. We have done a lot of research and have a lot of information about where we do well and where we do less well. A lot of our programmes are targeted at affluent people in urban areas that are quite diverse. We need to focus more on rural areas and less affluent areas. That's why we are putting a lot of our staff outside of London. We hope we will receive more commissions that reflect the whole of the UK.

Could you tell us a bit more about this regionalisation? How many of your staff are affected?

In news, we are moving 200 jobs out of London in addition to the 4000 jobs that are already in the regions. We are also moving roles to key areas, for example putting some digital jobs in Cardiff. The plan is to get a better spread of stories, approaches to stories, examples that are chosen. We have a north-south split in the UK, it is rural versus urban, towns versus cities. We are trying hard to improve the way we reflect the UK. A lot of our programmes are going on the road. We want to shift the dial.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Trust in public service media is up, but attacks still increase. What is your take on this?

Certainly, we live in a far more polarised world than we used to. It is fuelled quite a bit by social media. This is a noisy space that crowds out lots of views. This goes at the heart of what public service media are: providing all views. The goal is for everybody not to think the same but to live with differences. On social media nobody wants to hear that. There is this concept of safetyism. It goes: "I don't believe your view, I think it is dangerous, that's why I have to shut it down." But better decisions are arrived at through debate. It is one of the biggest threats to public service media: that people are defaulting to services which reinforce their existing world view. We have a more important role to play than ever.

Many politicians argue that people have enough choices in this information environment, they are capable of choosing what they like and feel is important.

We keep hearing that. But obviously there are also a lot of politicians that do make our case. Many have seen that without us they would have struggled much more with managing Covid-19, for example. I am worried about the politicisation of public service media: If they are not at a distance from governments, if they become the mouth pieces of governments, that would be a dangerous state for nations to be in. Because then people would lose trust in public service media. Many people think: It was on the BBC, therefore it is true. This is so vital. We have a mission to attempt to tell the truth.

But impartiality seems to be a contested concept for some. What is your position?

We are always talking about due impartiality. When 99 percent of scientists say that global warming is man-made and one percent says it isn't, there can't be as much space for the one percent. There is such a thing as truth. Impartiality is not being balanced; it is important to understand the difference between the two. That has always been the BBC's approach to impartiality.

How does BBC News deal with funding pressures? What will you do and what will you stop doing?

We spend several million pounds each year. We could always use more. We need to focus on how we spend that money and what really delivers audiences value. It's hard to stop doing things, because everything serves somebody, even if it is only a small audience. When you cut something, there is often a big protest from that part of the audience. But we cannot do everything that we do at the moment.

What have you been most proud of in recent years?

I'm really proud of our response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We did extremely well on helping the public through this pandemic. We have helped people to understand the policies, and helped audiences to understand different views. We saw incredible numbers coming to us, we had huge figures for TV as well as our digital services. It shows people trusted us.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 07

AI AND AUTOMATION LAB BR

INSIDE THE LAB: ALGORITHMIC ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING AND AI ETHICS AT BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK



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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has seen a strong interest from the journalistic community in recent years. News organisations such as the BBC, *The New York Times* and Associated Press have been at the forefront of thinking about, developing, and deploying AI solutions in various contexts in the hope of improving their journalism, audience outreach, and revenue streams. German Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) has invested considerable resources in exploring how to work with AI in a public service context. Most notably, its work around algorithmic accountability reporting and its new set of AI ethics guidelines have attracted attention.

The effort is centred in an interdisciplinary AI Lab, which is unique to German broadcasting network ARD, according to Uli Köppen. She leads the AI and Automation Lab at BR, a team consisting of journalists, machine learning experts, coders and product managers and tasked with everything around the development and implementation of AI in the context of newsrooms. “We owe this to the openness of the management, but also to the willingness of other departments and newsrooms to work with us.” What is so special about it is the collaborative concept: The Lab is working hand in hand with the data team BR Data and the investigative team BR Recherche, co-operating on investigative and product projects. The department leads, Köppen and her colleague Verena Nierle, established “a shared mindset and working culture,” as she puts it. So called ‘ad hoc teams’ allow a fluid collaboration among specialists across all three teams. Köppen is particularly proud of their ‘embedding model’: “We have people on our team who go to other departments for a while and perhaps even stay there. This creates fruitful and long-lasting connections which are great for the work we do.”

Much of this work centres around journalism. For many news organisations, the emphasis of AI in media — usually various forms of machine learning — has been on reaching audiences or developing tools to improve efficiency. BR wanted to show it also has a role in investigative journalism. The so-called algorithmic accountability reporting is the journalistic investigation of the politics of code.¹ “The idea is to keep an eye on companies and governments that use various algorithms for different ends. For that, you need teams that can both theoretically understand a question or problem at hand, but are also technically able to conduct these investigations,” explains Uli Köppen. One example of this kind of reporting is a 2020 investigation into the prevalence of hate speech in private

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

¹ [HTTPS://WWW.NIEMANLAB.ORG/2018/12/MORE-ALGORITHMIC-ACCOUNTABILITY-REPORTING-AND-A-LOT-OF-IT-WILL-BE-MEH/](https://www.niemanlab.org/2018/12/more-algorithmic-accountability-reporting-and-a-lot-of-it-will-be-meh/)

Facebook groups in which BR's teams used, among other things, a freely available machine learning image recognition algorithm (developed by Facebook itself) to identify SS-runes and swastikas in more than 2.6 million posts and comments. This showed that Facebook theoretically has the tools to moderate such instances of hate speech.²

Köppen also points to another example where her team investigated the fairness of an AI-based software which promises fairer job interviews by creating personality profiles of applicants based on short videos.³ The BR's investigation suggested that the software could not deliver on its promise. "We looked closely at the software and could show that it had several weaknesses. We were able to show that the support for recruiters does not really work as promised," explains Köppen.

When working with AI, her team soon became aware that there were no ethical guidelines for the use of AI in newsrooms, particularly not in a public service context. That is when a group of people with different roles started to discuss and draft a set of principles that could guide them through uncharted territory. The key points: AI must add value and not just be an end in itself. Its use must be transparent and accountable. And AI should benefit the user, while editorial control ultimately remains with journalists. At the same time, however, BR should strive to demystify and better explain AI in order to contribute to a greater understanding of the technology among the public.



PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Publishing the guidelines has had positive ripple effects beyond BR. "We have been contacted by many others who are working on similar topics, for example Deutsche Welle, and we've also been talking to the BBC and renowned experts and scientists. It was very helpful to discuss where their focus is and how they deal with the issues emerging from the use of AI." Köppen says that the goal is to discuss and rethink these rules with others in the future, and perhaps implement mechanisms to check whether these rules are being followed in practice.

² [HTTPS://INTERAKTIV.BR.DE/HASSMASCHINE/ENGLISH.HTML](https://interaktiv.br.de/hassmaschine/english.html)

³ [HTTPS://WWW.BR.DE/NACHRICHTEN/NETZWELT/KUENSTLICHE-INTELLIGENZ-ZUR-PERSOENLICHKEITSANALYSE-FRAGWUERDIG.SPBPMWR](https://www.br.de/nachrichten/netzwelt/kuenstliche-intelligenz-zur-persoenslichkeitsanalyse-fragwuerdig.spbpmwr)

Limits to innovation around AI are often in the form established structures, Köppen reflects. “Especially when it comes to larger infrastructures, there is a desire and willingness to make improvements, but at the same time you have to deal with very complex structures shared between different departments. This is often a long and tough process, and you have to do a lot of lobbying.” She mentions four main lessons in developing AI structures within large organisations: “First, trust is important. You have to trust other people’s judgment in many areas. That takes practice.” Second and at least as important is breaking down silos, she says, ideally with small innovation teams. Third, this needs to be supported by management. And finally, development opportunities for the staff are especially important, to get the right people. “Someone who has mastered machine learning can earn much more money at technology companies. For these people, it is important that they get meaningful tasks and opportunities to grow, even outside traditional career paths. This is where public broadcasters have a lot of catching up to do.”

BR'S AI ETHICS GUIDELINES: [HTTPS://WWW.BR.DE/EXTRA/AI-AUTOMATION-LAB-ENGLISH/AI-ETHICS100.HTML](https://www.br.de/extra/ai-automation-lab-english/ai-ethics100.html)

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 08

SVERIGES RADIO'S NEWS VALUES PROJECT

ALGORITHMS THAT CARRY PUBLIC SERVICE SPIRIT

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When it comes to algorithms, media professionals tend to focus on those they cannot control. They wonder how to optimise their offerings to maximise their impact on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram or other platforms they need to reach audiences. Not so at Sveriges Radio (SR). In 2018, an innovation team at the Swedish public broadcaster decided to exert some control over the world of digital choice, at least on their home turf. The News Values project was born: a ground-breaking effort that offers listeners a feed of newsclips, but with a significant difference to regular feeds which are mostly determined by preference and habit-based algorithms. Clips are ranked partly according to public service news value. And the system has proven to be successful: "People tend to listen to nine to ten clips in a row, on average they spend ten minutes in each session," Olle Zachrison says, SR's Head of Digital News Strategy and Deputy News Commissioner.

He recalls the decisive team meeting: "I clearly remember the day when a senior editor said: we don't really have a system for news evaluation here. Responses in the room were a bit incredulous: 'What? We are doing this all the time.' But the truth was: We had 2,200 staff, 33 newsrooms and 26 local stations around the country. And they all had their own ways to assess the news." But once all stories are gathered and mixed in one news feed, there needs to be clear rules about their ranking.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



In most newsrooms, this is a touchy subject because editors have long been taking pride in their own news judgment. Indeed, this is often how they validate their very existence in a world where choices are increasingly made by software. One major attraction for journalists in the Swedish project is that they are still very much part of the game. The editors rank the news clips, not machines. But they are not entirely free to choose: there are parameters. Digital news editors rank stories in three dimensions: the magnitude of the story, the lifespan and then — and this is the core of the innovation — the public service value.



“Our commercial competitors use news algorithms, but we wanted to add our own twist,” Olle Zachrisson says. SR initiated a long series of workshops to pin down the essence of public service value. “We use criteria like: Are we out reporting on location? Is this an underreported topic? Is an underserved community featured? Is the audio storytelling compelling? Does it contain unique voices of affected people, not just experts and politicians?” he says. According to Zachrisson, the debates about the criteria have been an interesting journey – and they continue to this day: “Every three weeks we have a meeting with digital editors across the country. That editorial discussion in itself is a value. Often someone asks, for example, why don’t we have enough unique voices? It has provoked quite a positive change in the way we do our journalism. It has made journalists go out more – and even inspired other companies to start identifying public service values,” Zachrisson says.

SR launched the project in 2019, starting a couple of feeds at a time, ultimately covering 26 local news desks around Sweden. Only in the spring of 2021 was it extended to the national desk. Now each clip receives a score that is used by the algorithm to automatically generate a news playlist. “We publish 350 stories a day, all of those stories are now assessed in this system, all news products are automated this way,” Zachrisson explains. An important detail: Editors can’t overrule the score, but they can refresh and republish a story. “We had to give in a little bit,” Zachrisson says, “they needed to be able to pin the top story so that it stays on top.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

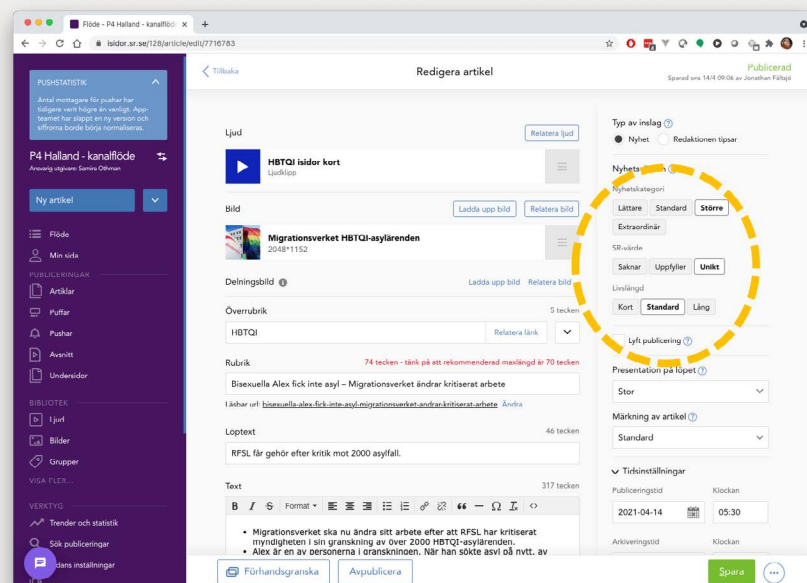
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

The gradual rollout was done in the spirit of digital innovation, very much based on a concept of testing and learning. Zachrison: “We have tried to do it in a decentralised way, not a top-down thing. We started at two or three local stations, and then we rolled it out more. The system grew and evolved gradually. The introduction to the national desk this April was much more difficult, since the volume of clips is so much bigger. It helped that we used local stations as pioneers.”

SR has ambitious plans to develop the system. The current step is personalisation. “We now test mixing high-value clips from your geographical area into the national news playlist. That gives everyone the most important news of the day but with increased local relevance. Later on, we want to do automated newsletters, so that someone for example can subscribe to the most important stories from Stockholm for this week,” Zachrison explains. SR’s conviction is that you can and need to provide a more sophisticated personalisation without diluting the public service principle to always serve the whole audience.

For those interested to copy the concept, he offers some encouragement. “It is totally feasible; you don’t need more than high school math. It is not complicated tech. It is a system for improving our journalism.” The bigger challenge has been to change the whole production model at SR with a digital first approach and a hard focus on audio. Every news story is now a piece of audio that stands alone and can be consumed entirely outside of any broadcast context. This challenges the ways reporters used to work, for SR’s 1,500 journalists all over the country. Zachrison: “Every newsclip has to be a little podcast in itself, it has to be self-explanatory. Producing audio for digital is a big but exciting change.” Going from broadcast radio to a truly digital audio company will take years, Zachrison knows. “The news value system is just the tip of the iceberg.”



PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 09

RTÉ BRAINSTORM

A LOW-COST, HIGH-GAIN STRATEGY TO PUSH QUALITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH ACADEMIA



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“Why are some sports people saying no to Covid-19 vaccines?”

“The great resignation: why are so many people leaving their jobs?”

“Six tips to help children deal with back-to-school anxiety.”

Headlines like these, taken from a September day, are the stuff that [RTÉ Brainstorm](#) is made of. And they might explain why the Irish broadcaster’s offering has become the content of choice for Ireland’s curious minds, especially the younger generation.

“Young people are more loyal to content than to brands, so you have to get your content right,” Rory Coveney, RTÉ’s Director of Strategy concludes. Doing so in a low cost and collaborative way, well, there is not much more you could wish for.

The Brainstorm project has kept its name from the early days, when it was the result of some, well, brainstorming. And it has a headcount of just one on the public broadcaster’s side: one editor commissions, discusses, and edits contributions that are written and submitted by academics from six Irish universities. “The purpose was to make high level research and empirical thinking accessible to a broader public,” Coveney says, who has had a significant hand in the project. And where should one look for a huge body of knowledge if not to the universities?

“My original pitch to the university presidents was: you hold the information, the public should see it. People fund universities, they should see what emerges from them,” Coveney says. He set out to negotiate partnerships. Eventually, agreements were formed, with the universities even contributing financially to the project. “Brainstorm is very low cost; it basically funds itself,” he says.

Luckily, the project was met with enthusiasm by academics who were tired of dealing solely with the slow processes of scientific publishing in peer reviewed journals. When offered the chance to dish out something more digestible and increase their reach, many of them did so readily and have kept doing so, raising their public profile. “We are the most trusted news organisation in Ireland, and we have a huge audience,” Coveney says. That’s what they have come to appreciate, it seems.

Brainstorm has been running since 2017. Since then, more than 2,500 articles have been published. 2,300 academics are now registered; many of them are serial contributors.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

“It has given our audience a richer engagement with a broad range of topics,” Coveney says. While many of the pieces are made to fit the daily news agenda and complement bigger events, a lot of them are features from all kinds of fields, from history and the arts to Brexit and the environment. “We have published articles on every conceivable aspect of climate change, for example, 170 of them so far,” Coveney reports. And he seems to be happy with the uptake. “The pieces are thoughtful and insightful.” RTÉ’s statistics reveal that the audience is young with slightly more female than male members. According to Coveney, Brainstorm articles have on average 7,000 to 8,000 readers, some pieces had more than 100,000. And they have increased the dwell time on RTÉ’s website. “We have found that younger audiences really want quality writing on interesting topics. They want to understand the world in which they live,” Coveney says. The serendipitous effect of this content’s complementary effect on current affairs topics is another plus, and there is plenty of evergreen content that is viewed repeatedly over time.

“There is one piece: ‘What happens to your body when you run a marathon’ — every time we publish it, it gets 20,000 readers,” Coveney reports. Many academics go back to their pieces with new findings and update them at their own initiative. This is good news for newsrooms that tend to get caught up too much in the workings of current affairs to think about polishing old material. “Initially we thought it would be difficult to get academics to be brief. But we were surprised how well that has worked,” Coveney says.

It is no surprise that stories about Covid, Brexit and climate change rate highest with the audience, but this year’s favourite came from a different area: “It was a piece about [why Russian planes are flying over Ireland](#). This had 300,000 readers and was picked up by news aggregators and spread all over the world,” Coveney says.

Apart from strengthening the relationships with the third level sector, the broadcaster benefits from the ever-growing network of contributors. “We have a lot of new voices now on air, in our radio and TV programmes. It is a small project but it has also acted as a catalyst to encourage our own journalists to write features more regularly,” Coveney says. In fact, the website will not be the end of it. Brainstorm has attracted additional funding to produce two radio series with a TV series forthcoming in spring 2022, so expanding its reach.

His team would happily help other public service media to set up similar projects, he adds. In his view, there is a lot of potential for international expansion. “Lots of stuff would work in other countries in different languages. It could be a real repository of knowledge.” He believes that the project fits quite well in the broader context of the misinformation debate. Of course, misinformation requires fact checking. “But another strategy to combat misinformation is to flood platforms with brilliant information, analysis and informed insight,” Coveney is convinced. And this would be in the best tradition of public service media.

BRAINSTORM WEBSITE: [HTTPS://WWW.RTE.IE/BRAINSTORM](https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm)

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 10

FUNK, ARD/ZDF

REACHING YOUNG PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE: FUNK



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In the long list of worries that plague most public service media these days, one that consistently comes out on top is some variation on “What on earth should we do about young people?” Amid changing media habits, younger audiences are seen as particularly hard to reach yet crucial for public service media’s long-term survival and relevance. Tried and tested formats seem to show little effect in attracting and retaining a younger audience. So, how can public service media become and stay relevant for generations Y and Z?

Aware of the scale of the challenge, in 2016 Germany’s public broadcasters ARD and ZDF came up with an unusual solution: they re-thought their approach to young audiences and joined forces and created funk¹, a content network for people between 14 and 29 with a strong presence on social media platforms ranging from YouTube to TikTok and its own web app. These days, funk produces over 60 programmes for various social media platforms. “Funk was born out of an attempt to reach young people with content where they are — that is, on platforms — rather than trying to pull them into linear offerings,” explains Nicola Staender, Head of Content at funk. At the same time, says Staender, funk also serves to further develop in-house online competence at the two broadcasters.

When it comes to developing content, funk follows an almost sociological approach. “We think in terms of issues and interests rather than just demographics. In doing so, we didn’t see ourselves as the norm or the gold standard.” Apart from analysing online metrics, the funk team uses qualitative research methods such as interviews and participant observation. “We hang out where communities already exist, for example on Instagram or Reddit and use this to inform our programming,” says Staender. The result are formats that do not shy away from discussing difficult topics or those that are stigmatised — paedophilia, poverty, sex and gender, or mental health, to name just a few. But in the end, they all follow funk’s motto: to entertain, inform, and guide. The last point in particular is important for younger people, says Staender. “We want to give orientation in a world that can sometimes overwhelm you, and help you find your own identity and interests.”

Diversity is crucially important here. “For one, diversity is something completely normal for us and the people we cater to. In our target group, for example, an estimated one in three has a migration background,” says Staender. According to her, funk is committed to the public service mission in that it wants to make all realities of life visible and show more

¹ WHICH CAN MEAN “BROADCAST” BUT IS ALSO AN ABBREVIATION OF THE TERM FOR “SPARK” IN GERMAN.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

than just a mainstream or middle-class perspective — not least in order to act as a guide in how compassionate and tolerant coexistence in society can work. funk's organisational structure also helps with this: "The individual formats are organised very independently under the funk umbrella brand, which makes it easier to make this work. We develop and produce all content for social networks and adapt the content depending on the platform. An Instagram format, for example, will use all the interaction possibilities of the platform and, of course, we will not simply upload YouTube videos to TikTok."

In developing its formats and content, funk also collaborates with people who are already influential in certain communities. There are several reasons for this. "We think a lot about who to bring on board — for example, existing influencers — in order not to produce anything embarrassing, but also to draw attention to our content and guarantee wider reach," explains the ZDF journalist. However, she points out that it is also important to be modest and not to think, "We have the best ideas!" Instead, Staender says, helping those who already produce great content and have a small audience but perhaps haven't yet had their breakthrough can be a great way to find new and fresh voices. "I would find it a pity if such content was not promoted and supported." Funk tries to connect the vision of these people with the vision and quality standards of public service media, by offering editorial support and training. Editorial control, however, always remains with the funk team.

One paradigm that funk rejected from the outset — perhaps a key ingredient to its success — is the widespread idea that Millennials and Generation Y are difficult audiences. "Why are they considered difficult? This assumption has to be questioned in the first place," says Staender. "I don't think that younger audiences themselves are the problem, but the general change in media consumption itself." Consequently, much more self-reflection on the part of public service media is important, she argues, especially by asking the question, "Why are some formats popular with younger audiences and what can we learn from these?" According to the ZDF journalist, public service media must move towards these groups instead of expecting the reverse. Rather than seeing platforms and the formats that prevail as a threat, they should be treated as a learning opportunity.

Despite funk's success, issues remain. "The greatest challenge are the youngest cohorts, especially those between ages 14 and 18. You have to be careful not to make it too easy for yourself. Here it would be fatal not to stay up to date with shifting trends and interests," Staender says. Another challenge is politically motivated attacks and criticism. "For example, when we do a report about transgender issues, there are often emails to the editor afterwards." But society is changing, and it is important to be part of this change, argues Staender. "For example, we must not ignore certain topics just because an older audience can't cope with them. We make programmes first and foremost for our audience." Nevertheless, Staender emphasizes the importance of always being able to explain one's own methods and decisions, not least to make it easier to counter politically motivated criticism. And, of course, criticism also comes from the very people funk tries to reach. "There is always justified criticism, especially from our target audience. For example, we don't always succeed in illuminating topics sufficiently from all angles. We take this very seriously."

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

So, what's next for funk? Staender hopes for more collaboration between public service media. "You don't always have to see everything as competition. Why don't we also collaborate more, especially when it comes to delivering the content that the market can't or won't deliver?" Funk is a good example of this, she thinks, but in her opinion more could be done. One thing that will always have to remain front and centre, according to Staender, is a willingness to constantly second-guess oneself. "Where are the people for whom we are doing and how do we reach them? How do we open up to sections of society that are underrepresented? How can we create something that leads to more unity and less polarisation, especially in a market where other players are trying to fuel or exploit division rather than heal it? These are the questions we need to be asking again and again."

WEBSITE OF FUNK: [HTTPS://WWW.FUNK.NET/](https://www.funk.net/)

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 11

SOURCE TRANSPARENCY WITH FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS

“NOSSOURCES IS FOR THE PUBLIC, BUT ALSO TO PRODUCE BETTER JOURNALISM”



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You could call it a moment of clarity. Pascal Doucet-Bon, France Télévision’s Deputy Director of News, recalls the experience that opened his eyes on transparency. “About two years ago, we were having this huge, three-month long debate about trust between the public and large media organisations. One day, a man called and told me we shouldn’t be surprised trust was declining among our audience,” Doucet-Bon says. When shopping for groceries, he could make informed choices, because products were clearly labelled with ingredients. With news, he had to rely on the promise of the brand. “He told me: ‘Guys, it can’t work like this anymore.’” Without sharing sources, you can’t have trust, the caller elaborated. “I was a little ashamed to admit that he was right. Any supermarket grocery item was more transparent than the news. But back then, I didn’t know what to do about it.”

Doucet-Bon kept toying with the subject. Across all its channels, France Télévisions broadcasts 60 hours of news every day, more than any other newsroom in Europe. But trust in media is comparatively low in France. They scored just 30 percent in the 2021 Digital News Report after a pandemic-induced hike of seven percentage points and a steep decline the year before. The yellow vest protests, which targeted the establishment, had left their mark. A project to build trust seemed essential for the industry. But what would be the equivalent of a nutritional label on news item? “We work with public money; the public has a right to know and judge our sources.” This was the thought that prompted Doucet-Bon. It still took a while and a change in leadership for the idea to evolve. But eventually, on 31 May of this year, “*nosSources*” was born.

The concept is simple. In every story published digitally, the audience can now choose to see the sources. They can access studies, infographics or additional information about experts that are quoted. “This has turned out to be particularly important in the vaccination debate,” Doucet-Bon says. Opponents of vaccination have in some cases deliberately screened and challenged sources and questioned the competence of scientists and doctors or tried to link them to the pharmaceutical industry. Obviously, sourcing has its limits in journalism: “We never give away any confidential sources, of course. And with some reporting there are no sources, for example if someone spends a night with homeless people,” Doucet-Bon explains.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

The goals were clear from the outset. Doucet-Bon: “We wanted to achieve two things: First, to be transparent for our audiences. Second, to get our journalists to be more serious about the choice of their sources.” Before the project was introduced, some reporters did what probably happens in many newsrooms. Experiencing time pressure, they quoted sources that others have used without tracing their origin, particularly figures. At times it even became obvious to the audience: the same experts were asked to comment again and again. “*NosSources* is not only for the public but also to produce better journalism.”

The project’s development took a while. “The process was traditional for an innovation subject,” Doucet-Bon says. Management was interested in making changes, and the board wanted to see progress on trust issues. “So, we got a working group together.” This was comprised of journalists from the national newsroom, regional newsrooms and newsrooms serving the French territories all around the world. They started to design the project and the resulting workflows. As the project was intended to be agile, testing ensued. The business desk ran the first test in February; three weeks later the national desk followed without publishing anything. “The most important work was to convince the journalists,” Doucet-Bon recalls. “We benefited from the passive support of the union, even though we asked for additional work without additional money. But they understood the goal.” This was significant in France, where the absence of protests is a kind of tacit agreement.

After its launch, *nosSources* did not suddenly push traffic to franceinfo.fr, the French market leader in digital news. “Only a few people actually click on the sources, but it is important for the public that we have it,” Doucet-Bon says. “It is too early to say whether trust has actually strengthened, but the project has garnered some media attention.” There was only one issue: about one in four journalists did not want to reveal their sources. Most said it was because it was too much work for which there was no additional budget. But management suspects some of them might worry they will be questioned on the quality of their sources. In the initial period, there were no sanctions for non-compliance, but at some point there will be, according to Doucet-Bon. “Some just hope this will go away,” he suspects. But it has not, and progress is being made. After our interview, Doucet-Bon conducted an evaluation, which showed favourable results: only seven percent of national news bulletins did not reveal sources when they were required to do so. Perhaps sanctions will not be necessary after all.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 12

BBC GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

THE SOCIAL DILEMMA - "EVIDENCE-DRIVEN REPORTING IS MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN OPINION"

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Many newsrooms struggle with the modern question: How should their journalists behave on social media? On the one hand, media outlets profit from their stars' visibility, with some commanding hundreds of thousands of followers. Their exposure contributes to the media brand. Social media also provides opportunities for engagement with the public. On the other, there is considerable risk for organisations whose reputation depends on their impartiality. This risk affects both the media brand and the journalists, as controversies at organisations like the BBC, *The New York Times*, and German ARD have demonstrated. A single, opinionated tweet from a reporter can have serious repercussions for the organisation. Journalists have to walk a fine line, using a personal tone of voice and making the bold statements required in social media, while refraining from anything that might cost them their jobs. Where does their professional duty end and the personal right to freedom of expression begin? It is safe to say that no newsroom has solved this dilemma to everyone's satisfaction.

The BBC has been well aware of this challenge for quite some time. Following a detailed and independent review process, the broadcaster introduced a new set of social media guidelines in October 2020. The review was led by the Professor of Journalism at Cardiff University, Richard Sambrook, a former director of Global News at the BBC.¹ In the process, a team of four researchers from Cardiff University conducted a quantitative analysis of BBC staff's Twitter usage, conducted interviews, and scrutinised the social media guidelines of other UK broadcasters and major international news organisations, like the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

While the review concluded that most of the analysed posts were impartial, Sambrook and his team found enough instances of potential breaches to recommend stricter guidelines. These ranged from loose use of language to more serious expressions of partisan opinion, and included instances of obvious personal brand building. Interviews with BBC staff also revealed a weakness in their understanding of the principle of impartiality and how it should be applied. They concluded that a wider discussion of the concept was needed. "Impartiality remains absolutely central for public broadcasters, for all the traditional reasons," explains Sambrook. "It is crucial for trust and for providing trustworthy information, based on which people can make choices for their lives. As such it is as important, if not more important, today."

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

¹ [HTTPS://WWW.BBC.COM/NEWS/ENTERTAINMENT-ARTS-54723282](https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-54723282)

The results prompted some hefty debate. The guidelines — which the [BBC published on its website](#) — apply to all staff regardless of whether they are a journalist, and whether they are using online platforms in a personal or professional capacity. It reads: “The overriding principle of this Guidance is that anyone working for the BBC is a representative of the organisation, both offline and also when online, including on social media.” They demand that employees not “express a personal opinion on matters of public policy, politics, or controversial subjects.” In addition, they should not bring the BBC into disrepute or criticise colleagues in public. Advancing personal goals by using the BBC brand is considered to be a breach of these guidelines, as is prioritising one’s personal brand over the organisation’s. Supporting causes by retweeting or liking certain content — so called “virtue signalling” — is also not permitted.

Some BBC staff felt that aspects of the guidelines infringed on their freedom of expression. Others thought that it was about time for clear rules; they had been wondering about certain colleagues’ behaviour on social media themselves. In any event, implementation seems to have been relatively smooth. “The Social Media Guidance seems to have had a beneficial impact on the use of social media by those working for the BBC,” according to David Jordan, the BBC’s Director of Editorial Policy and Standards. There have also been some formal consequences. “The BBC has on the basis of the Social Media Guidance, been able to insist that some tweets are removed including some from high profile individuals either because they compromise the BBC’s impartiality or bring the BBC into disrepute,” Jordan says. From 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021, four BBC staffers were disciplined for breaches of the guidelines, according to a freedom of information request by trade publication which did not disclose any details.²

Sambrook acknowledges that impartiality is more difficult to achieve than in the past:³ “As a term, it is misunderstood. Impartiality is not about false balance or pretending you do not have views. It is a set of professional norms and practices designed to overcome issues of personal bias and false equivalence.” Sambrook also points to a change of circumstances. “We have a more polarised political climate these days, especially on social media. People like opinions, and there are frequent calls for journalists to become more activist which clashes with this traditional norm.” The concept of impartiality, he explains, strikes especially younger audiences and journalists as old-fashioned, with this lack of understanding also impacting the new guidelines. “This is why public broadcasters need to unpack this term and communicate the values behind it. And they are often not doing this enough.”

Nevertheless, protecting their reputation for impartiality could be a matter of survival for public broadcasters like the BBC. They can be easy targets for politicians who call for funding cuts when the slightest hints of partisanship are detected. Sambrook admits that, apart from journalists becoming increasingly lax on social media, the political situation

2 CHARLOTTE TOBITT, “FOUR BBC JOURNALISTS DISCIPLINED OVER SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES WHICH BAN ‘VIRTUE SIGNALLING’”, PRESS GAZETTE, UPDATE 6TH OCTOBER 2021

3 FOR AN EXPLANATION, PLEASE REFER TO: [HTTPS://REUTERSINSTITUTE.POLITICS.OX.AC.UK/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/2017-11/DELIVERING%20TRUST%20IMPARTIALITY%20AND%20OBJECTIVITY%20IN%20A%20DIGITAL%20AGE](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/delivering%20trust%20impartiality%20and%20objectivity%20in%20a%20digital%20age).

played a significant role. “Since Brexit, there has been a very concerted ideological attack on the BBC and its journalism, with opponents hunting for examples of impartiality breaches. The BBC needed to respond to that and shore up its response.”

Sambrook thinks that journalists need to reset their relationship with social media. Adhering to the impartiality principle protects them as well as the organisation, he says. By failing to pay enough attention to impartiality, journalists more easily open themselves up for attacks — and make it harder for public broadcasters to counter the same. He also argues: “The world isn’t refracted through social media and the majority of the public are not on a platform such as Twitter.” Many of the issues people care about are found elsewhere or are visible on social media only in a very distorted way.

Media must strike a balance by setting these kinds of rules, not just because of the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Social media has opened research opportunities for journalists that many of them would not want to miss. They can discover new sources, make contact, and stay in touch with them. They can also conduct ‘social listening’ to an extent that was not possible for journalists of Sambrook’s generation. The declared desire of media outlets to shift journalism from broadcasting to a two-way process would be unthinkable without access to and use of the social media world.

Sambrook says the extended and intense internal debate about the rules has been critical. “One question I often faced was: How can I remain impartial about something like genocide or racism? The answer is: No-one expects impartiality around such fundamental human rights. However, if you have strong views you need to express them through your reporting. Instead of being opinionated, you go out and report it and show the evidence. There are many examples of impartial, evidence-driven reporting, which is incredibly powerful, and ultimately much more powerful than opinion,” he says. As such, he recommends that broadcasters not only offer ongoing impartiality training but also create a culture of open discussion around the problems journalists run into in their day-to-day work.

THE BBC'S SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES: [HTTPS://WWW.BBC.CO.UK/EDITORIALGUIDELINES/GUIDANCE/INDIVIDU-AL-USE-OF-SOCIAL-MEDIA](https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/individual-use-of-social-media)

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



What's next in
LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION?

PRESS ENTER



PART 3

WHAT'S NEXT IN **LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION?****FACILITATING CHANGE IN A FAST-PACED ENVIRONMENT**

For a long time, leaders in media organisations have taken pride in two things: the quality of their journalism, and the ability to navigate even the most critical news situations with a high degree of competence, calm, and efficiency. People were trained to apply highly structured procedures to chaos and uncertainty. Roles were clear and routines fixed, experience highly valued. Leaders knew talent when they saw it, or so they said. Although they praised creativity, they presided over efficiency machines, able to serve the public 24/7. This time is not entirely gone. Quality of journalism still counts, as does responsiveness to crises — as many newsrooms have demonstrated during the pandemic. But some of the former rules of excellence no longer apply to the extent that many protagonists might wish. And they will be called into question even further, as data and artificial intelligence advance, and the need for greater diversity in talent, formats, and ways of engaging audiences becomes more obvious. In the digital age, organisations need to become ‘imagination machines’ (which is also the title of the latest book by Martin Reeves and Jack Fuller, [see Q&A with Martin Reeves, p. 137](#)). In other words, structurally capable of being adaptive and inventive at the same time.⁹⁶

The very essence of a machine is that once it has been switched on, it runs on its own. But will it ever be possible to create organisations which are responsive, and fast moving, yet still provide the stability and calm people need to feel safe? Safe not only to go about their daily work, but also be sufficiently imaginative to envision a future for the service they are providing? Will it ever be possible for public service media, in particular?

It will be a challenge, that's for sure, and leaders need to up their game. In the past, it was enough for most public service media leaders to simply understand journalism and journalists. Today, they need to coach cross-functional, interdisciplinary teams. Where once they were expected to understand their specific silo, today they need to grasp the world of platforms and technology, while figuring out how to apply public service values to this world. They need to make sense of data without becoming its slave. And they need to inspire and engage the younger generation, which has high expectations of their work environment, while motivating older generations which run the risk of losing their sense of security and pride in the work for which they used to be praised. Today's leaders need to be champions of change and talent management. As Lucy Küng, a leading expert on cultural change in news organisations and Senior Research Associate at Reuters Institute, puts it: “In the past 15 years we have trained people on digital. That is not what is needed

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



anymore. What is needed are people leadership skills. The challenge for public service media is to find that for their environment – without the management jargon that puts people off.⁹⁷

This chapter walks through the most important challenges faced by current and future media leaders, drawing on insights from various interviewees in public service media, the wider journalism industry, and academia, and wide-ranging experiences from leadership classes and consultancy in the media industry. It discusses the particularities of facilitating change and fostering imagination in organisations. And it addresses the challenges of making newsrooms more diverse and inclusive while also tackling a talent shortage that has already started to affect the industry. Finally, it touches upon the impact that the pandemic has had on media organisations, a question that will mostly remain open at the time this report is published.

The good news is: change is hard, but it can be structurally embraced when applying the right methods. And public service media organisations have a lot going for them when recruiting from a new generation that is hungry for purpose and meaning and less attuned to the old world of status and job security which motivated many of their predecessors. Eventually, better leadership will hopefully result in better journalism.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 13

NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY AND MANAGING CHANGE

LEADERS NEED TO GIVE UP CONTROL AND MANAGE PERFORMANCE AT THE SAME TIME. BUILDING TRUST IS AT THE CORE OF THIS.

Managing performance is key to successful leadership. But how do you manage performance in a volatile world with constantly changing parameters? Developing responsiveness is essential in an environment where new technologies and platforms emerge and fade quickly, and where control over these is often beyond the capacity of media organisations. Or as EBU Director General Noel Curran puts it: “The idea of five-year strategies is increasingly redundant. The overall approach needs to be much more flexible. Leaders need to lead on what’s happening in the market” (see Q&A with Noel Curran, p. 11).

This is easier said than done, particularly for managers with a journalism background, and a long-held conviction that they understand the world better than most. Lucy Küng: “Suddenly, leaders from the mid-level upwards have to be very good people leaders, they need to be very strong at building relationships. That never used to be a key part of the job description in journalism.” Many of our interview partners in leadership roles are quite self-critical about their own place in a profession populated with people whose claim to fame has often been a well-developed sense of gut feeling. Eric Scherer, Director News Innovation and External Affairs at France Télévisions, observes a generational change: “We very often were the show-off generation. We took ourselves so seriously it was ridiculous. The new young leaders are more on the ‘no bullshit’ side. We have to give the keys to the young generation.”

In this context, ‘young’ should not be taken too literally, however. It encompasses a heightened sense of self-awareness and understanding that the days of the ‘know-it-all top guy’ are over. Dmitry Shishkin, who worked in leadership roles at BBC News for many years and is now an independent consultant, says: “As a leader you need to be transparent about what you know and what you don’t know, and you need to learn to trust people who know more than you do. The old-fashioned habit of hiding information doesn’t work any longer.”

Olle Zachrisson, Head of Digital News Strategy with Sveriges Radio, is more specific: “The old days, when all the solutions had to go through top management, are clearly over. It is about abandoning control. So much is happening, and the solutions are found in these iterative steps in cross-functional teams. As managers you have to stay away (...). You can’t be in all the details. You have to be a lot better at formulating good, strategic goals, doing so in a concise way, and boosting people’s confidence in finding the solutions.”

Uli Köppen, who runs the data and AI lab at German BR, echoes this sentiment: “Working as a leader in interdisciplinary teams, you are confronted with your own limits all the time. You never know everything; you must trust others. It’s constant translation work

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



because sometimes you don't understand someone else's perspective on an issue. You need to solve conflict in an integrative way." This is particularly important as much of today's innovation occurs when those trained in journalism, coding and the business side interact with each other. Petri Jauhiainen, Head of Media at Finnish Yle says: "Coders and journalists have their own slang. It is your job as a leader to ask the most stupid and basic questions, so no one is embarrassed."

Jochen Wegner, long-time Editor-in-Chief at *Zeit Online*, a German success story in digital journalism, has a similar outlook on leadership: "You control by not controlling, you just set the parameters. You need to establish a culture that surprises you with its problem-solving capacities. You know you are doing this right when you feel, 'hey these people have great ideas now, previously this wasn't the case'." A high degree of autonomy for individual parts of the organisation is key. But this does not happen overnight, he knows from painful experience. "You need to build a system that runs itself; it took us many years to get there." From his point of view, there is one important condition for succeeding: "You must not tolerate political games."

Kai Gniffke, Director General of SWR in Germany's Southwest, is equally outspoken about this: "The magic potion is trust." The old-style leader's main task was to fight for their own silo against other silo captains, Gniffke reflects. "This doesn't lead anywhere in this new world. Now leaders need to make sure now that nobody is scared they will be taken advantage of." Deutsche Welle's Editor-in-Chief, Manuela Kasper-Claridge, shares this outlook on leadership: "If your colleagues trust you, and are open to working in unconventional teams, you can create room for the development of successful new approaches. With our project 'Flipping the Script', for example, I particularly asked our young colleagues to submit their ideas for covering the German election" ([see case study 'Flipping the Script', p. 49](#)). That young team was successful in part due to their confidence that their boss would not quash their initiative, which was eyed suspiciously by some more experienced colleagues on the politics desk.

Douglas Smith, a veteran consultant, is adamant that leaders do not ignore office politics. Networks of influence, power structures, and privileges are a reality that must not be ignored but addressed: "All organisations are politics. If they don't make politics explicit and constructive, they reduce the odds of actual performance and change." Very often, those who are skilled at navigating an authority-driven culture stand in the way of making leadership more collaborative. As Juliane Leopold, Editor-in-Chief Digital at German ARD *Tagesschau*, frames it: "What needs to change is this image of the lonely wolf who makes decisions, tough, and non-negotiable. We don't need hero stories any longer; this is not the reality of successful leadership. Collaborative leadership is successful leadership." The experience of Thomas Hinrichs, Director of Information at German BR, is that women are particularly capable at this. "Women don't need to grandstand as much as many men. These days it is important to recruit leaders who don't feel they need to stand in the limelight all the time."

Being collaborative and showing vulnerability should not be mistaken by leaders for being

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



soft on yourself and others. On the contrary, while old-style leadership often camouflaged deficiencies with status, charisma, and past accomplishments, the modern-day availability of data and success metrics means that failures can be illuminated quite harshly. This is new particularly in public service media organisations where business pressures are not as obvious as in commercial media – even if they are painfully present for some in the hierarchy.

Erik Roose, Director General of Estonian ERR and a veteran of 20 years in the private sector, is quite outspoken about this: “When I moved to public service, I was shocked to see how much leaders trusted themselves and how little they observed outside of their bubble. (...). In the public sector you can survive like this for many years.” He reports running into conflict when he told his teams as much. “The problem is: we don’t measure ourselves. There are no key indicators. When I started to talk about this, managers looked at me like I was a criminal. They said: ‘you cannot measure this’.” Managers were then told to come up with their own metrics: “As a manager or leader you must be able to measure yourself, checking whether you performed better than last year,” Roose says.

Leaders must communicate plentifully and clearly, and give feedback – without scaring people off.

Clear communication of changes, expectations and regular feedback is an essential ingredient for successful leadership according to almost all the leaders we interviewed. “You should not only be talking about what you are doing but why you are doing it,” says Jennifer McGuire, who stepped down as the longest ever serving editor-in-chief of Canadian Broadcaster CBC in 2020. The pervading wisdom is that you can never communicate enough when you want to see change, so that others take it seriously rather than just waiting for the storm to pass. So: Say it, say it again – and then again. It works even better when you have supportive evidence. Tinatin Berdzenishvili, Director General of the Georgian Public Broadcaster 1TV, emphasizes how important metrics are when making a case ([see Q&A with Tinatin Berdzenishvili, p.140](#)).

Bakel Walden, Director of Development and Offering and board member at Swiss SRG SSR, describes communication as like walking a tightrope: “On the one hand, there’s the expectation of flat hierarchies, particularly with young people. But there is a tension, because on the other hand expectations towards management are very high. People expect a clear vision, a clear strategy and leadership,” he says. The Swiss broadcaster had put a lot of emphasis on change management, but not everyone was happy about it. “The feedback was: there was too much communication, it lacked clarity. The big challenge for leadership is: how strong is the demand for flat hierarchies, really?”

The core of all advice about managing people, team and individual performance is probably right there: Teams perform best when people feel safe – which is not easy to provide in times of restructuring and general uncertainty.⁹⁸ “Change can be hard,” Jennifer McGuire says, “and people don’t always know what they can do and where they can shine.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



As a leader, you need to become the person to champion change and protect your team at the same time.” Leaders need to encourage and motivate those seasoned employees who feel devalued and are afraid of losing their jobs. But they also need to stand behind young teams which are supposed to lead on innovation when they inevitably meet resistance. These teams need to be nourished and shielded. BR’s Head of AI and Automation Lab Uli Köppen says: “You need to crack silos, and put innovative cores in them that infect others. It is essential to protect small teams in the beginning. Just putting them there and thinking, ‘they’ll be fine’ – this is not how it works.” If leaders do not invest energy in helping innovation teams work and develop, the effort might merely be an alibi for activity. It may even backfire entirely. Others in the organisation will see that risk-taking does not pay off and might refrain from doing so in the future.

Managing a cohesive whole requires regular and constructive feedback, which Swedish TV SVT has institutionalised (see case study [Changing Culture with SVT](#), p. 144). Candid feedback is flagged as one of the ingredients for the Netflix success story, as described by founder Reed Hastings and consultant and business school professor Erin Meyer in their bestseller *No Rules Rules*.⁹⁹ Many of the traits they advocate would not translate to all environments, however, especially in a public service setting, where you cannot easily reward the stars and fire others for mediocre performance, as Hastings and Meyer advocate. Every organisation must experiment with what works and what does not within their own cultural parameters – which can look very differently from those of Netflix. Jochen Wegner, Editor-in-Chief of *Zeit Online*, feels his company is successful precisely because it champions a culture of utmost personal appreciation and respect, which includes an early communication of major changes. Wegner: “You might think of this as almost archaic, but I look at it as a great source of energy. We always make sure there is a face-saving way out for everyone.” Also, cultural differences matter, he says: “You couldn’t do 360-degree feedback in Japan, for example. To be too blunt can be toxic, too.”

Skilful communication is also important for the prevention of burnout, a prominent problem in the pressurised news industry with its need for 24/7 commitment and engagement. Throwing people this way and that robs them of agency, which deprives them of feeling valued and secure. Lucy Küng, who has researched burnout, knows that it is a complex issue which runs on a spectrum: “At the one end are serious mental health issues, and these need professional support. But towards the milder end of the burnout spectrum, and also in terms of reducing the propensity for burnout, leaders can make a big difference. The key point is that the onus is on them. Young ambitious journalists, who are probably themselves somewhat hooked on the news cycle, are never going to raise the red flag.” Her advice: Watch and take note. “Normalise the topics of overload and burnout. And communicate as transparently as you can on big issues – avoid abrupt announcements on major reorganisations, new hires, or unexpected bumps in performance. In an unsettled workforce, these can send the adrenalin sky high.”

One important part of leadership communication is acting as a role model. Employees will always sense the cultural norms of an organisation and watch what the people they report

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES 

to actually do: whether and how they ‘walk the talk’. Lucy Küng: “A lot of this is leaders modelling behaviour, for example taking time off themselves. Leaders need to build up enough trust and relationships in which people can admit they are at their limit.”

A leader is always a role model, for better or worse. A manager who responds to emails around the clock will signal that she expects her reports to do the same. Another who leaves the office at 5pm every day to pick up his daughter from day care does not need to tell his staff that this is okay. At Netflix, for example, every employee can take off as much time as they think is reasonable. The success of this policy lies in the fact that the leadership team takes plenty of vacations themselves – and talks about it often. Erin Meyer, co-author of *No Rules Rules*, is convinced: “If the CEO doesn’t model this, the method can’t work.”¹⁰⁰ Communicating by doing has more impact than communicating by meetings and manuals. For those who are less convinced of their verbal communication skills, this might come as a relief.

Leaders need to help their teams embrace change as the new normal and establish processes that facilitate change.

The challenges of managing change have not changed significantly since John Kotter published his classic “[Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail](#)” in 1995.¹⁰¹ Back then, Kotter was not able to predict all the idiosyncrasies and the pace of digital transformation. But his eight principles of successful change, from establishing urgency and developing a vision, to forming a guiding coalition and pursuing goals relentlessly, are still important when steering teams and whole organisations through change processes.

What has shifted is that in today’s highly connected world, change is never done. Humans, businesses, and organisations operate in an ever-developing technological ecosystem that is to a large extent shaped by powerful tech conglomerates. While these companies set the parameters, even their protagonists are not always capable of grasping the full impact technology has on everyone’s life. That is why constant adaptation to changing environments is necessary. But public service media need to do more than just adapt. Because of their public service mandate, their sheer size and therefore influence, they should have the ambition to shape this environment, at least in part. This leaves leaders in public service media with a huge responsibility. How do they navigate this world of opportunities and risks, and make their expectations clear within the organisation?

Douglas Smith has been an expert on managing change for decades. In 2015 he developed the Table Stakes Program for the US that focuses on the digital transformation of local and regional news organisations. It was launched as [Table Stakes Europe](#) in 2019.¹⁰²

For Smith, one key error leaders commit is thinking that they can drive change top-down through decisions alone. Decisions are important, but they are not enough when implementation requires people learn new behaviours, skills, and ways of working

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



together. This can be difficult for leaders, especially leaders who focus more on power than purpose. In other words: The decision is when the work begins. And leaders have to change their behaviour, too.

For change to gain momentum, initiating a reinforcing cycle of successes and failures from which to learn is central. Martin Reeves, Chairman of BCG's think tank Henderson Institute, recommends: "Experiment in small ways early. If you have just one big experiment and you need a positive result, it is all or nothing. De-risk experimentation instead, do many. It is the opposite of efficiency. Diversity is important." (See Q&A with Martin Reeves, p. 137).

Douglas Smith is adamant about setting goals at the outset: "Performance results are the primary objective of change, not change." What sounds obvious is easily neglected by those who fall into the trap of focusing only on activities in a change process. Everyone is familiar with leaders who are busy summoning meetings, buying new technology, assigning new tasks, writing strategy papers and so on – but do not actually change anything. Smith: "Organisations have a very strong tendency to pursue activity-based change. But it is key to get an ever-increasing number of people to commit to performance."

The people who drive change do not have to be at C-suite or similar levels – many assume that things will move only if top management is fully committed. But a driven, competent team with superior communication skills can carry a project far. Douglas Smith: "It is excellent if top management supports and drives performance and change. That is not the only path, though. By starting with readiness down in the organisation, change can happen. There is a famous dictum of the Jesuits of management and leadership, that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. (...) One of the great delusions in organisations is this sense that if we can only get that one senior person to change their mind, everything is going to be great." Instead of waiting for a saviour or a miracle, those with an appetite for change should find allies and get started. "It is a delusion that you just need to convert the resisters. If you put that energy in your own work instead, things will be much better," according to Smith.

Ideally, teams should produce some success stories fast. This requires some careful thinking: what kind of projects are easy to implement and most likely to produce results? Where are the 'low hanging fruit'? "There is nothing like results to open people's minds. If you have built momentum, and the politics are shifting in your direction, then the price of the resistor's behaviour actually gets much higher," Smith says. Someone who used to block change might find themselves in a defensive position when the tides of success approach. For dealing with people who block change, Smith has just one piece of advice: "Ignore them as long as possible."

If progress stalls and you cannot put your finger on why, it can help to consult the so-called D x V x P formula for change, which has been taught in variations in business schools. According to this formula, every successful change needs a minimum of three

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



elements: dissatisfaction with the status quo (D), a vision (V), and processes (P). Without dissatisfaction or urgency, the project will end up at the bottom of the inbox – let's do it next year. Without a vision, people will not know where they are headed, the 'why' is unclear, so you might have a start but not enough energy. And without processes, anxieties will build up, because people lack direction. It is a multiplicative formula: If one of the three elements is zero, change will not work.

Switching to agile methods — a structured test-and-learn approach to change — does not work when they are pursued for their own sake, maybe because some executive wants to appear up to date. Again, Douglas Smith: “One of the biggest mistakes is to just talk about agile. (...) If people don't understand that it is a methodology to pursue results, they will pursue agile as an activity. It will just be a fad.” Energy, effort, and meaningful language in communication are essential ingredients in change processes, Smith says. “Deep down a lot of people kind of wish this whole thing would be a light switch — flip the switch and all will be well forever! They don't understand that today's realities demand persistence, focus and accountability for results. You have to keep your shoulder on the wheel.”

By their very nature, public service media struggle harder with innovation than commercial media, not only because of their size, complexity, and legacy. Lucy Küng says: “One of the challenges is simply shifting resources into new areas, that's incredibly complicated in public service media. They are always in a bit of a strategic straitjacket because their sphere of operation is laid out in their governance arrangements. Responding to market shifts in an agile way is tremendously difficult.” This complicates innovation. Talking about failing fast is fine if there are some venture capitalists hovering in the background. But sinking resources in an environment that receives public scrutiny can be embarrassing to say the least.

Then again, although tight finances might serve as an excuse for not even trying, innovation does not always hinge on huge sums of money. Erik Roose, Director General of Estonian ESS, is outspoken about this. “Public service is pretty inefficient [compared to the private sector],” he says. Management regularly complain their budget is insufficient “There's always this: ‘give us more money, we have all these brilliant ideas.’ But when you ask, who will need these services, they have no answer.”

Dmitry Shishkin, formerly with the BBC, knows this all too well. “How do you put pressure on people who are not incentivised to change, who are comfortable and protected? How do you innovate when there is no stimulus for innovation? The challenge for leadership is to make sure that people are nimble and curious and innovate for audiences' sake, not for innovation's sake.” Finances might seem tight for those inside the organisation but compared to private media this may not always be true. Shishkin: “You have a lot of public money to play around with, but you have to put it to use.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES 

‘Stop doing’ is essential for any change efforts. Public service media struggle with this more than others; they need to steer and shape the debate rather than being chased by it.

When reallocating resources rather than using new ones, managers need to make their case carefully. Setting goals, measuring impact, and defining evaluation cycles is easier when a project is conceived than when it has run its course. Experience and research show that to *stop doing* things is one of the hardest parts of digital transformation. Every organisation burdens itself with a deluge of processes, practices or projects which are either no longer needed, do not work, or do not meet minimum performance criteria. It is akin to the world of politics: once something is a law, it remains a law. As a consultant and researcher, Lucy Küng has seen public service media struggle particularly hard with *stop doing*: “Structurally they have to be accountable to the public and they have to serve the entire population. That makes it extremely difficult in a fast-paced environment.”

Rory Coveney, Director of Strategy at RTÉ, brings up another tricky issue. “The talk about what we are doing too much of is largely led by our competitors. Of course, we could be more efficient. But our audience doesn’t want us to become smaller, they want us to have more output. The challenge is around our resources.” Coveney has a point, because any debate on what is potentially outdated or non-essential for public service media could end up as ammunition for those who feel the whole concept has lost its legitimacy. Anne Lagercrantz, Director of News and Sports at Sveriges TV observes a similar development in Sweden. Conservative politicians often argue that SVT should focus solely on news and not on entertainment or sports, broad-appeal subjects which are inclusive and attract a mass audience, she says. But doing so could be a flawed strategy: By saying goodbye to crowd pleasers, public service media might lose some news audiences as well.

Still, putting an end to old or ineffective practices and programs is essential, not only to save costs but also to free up energy and management attention for new projects and maintain and sharpen focus. Public service media has a mission; it needs to carefully rethink and outline what this mission is in an age of information and entertainment overload — and then act upon it. Kai Gniffke, Director General of German SWR, views this as a prime leadership task: “Leaders need to learn how to stop doing. We must be much more rigorous in saying, what’s not our business any longer.”

Marcel Gelauff, Editor-in-Chief at NOS, mentions the example of a special morning bulletin for primary school children that used to run at 8:45 in the morning. “We ended that show to bring the innovation to the internet. We did so after discussion with educators, who told us they needed more online content. Still, it takes guts to stop something on TV that you have done for years.”

Dmitry Shishkin has seen a lot of redundancy at public service media: “The majority of newsrooms tend to overproduce. In fact, in some cases I worked on, 80 percent of editorial

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



pieces produced was being wasted, it simply did not find its audience. So, optimise your coverage, reuse content as much as possible. The internal competition among media is detrimental. If I have a vacancy, I'd rather hire an analyst than a journalist, an audience development person, a newsletter writer. The meaningful contribution of these roles cannot be overestimated." In his view, public service media very often suffer from a lack of focus. "The obsession of product market fit that has come from Silicon Valley is real. Lots of companies cannot identify correctly why they exist."

A major task is communicating what will be stopped to the outside world when protests are inevitable – the Swiss 'No Billag' referendum is a telling example ([see case Swiss Referendum, p. 57](#)). Those who have a fear of losing something are always noisier than those who don't care or have something to gain in the process. But it is also essential to communicate clearly and empathetically within the organisation, too. Gniffke: "Yes, there will be people who feel devalued because their jobs are no longer needed. We must not pretend this is not the case. People have fears, and these need to be addressed. We must reassure them that we won't abandon them." Sometimes even overachievers need to be disappointed. This can be particularly challenging, BR's Thomas Hinrichs says. "My problem now is that there are too many ideas, too much of a spread. We need to prioritise and focus, disappoint people at times. We need to decide systematically along certain criteria: relevance, cost-efficiency, public value." Juliane Leopold of German ARD states: "There is still too much energy being put into unsuccessful innovation because everyone is so proud when they started something, and no one dares to pull the plug. There's too much reinventing the wheel. I'd like to see more collaborations in innovation." ([See case study Shaping the Social Media Strategy of German Tagesschau, p. 146.](#)) This is particularly necessary, if not mandatory, in an environment where the money to be utilised is the taxpayers'.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES





CHAPTER 14 THE TALENT CHALLENGE - GET THEM, HOLD THEM, NURTURE THEM

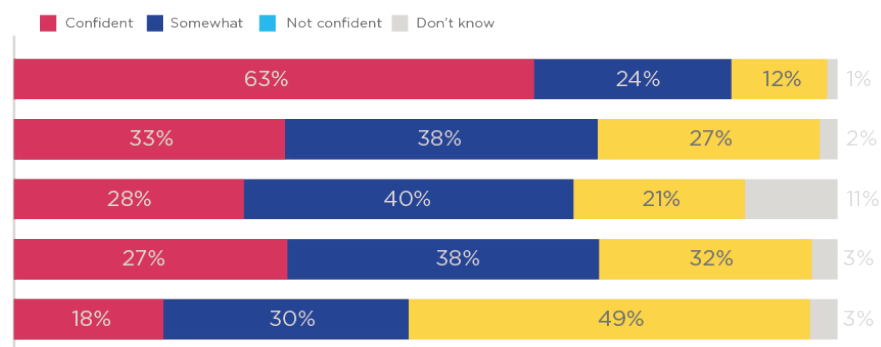
LEADERS NEED TO MAKE SPOTTING, RETAINING, AND DEVELOPING DIVERSE TALENT A PRIORITY IN AN INDUSTRY THAT WILL INCREASINGLY BATTLE A SHORTAGE OF APPLICANTS FOR BOTH TECHNOLOGY AND JOURNALISM ROLES.

It was not so long ago that a talent shortage in the media was unheard of. Then, the big brands that dominate the industry were flooded with more applications than they could digest. This was, and to this day still is, particularly true on the journalism side. There is still no lack of highly qualified candidates for traditional roles such as reporters, editors, and commentators at the big names. But the attractiveness of journalism is waning. It is viewed as a profession that offers lower salaries, less job security, and fewer opportunities than it used to. It is increasingly undermined by a low-trust and 'fake news' narrative that doesn't necessarily reflect reality but leads to worries about safety and accuracy, nevertheless. This holds particularly true for local and regional media, where career paths are even less certain. Journalists' worries were expressed in the study "[Are journalists today's coal miners? The struggle for talent and diversity in modern newsrooms](#),"¹⁰³ A coal miner image does not bode well for the media industry. Or as Erik Roose of ERR, puts it: "At the end of the day, it is trivial: If you are in the service sector, your biggest asset is people. If you have good, innovative people, you will win any battle."

To the younger generations, journalism looks less colourful than it used to. Influencers on social media outshine weather-beaten correspondents and what were once celebrity-like anchors or talk show hosts. Today, everyone can express themselves freely and creatively by uploading a video or blogpost; a privilege primarily enjoyed by journalists in the past. And in general, the roles available in today's news industry do not offer exciting research opportunities, attractive travel, or access to the powerful players. They are in audience and product development, social media moderation, search engine optimisation and other lower profile areas, where publishers and broadcasters are looking for talent — and in tech. Media houses compete with Google, Facebook, Spotify, and the like, companies which pay a lot more and offer more flexibility and opportunities. Why should a software developer choose a career in the media industry?¹⁰⁴

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2
- PART 3**
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES

FIGURE 12 CONFIDENCE IN ATTRACTING TALENT



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF JOURNALISM, 2021

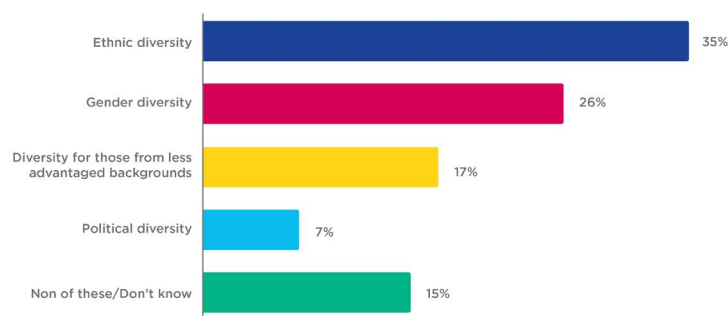
Helje Solberg, Head of News at Norwegian NRK: “Talent retention is a big issue; we discuss it a lot. We cannot compete with salaries, but we can with everything else: Opportunity, mission, career path, we need to get better at showing all the opportunities.” Petri Jauhainen, Head of Media at Yle says: “The brand helps — and people feeling they belong to the good side. A story I remember well: We had an evening out with the team one day. A young guy who had previously worked for a gaming company walked up to me and said how much he liked it that his grandma was so very proud of him, now that he worked for Yle.”

Anne Lagercrantz, Director of News and Sports at Swedish TV, has witnessed the talent shortage for a while. Now her newsroom is taking action. “Journalism as a profession is not as attractive any longer, so, there are fewer journalism schools. The new generation doesn’t know much about the public service. Also, teachers say: ‘Don’t go into journalism, they are not recruiting.’ We need to tell students that we are recruiting. We can’t wait for them to discover us; we must tell them about us.” SVT doubled its number of interns and provides internships for journalists with foreign backgrounds to increase diversity. Lagercrantz: “We meet as many kids as we possibly can in sixth grade, we talk about journalism as a trade, about misinformation and press freedom. We have reporters and anchors going to their old schools, talking about their job. It is a lot of fun to do that.”

Hiring and retaining diverse talent is a must for public broadcasters, which by their very mission need to reflect society as a whole.

Active recruiting is something that has long been foreign to newsrooms, but it will be essential for media to resemble the world in which it is operating. The talent that newsrooms seek is not necessarily the people waiting at their doorsteps. The need for more diversity has become blatantly obvious in an industry which by its very nature has to reflect society as a whole — particularly in public service media — but is populated by a very homogeneous cohort of well educated, very often urban, non-religious, white and (particularly in senior leadership roles) male professionals. While public service media seem to be doing a tad better in representation than many traditional private publishers, the issue needs to be addressed, particularly with respect to ethnic diversity. Many media leaders feel the latter needs to be tackled most urgently.¹⁰⁵

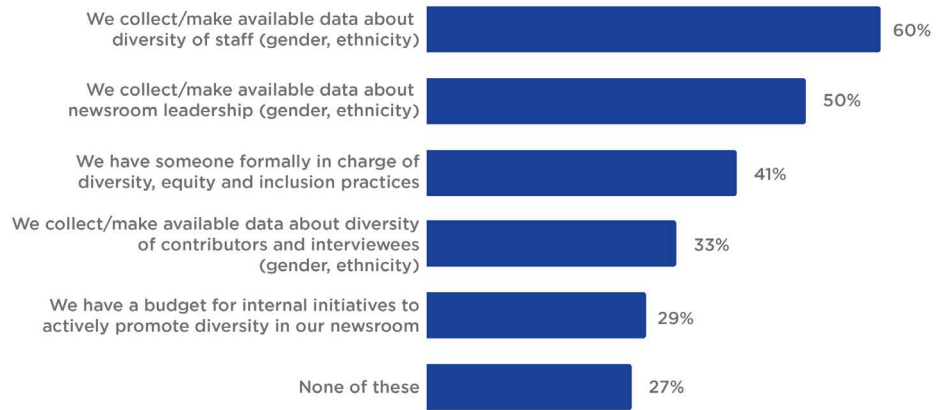
FIGURE 13 ETHNIC DIVERSITY IS SEEN AS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY FOR CHANGE



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF JOURNALISM, 2021

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2
- PART 3**
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES

FIGURE 14 WHAT ORGANISATIONS ARE DOING TO INCREASE DIVERSITY



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF JOURNALISM, 2021

Kai Gniffke, Director General of SWR, is adamant about diversity: “We need people with different perspectives; otherwise, things won’t change.” And he sees plenty of room for improvement in the industry. “We print shiny brochures about diversity and raise the rainbow flag, but when push comes to shove, the old mechanisms prevail. Leaders haven’t met their own standards,” Gniffke says. “That’s why we need numbers: 25 percent of all new hires need to be from migrant backgrounds. And we need to enforce these numbers.”

Eric Scherer, Director News Innovation and External Affairs at France Télévisions, is equally self-critical: “The diversity of French society is not well served by broadcasting, public service as well as commercial. You have to have diversity in front of and behind the camera. We need to stop having journalists coming from OxBridge and Science Po. We just hired a big influencer on social networks with a migrant background; he is now one of the top talents on our evening news. We also hired one of the biggest influencers on climate.”

As the saying goes, what is not measured doesn’t get done, and this awareness seems to be spreading even in organisations that have been performing better than their competitors. Helje Solberg, NRK’s Head of News: “We need to respond to the diversity challenge. The importance of getting the culture right cannot be underestimated; our staff is our biggest asset. The most important thing is to set clear goals, to deliver on them, to measure. It is a systemic challenge, and it needs to be met systematically. We need to make sure that diversity is part of the recruitment process.”

Once diverse talent has been successfully recruited, the real work begins. People with different perspectives can only have an impact if these perspectives are listened to, acknowledged, and find their way into programs and processes. It is the exceptionally talented, in particular, who tend to excel at grasping the cues and conforming to the dominant culture – often at a high personal cost. A diverse workforce alone does not guarantee diverse and inclusive content, nor is it a sure-fire catalyst for innovation.¹⁰⁶

Dmitry Shishkin experienced this at the BBC and elsewhere: “People of colour are nominated to all those roles, but the organisation stays the same.” In short: Diversity

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2
- PART 3**
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES

without inclusion will remain a box-ticking exercise. If the culture does not change, impact will be limited, and talent runs the risk of burning out. CBC's former Editor-in-Chief, Jennifer McGuire, knows how easily minorities are forgotten once hired. "You need to keep an eye on the advancement of diverse employees." From her perspective, it is also important to not overburden them with expectations. "We put some indigenous reporters in an impossible position. They were in the middle of a sandwich at times between their newsrooms and their communities." Anne Lagercrantz shares similar observations: "We are trying to understand more about the people we employ. How do they feel included? We are conducting a big survey to learn more."

Companies that get inclusion right will reap the benefits, as Alison Maitland and Rebekah Steele demonstrated in their 2020 book, *Indivisible: Radically rethinking inclusion for sustainable business results*.¹⁰⁷ These companies will become magnets for talent and are more likely to breed innovative ideas. While most media organisations are still a far cry from being inclusive, some leaders are optimistic that things are moving in the right direction. ARD's Juliane Leopold: "It has surprised me how central the topic of diversity has become in the past ten years. That does not mean it is solved. Newsrooms are not diverse, certainly not nearly enough. But it is not a fringe subject any longer."

It should also become easier to extend recruitment to those with fewer formal qualifications as well as ethnic minorities in modern newsrooms. There are plenty of opportunities in the new job market that do not necessarily require talent in skills specific to journalism, such as outstanding language proficiency. Someone who is talented in shooting video on her phone does not need to be a spelling champion. Also, professions with no direct relation to journalism can turn out to be extremely useful. For example, *Zeit Online* employs two mathematicians inside the newsroom who spend their time analysing which content is generating subscriptions. "It is so important that they sit directly with us and not in the marketing department," says Jochen Wegner. And success breeds talent, too. "We are more and more able to hire brilliant people we wouldn't have had a chance with previously," Wegner says.

The fact that HR has never previously taken centre stage in newsrooms and publishing houses is a disadvantage. The traditional separation of the editorial and business sides has long prevented professionalism in matters of people development. This needs to be resolved, particularly in today's environment where cross-sector collaboration is essential for success. Olle Zachrisson of Sveriges Radio experienced this when conducting SR's award-winning project (see case study *SR's Public Service Algorithm*, p. 100): "The public service value algorithm is the most cross-functional thing we have ever done. (...) You need to work with people from different parts of the organisation, with different backgrounds. The days are over when journalists were kings but failed miserably in digital innovation, because we didn't know how to cooperate with the product side."

Hiring processes and retention strategies need as much knowledge, experience and effort as research and news judgment do. Professionalising HR and leadership require a certain

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



amount of humility on the side of top management, too. Jochen Wegner, Editor-in-Chief at *Zeit Online*: “The biggest mistake is when leaders only hire and promote talent that doesn’t endanger their own status. Good leaders hire people who outperform them on many fronts. We reflect a lot about leadership, and we don’t believe that someone who is a good journalist is necessarily a good leader.”

If you need a summary of what is needed for talent recruitment and retention today, Fran Unsworth, Director of News and Current Affairs at the BBC, has it: “We need the best people; we need to create a welcoming workplace. We need greater diversity and inclusion. We cannot serve all audiences if our staff doesn’t reflect all audiences. We need to really look after the staff and empower them, build their confidence. We have to create lots of opportunities for our staff.”

Leaders need to facilitate intergenerational collaboration, managing the purpose-seeking and digitally savvy millennial generation as much as the deeply connected and experienced journalists of the generations closer to retirement.

One of the important challenges for leaders in any industry today is to manage intergenerational cooperation — or conflict, for that matter. Differences in worldview and opinion have always existed between young renegades and seasoned warriors in any organisation. But with the digitally savvy newcomers and their analogue colleagues, different expectations and competencies are prone to clashing. Experienced journalists and marketing staff tend to act defensively when they feel questioned on their skills and experience. Young entrants often arrive with a host of digital skills but need to catch up on the journalism side, since many of them started their careers mastering home pages, newsfeeds, and online forums instead of talking to people face-to-face (which can also happen on a screen, of course). Channelling these conflicts into productive practices and alliances will be key to running a successful operation.

A lot of attention has been paid to the generation born in the late 1990s and early 2000s and their supposedly different expectations of leadership. And indeed: Practitioners and researchers agree that this poses a particular challenge for those who are currently in management positions. Bakel Walden of SRG SSR describes: “The young generation expects a lot of feedback. I’m in my mid-forties, and I still feel far away from people who are in their early thirties. They have high expectations and are fairly impatient. They don’t want to go on the slow grind any longer.” While previous generations knew they would need to put in a few years to rise through the ranks, young people want to have responsibility and influence now. This might not be all bad for those with experience. Walden reflects: “That’s when older candidates become attractive again.”

Lucy Küng has led focus groups on and with millennial participants. What did she learn? “Probably the single most important trait they are looking for in their leaders is empathy.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



And this is a new skill for leaders to acquire. It's challenging for those at the top. On the one side they need to be highly intelligent, and the conceptual chops to navigate a truly complex strategic environment. On the other they need to be self-actualised as individuals — approachable, transparent, open about their own need to change assumptions, and able to listen. They need to create a communication culture where key messages can float up.” Having messages trickle down in an adequate way can be equally challenging. Küng: “The need for feedback is baked into this generation, but it is incredibly difficult if it is not positive feedback.”

Organisations must make use of the energy and inventiveness of the incoming generation. Dmitry Shishkin, formerly of BBC News: “The young generation is very purpose driven, very vision driven, you need to provide value to your staff all the time. You need to let young people try things, give people space to fail.” Küng agrees: “It is about unleashing their potential and their energy. This generation is very purpose driven; they won't compromise their values. It is important to synchronise their values with the values of the organisation. This is actually much easier for public service media than for commercial media, because the entire organisation is geared to serving public purposes, to protecting important societal values.” Living up to these values in daily work is essential, however. Shishkin: “Young people really smell when it is unfair.”

It is critical to not stall the young generation at entry-level positions with little variety or progression. Küng: “They have very strong self-actualisation needs, a huge appetite for learning and skill acquisition. They are looking for opportunities for growth, also personal growth. Moving them around a lot more is key, this is actually good for breaking silos.” In public service media, the structures do not work in management's favour because it is extremely hard to reward exceptional performance, Küng reflects. And there are more difficulties: “The pain points are: they are highly mobile, even if they love a job, you are lucky if they stay for more than three years.”

Uli Köppen of BR belongs to the new generation of leaders. She leads a team of sought-after data scientists, among others, and echoes some of these observations: “Young people have high expectations about personal development and learning. They want to work with purpose and improve their skills — that's sometimes worth more than big money. Public service media have a lot of catching up to do in this respect, because until now the only people they have career paths for are journalists. They don't have it for designers, product developers, data scientists. There are more new roles now than you can count, but that doesn't mean that people can get ahead on them. HR is just starting to deal with this.”

But how to keep young talent happy and engaged over time? Martin Řezníček, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of News at Czech TV, can explain what happens when there is no strategy in place. The experience of Eastern Europe, where there was only state media before the fall of communism, could be telling. Řezníček: “Because of communism, we are lacking people in their 50s and 60s. So, many people here are doing their job way, way younger than they should be. Some people in their 40s feel they have already achieved

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



everything. Then they leave and go to the private sector.”

Some advocate exchanging old leaders for young. Eric Scherer of France Télévisions thinks that managers of his generation need to be prepared to step back. Köppen feels that there is too much emphasis placed on generational differences: “I refuse to look at this as a generational conflict. I know many people who are older but are exceptionally good leaders, who have always followed seemingly modern leadership principles. You are not automatically a better leader just because you are younger.” But there’s a certain type of older leader who will not prevail, Köppen is convinced. “I still encounter a generation of leaders that doesn’t question itself. In a way I do not blame them because it can be extremely exhausting to lead collaboratively. This is particularly hard for those who have always operated in hierarchical structures.” Putting work above everything is also a sure turnoff for young people, Köppen has experienced. “Thankfully, workaholic culture is less pronounced among them. There is a clash between middle management, where working yourself to death is still flashed as a status symbol, and new entrants who are demanding work/life balance.”

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



CHAPTER 15

THE FALLOUT OF COVID – WHAT'S HERE TO STAY

FOR MOST, COVID HAS BEEN AN ACCELERATOR OF CHANGE. NOW LEADERS NEED TO MAKE SURE THE MOMENTUM IS KEPT

Talking to leaders today about the onset of the pandemic almost always elicits a profound sense of pride. Switching operations from centrally organised office buildings to scattered units managed from someone's kitchen or another's living room within days – sometimes even hours – without major losses raised many leaders' confidence in their teams and their own capabilities. Some were even tempted to say: "Digital transformation? Done." It does not come as a surprise that most managers interviewed for this report have seen the pandemic as an accelerator of change.

Rory Coveney of Irish RTÉ, says: "Covid-19 changed everything. It forced us to be much more agile, to communicate more directly, break down barriers. We have had digital meetings with groups of people who would not routinely have been in the same room before. It was amazing, we went from 1,800 people on site to 180 people on site within three weeks. There were a lot of lessons in that. We saw we can make decisions quickly and avoid needless bureaucracy. We also learned: you cannot overcommunicate. The biggest lesson would be: don't go back."

SWR Director General Kai Gniffke, who in his former role as ARD Editor-in-Chief had taken immense pride in planning a huge newsroom to run Germany's most important news program, agrees. "This was a total boost for us. We have reached the point of no return. People are now much more confident in using digital tools." Change processes also accelerated. SWR, for example, experimented with a video format that soon became a TV show.

Responding to the pandemic, the news division of Norwegian NRK launched an initiative in March 2020 that provided one news livestream across all platforms: TV, radio and mobile. A joint desk started to deliver continuous live journalism throughout the day. Head of News Helje Solberg is proud of this: "In order to meet the enormous need for information, we changed our entire news offering and made one news stream for all platforms. This has now become permanent. It strengthens our position as a leading provider of live journalism when news happens. Yes, our three platforms are different, and they have different audiences, but TV, radio and mobile have a distinctive feature in common: The need to provide content live when it happens that is the same on all platforms. This was the most important strategic initiative during the pandemic. This also differentiates us from our competition. Netflix, for instance, will never be able to do the same. We combine resources. We have a consistent tone of voice across platforms, and we are providing better quality, and are more efficient." During a crisis an organisation becomes more flexible, she reflects. "It is about getting news out to the people. One live stream on all

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



platforms is not without compromises, but it is not controversial at all.” Swedish SVT experienced something quite similar. Director of News and Sports, Anne Lagercrantz, says: “We made new programmes in a few days that previously used to take months.” She heard several staff saying they were a more democratic company now, she adds. “Everyone is working on equal terms, whether they are in Stockholm or elsewhere.”

Olle Zachrison of Sveriges Radio, which is located across the street from SVT but is an independent organisation, elaborates: “Working remotely has had a democratising aspect. Now everyone has the same chance to participate in meetings, no matter where they are. In former times, everyone in Stockholm was at an advantage.” But for Zachrison, the picture is mixed: “It’s been more efficient in a lot of ways. We had shorter meetings, quicker in between meetings. On the other hand, coming up with bold, super cool ideas has been hard.” This was much more likely to happen during workshop weeks on site, he says. Marcel Gelauff of NOS feels the same: “We didn’t have the energy to pay attention to the education of colleagues, to discussions, new ways of innovation. We just had breaking news situations day after day after day.”

In times of crisis, leadership qualities are tested in a unique way. Disruptions like the pandemic ask for a ‘holding’ management style, rather than a visionary one, as Gianpiero Petriglieri, professor of organisational behaviour at INSEAD, has coined it. “Crises always test visions, and most don’t survive. Because when there’s a fire in a factory, a sudden drop in revenues, a natural disaster, we don’t need a call to action. We are already motivated to move, but we often flail. What we need is a type of holding, so that we can move purposefully,” he wrote in an [article](#) for Harvard Business Review.¹⁰⁸ Many of those who have navigated the pandemic in a leadership role would most likely agree. BR Director of Information Thomas Hinrichs watched the crisis separate good leadership from the not so good. Hinrichs: “The pandemic has made leadership qualities obvious. It is easy to lead in good times.” That is why BR started to offer voluntary leadership training on every Friday in a digital format. This has been appreciated by many managers who want to tackle the challenges of leading remotely.

SRG’s Bakel Walden agrees that working remotely has confronted managers with new demands: “Trust is at the core. And you have to learn how to listen actively. If you have people working remotely, you not only need to know what they are working on but also how they are doing emotionally. Empathy hasn’t been too much of a topic in the office environment. It’s quite a challenge for some managers to on the one hand grant people freedom, on the other to set clear boundaries.” Alongside digitalisation, Walden sees Covid as “an absolute accelerator,” the side effect being to make SRG more attractive as an employer. Walden: “It will help us in recruiting talent.” (...) “Now we have to make sure leadership skills can catch up with the progress we made.”

Juliane Leopold, Editor-in-Chief Digital at ARD thinks that the pandemic has boosted leadership skills, because it made the need for collaborative leadership obvious. It was the time for leaders to show vulnerability, to ask for help, she says. “No leader knew in advance

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

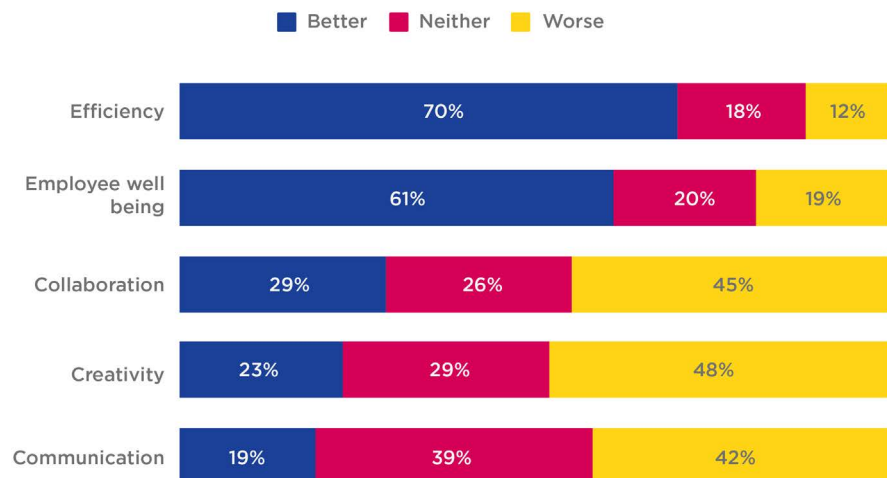
REFERENCES



what would be happening. And every one of us was also a human being at the same time, a parent, daughter, partner. (...) When certainties break away, it is a sign of strength to lead collaboratively.” From her point of view, the pandemic has shown that workplaces and culture can be transformed. Leopold: “We need to overcome ‘presence culture’. When we saw performance problems with remote work, most cases were not unexpected. But the needs of different generations vary. The older ones appreciate the office. For the younger generation, flexible work is a requirement. We hear that in every recruiting conversation.”

At the time this report was researched, many organisations were not yet entirely sure how the post-Covid workplace era would ultimately play out — there were too many uncertainties relating to the pandemic itself. Most employees seem to be reluctant to make a full return to the office. Some expect that only half of total staff will return to working on the premises full-time. Erik Roose of Estonian ERR finds the situation quite challenging. “This broadcaster waited 20 years for a new TV building. Now we have the budget for it, but the majority of people don’t want to return to office. They find all kinds of funny excuses. But it is complicated: how can we work together as a brand and have the same values if we don’t meet physically? I don’t know how to do this.”

FIGURE 15 GAINS AND LOSSES FROM REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKING, WHAT NEWS-ROOM LEADERS THINK



SOURCE: REUTERS INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF JOURNALISM, 2021

Fran Unsworth of BBC News says the rapidity with which staff adapted to working remotely was her biggest surprise in recent years. Until the beginning of September 2021, when it began to roll out a new ‘hybrid working’ policy, the BBC had only a proportionally low number of staff in workspaces. Unsworth: “Now we have to figure how to move forward from that. We are in a period of experimentation. We have to see how we train people, because lots of training involves learning on the job, discussing with people next to you. There are some anxieties about the future.” Many staff seem to want better work/life balance, she says. “We are in a competition for good people, we are going to have to balance that.” NRK’s Helje Solberg has the same experience: “The next few months will be very challenging. Some people are burnt out. And talent has itchy feet. We are getting the staff back to the office. Hybrid media houses are here to stay, but we need to find the right balance.”

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2
- PART 3**
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT
- REFERENCES



Benoît Balon-Perin, Innovation and Workflows Manager at Belgian RTBF is ready to have people back at the office. The public broadcaster has developed an innovative concept for changing work environments that takes into account the requirements of an audience-first newsroom (see case study [Changing Work Environments at RTBF, p. 148](#)). The new design is already being used in smaller locations, implementation at the headquarters will follow when a new building is ready.

Covid-19 as a confidence booster, an overdue digital accelerator, and a welcome brush up for leadership skills, organisational culture, and employer brand – on balance, the fallout from the pandemic seems to have been quite positive for public service media. What some leaders would like to see even more of is international cooperation, particularly an exchange of ideas, best-practice, and experiences.

Martin Řezníček, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of News at Czech TV mentions the EBU's weekly editor-in-chief online meetings as a stellar example. "There were eight or nine of us in the beginning, just exchanging ideas. It brought European news departments together like nothing before. This was a powerful and welcome tool for all of us." From his perspective, small broadcasters in particular profit from round tables like these. "This helps us to feel like part of the European family." Marcel Gelauff, Head of News at NOS, agrees: "International collaboration is important. Our informal editors-in-chief network that started a couple of years ago is a big win. Being in contact with colleagues is really important to be on top of innovation." Rory Coveney of Irish RTÉ says it is no surprise that a lot of innovation in public broadcasting originates in the Nordic countries: "Scandinavians cooperate in a very structured way. It will be important that we cooperate more with other public service media organisations."

There is certainly no one-size-fits-all solution for managing change successfully, whether in the media industry or elsewhere. Tinatin Berdzenishvili, who is operating in an environment that used to be dominated by state media in Georgia, needs to tackle vastly different challenges than her peer Kai Gniffke, who can rely on a strong public service tradition but needs to navigate the complex structures of German broadcasting federalism. However, many to-dos bear resemblances across the board. The most important are how to attract and retain talent – diverse in social, professional, and ethnic background, gender, and generation – and how to keep pace with technological developments and audience needs. A learning mindset and a culture committed to performance results are key to getting things done in a world where the pace of change is set to increase further with the advancement of artificial intelligence. In media organisations, both aspects need to be rooted in a firm commitment to public service values. Journalism is a service, after all.

To employ technology in a way that benefits the public, humans will need to develop capacities machines do not have. One essential example is counterfactual thinking, which entails spotting surprises and aberrations, and connecting the dots, as Martin Reeves argues. Leaders need to establish structures that encourage staff to shine at this. Only then can organisations become something that resembles 'imagination machines'.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES



REFERENCES

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

REFERENCES





Q&A 6

MARTIN REEVES

Chairman of the Henderson Institute, author of
“The Imagination Machine”

“FAILURES OF IMAGINATION ARE FAILURES OF LEADERSHIP”

Can every organisation become an “imagination machine”?

Imagination is creating mental models of things that do not yet exist but could. It is not fantasy or creativity. So, in one sense yes: Every human can imagine. What is missing is harnessing imagination at a collective level. I am not saying this is easy, but it might be easier than you think.

So, it is not about the lone hero who comes up with brilliant ideas?

It is a phenomenally bad strategy to depend on one person or on certain individuals. Failures of imagination are failures of leadership. Some one-shot entrepreneurs are just lucky. But repeat entrepreneurs have some special propensities. My advice: Don't wait for the next Steve Jobs.

What's the most important thing that needs to happen?

Harnessing imagination means structuring the entire lifecycle of an idea. Six things must go right. The first step is seduction. Keep your eyes open for surprises, something that doesn't fit, an accident or an anomaly. Organisations are often very introverted. They need to be more outward looking.

The second step is working through an idea. This requires counterfactual thinking, something I haven't been trained in since kindergarten. Kindergartners self-train; they have this thing called play. Biologically, this is low risk accelerated learning. Adults can ask themselves these questions, build scenarios: 'imagine if, ... wouldn't it be cool if, ...'.

The third step is colliding the idea with reality. Alternate between idea and reality, sketch, prototype. Most new ideas fail. But with failure we are generating new surprises, and this helps imagination further.

The fourth step is when an idea spreads and evolves. An idea that doesn't spread doesn't create value.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

How do you make sure an idea isn't killed in a, let's say, not very adventurous organisation?

Early ideas are very fragile, you need a lot of patience and empathy, they need space to develop.

Step five is very important: Codification. Transfer your idea to a different context and describe the three to four things that are absolutely critical to reproducing it. Lego is a wonderful example for codification, it is visual and can be understood by a 5-year-old and a physics professor. The sixth and final step is: Success needs to be renewed for self-disruption. It is very hard to be persistently successful. Leaders need to keep their teams a little paranoid: They need to say, 'yes, we are big today, but we could be gone tomorrow.'



What would your advice be for organisations that are particularly hierarchy-driven?

Don't shoot down ideas in the name of practicality. Don't stay with yesterday's success model. Create spaces for reflection. Experiment in small ways early. If you have just one big experiment and you need a positive result, when it is all or nothing, de-risk experimentation instead, do many. It is the opposite of efficiency. Diversity is important.

For many people, all the hope is in data, but we need more than data to be convinced.

Storytelling is essential. We change behaviour if we are motivated by a story. Indigenous people spend a lot of time storytelling, discussing business and rumour, complaining. In the current age we tend to think that everything is data. But data doesn't motivate us.

How can a business "imagine, explore and create new scripts" while running existing operations, as you write?

We need to embrace the paradox that we have to run the business and imagine at the same time, execute today's ideas, and develop tomorrow's ideas, create the factory and the lab.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

What are the biggest mistakes organisations can make?

Leaving change until it is too late. Constant self-disruption is preferable to waiting for crisis. Another one is arrogance; you need to preserve humbleness. The third trap is introversion, to talk about promotions, plans, procedures, not to look out of the windows. The biggest one is not realising the mental model behind the business. A business is not just buildings but also a mental model, and we mistake mental models as facts. We see the world through the lens of past success. We talk about an industry. But increasingly, digital platform businesses cut across industries. Industries are not a fact, they a way of looking at things.

What are people better at doing than computers are?

Computers are very good at correlative thinking. Someone who buys coffee tends to buy donuts, that sort of thing, even quite difficult correlations like reading x-rays. Human beings are better at causal thinking and counterfactual thinking. We cannot have data about things that don't yet exist. Another one is empathy. We have agency. And we are more sophisticated ethically than computers. An organisation is a learning machine that creates synergies between human and machine cognition.

You quote the psychologist Susan Blackmore saying, we need less stimulation for imagination rather than more. True?

Some people say busy is the new stupid. But you don't become maximally creative by becoming maximally busy; you don't even become maximally efficient. The modern schedule does not permit very much space for reflection. We have to ask: do I have space in my schedule? Reflection is very important to formulate today's ideas, and develop tomorrow's ideas, to create the factory and the lab.

You say crises are great to trigger imagination. Will we see tons of imagination machines because of the pandemic?

We will certainly see a lot of change. As far as I can tell, things never fully return to normal after depressions, recessions and the like. The pandemic appears to be accelerating changes that have already been in the making, like digitisation. We have seen these even in education and healthcare, two sectors that are highly regulated, conservative, and tremendously resistant to change. People spent a lot of time at home, this was a unique aspect of the crisis. They have been reconsidering their lives, asking: Do I really want to work in a corporation? The employee value proposition will become important. The result is not yet clear. At the beginning of any crisis, everything tends to be about constraints and problems, then suddenly someone says: 'ah, opportunity!' I sometimes call it a race to optimism.

What's your advice for the media industry in particular?

Media deals with the products of imagination. The media industry might have the answer at their doorstep. Media is a great source of imagination for me.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



Q&A 7

TINATIN BERDZENISHVILI

Director General of the Georgian Public Broadcaster

“YOU CANNOT MANAGE WHAT YOU DON'T COUNT”

What do you perceive as the biggest challenges in your role?

The biggest challenge in our country is our heritage. We are a very young democracy. Our public broadcaster was transformed from state television as recently as 2005. The attitudes towards us are still a bit post-Soviet; a lot of people think we are state television and we are obliged to serve the government. We are doing our best to serve our audience and explain to them: How are we different from commercial media, what are our core values? We have to explain this to officials the people and journalists.

What's your strategy in achieving this?

We have been thinking a lot about what kind of journalism we should be implementing here. The media is very polarised in Georgia. We have big governmental TV and an opposition channel, people watch this more for entertainment rather than news. Of course, this means people don't want to watch our balanced, boring news. If we talk about ethical norms and standards, we are ignored. Also, there is social media, so, plenty of fake news. This means we constantly have to follow politicians' agendas and don't get around to setting our own as much as we need to. That's why we came up with the idea to focus on constructive journalism. At first it was not easy to explain to our journalists why they should be doing this. They thought they had to deliver positive news. But it is more about developing solutions.

Have you already experimented with constructive news?

We are just at the beginning of this journey; it will probably take two to three years to get there. First, our management needed to learn about constructive news. We are sending eight people to the Constructive Institute in Aarhus to have them trained. They will be ambassadors and teach the others.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Is this how you work as a leader? Looking around for what works and then trying to implement it?

Media is always a mirror of society, so you need different approaches in different markets. But yes, we take the best examples of Western European models and try to implement them here. Our best role model is Finnish Yle, we are quite similar in population size and structure. We have 1,200 employees serving a population of 3.5 million people.

Like others, you are right in the middle of digital transformation. How do you go about that as a leader?

I think the problems we faced here were very similar to those of other broadcasters. People's mindsets are that public service media is only television. Staff from TV, radio and online didn't know each other, online wasn't taken seriously. We started to change this two years ago by building an integrated newsroom. At first, journalists were laughing about that. How can we even sit together? We are different, we have different experiences! We have since made progress. We did a lot of research demonstrating that people were not waiting for the 9 o'clock news show in the morning any longer; they were getting their news from their phones. We changed this paradigm: now, digital comes first. Also, we don't have only news but also education and entertainment. We put the cooking show MasterChef on YouTube. It was a huge success. We have now 30,000 people per minute on digital, we saw huge gains in audience. These things changed the attitude of the new generation.

So, success stories breed success?

Yes. Another really big success story was our TV School during the pandemic; we were the first in Europe. When people were afraid of leaving their homes, we brought 150 teachers into the studio, we recorded all the lessons, all the subjects, for all grades according to the national study plan. This has been really important to change people's attitudes towards our brand.

Has the pandemic accelerated change?

Definitely. For one, we learned a lot of new tools. We didn't stop one single program during the pandemic. Also, we don't refuse now when people want to work remotely. We don't need their hours to be spent at the office, we need the work to get done. But now most of the staff has come back to the office; only 10 percent work from home.

You have changed a lot in recent years. What's your recipe for successful implementation?

It depends on the issues. We are taking a lot of risks. We are trying to experiment. This is really worrying for some. As management, we are trying to be very open. We are doing a lot ourselves and do not delegate too much, just to give examples, and be role models. Of course, it is not easy. Changing the culture takes time. Our communication is totally different than what it used to be. People are more engaged in organisational life. We have 700 people in our social media chat. As management we are trying to

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

post everything that is important, giving people all the information they need. We are listening to their comments, and if something is changeable, we are doing that. They know they are important.

Communication is at the core of leadership. Any advice on how to do this right?

I believe communication is my strong side. I've come from marketing, presenting numbers, and statistics. I love that. Communication is at the heart of the managerial process. But while we communicate everything to our staff, we have a lack of good communication outside of the organisation. We can't spend too much money on marketing as a public broadcaster. But we need to get our message across and create a dialogue with the people: Do we need this kind of organisation for the country? If yes, we need to treat it more respectfully within the government.

You are also working on increasing diversity, not only at home but also as chair of the Gender Equality Steering Group at the EBU.

We are doing well on women in Georgia, we are at 60 percent women now in our organisation. We are very balanced in leadership. And we have the first camerawoman operating a crane camera. Talking about diversity used to be a little hard around here; that's why we opened a separate division dedicated to it. Now we focus on ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ. We put anchors on air who belongs to an ethnic minority. We started a big project for people with disabilities. Our first employee with down syndrome joined us a couple of months ago. We also do trainings on how to behave, what is our language toward people with disabilities. Journalists often don't know how to cover this topic without insulting people. We want to be very open with all the diversity we have in our country.

Are you using metrics to assess performance?

This is my favorite phrase: you cannot manage what you don't count. We are doing a lot with metrics and give the data to our employees. We are trying to give them the whole picture to see what is going on. We measure everything. Right now, we measure how many of our staff are vaccinated and communicate it to them. We awarded prizes for those getting vaccinated, organized collective vaccination events. And we are talking to those who are not yet vaccinated, trying to convince them. This is another success story. 90 percent of our employees are vaccinated compared to 30 percent in the country.

Reward structures are very important to changing culture, what have you changed?

This is very important indeed, but motivation does not only work through money, it can be a lot of things. This said, with digital transformation, we tried everything and it didn't work. When we implemented bonuses, our journalists started to write for digital, too.

What is the biggest success you have seen in recent years?

We had our local elections in the autumn. And the OSCE attested us that our election coverage was balanced and impartial. We have had many reasons to celebrate in the past few years, but I think this is a solid achievement.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

With the political and historical context you described, impartiality must be particularly challenging to implement. How do you train your journalists?

This is why we want to focus on constructive news: it is a means to demonstrate independence. On social media, we use guidelines similar to BBC, Yle, Swedish Radio, and other EBU members. Some of our people said they were too strict, and they would infringe on freedom of expression. But we need to have some rules. Being politically neutral is part of the contract now. If you don't agree, you can't sign the contract. Social media cannot be a private world – there is no private world any longer.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

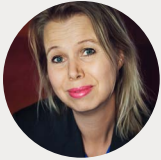
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 13

CHANGING CULTURE AT SVT

“THEY WERE PRAISED LIKE STARS, BUT THEY WANTED TO LEAVE”



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It was 2016 when Swedish television broadcaster SVT decided something serious had to change. An honest assessment had revealed that SVT News and Sports was losing touch with generations of news consumers and the digital news service was weakly positioned. The average age of a broadcast news viewer was more than 65 years. Management decided to radically reorganise national news. This came at considerable cost to many: 70 percent of all managers were replaced in one blow, all staff had to reapply for jobs in the newsroom, and 25 percent of reporter capacity was reallocated from broadcast to digital news. But sooner than expected, top management realised this was not enough. “The culture was still there,” Christina Johannesson recalls. As a project leader tasked with changing culture and competencies to support digital transformation, she is constantly on the lookout for new leadership techniques that seem to work for today’s most successful companies. “We had recruited top talent from other news media,” she says. But it didn’t work out as planned. “They were praised like stars, but they looked so sad.” Some were even facing burnout just a year later. Some said, “It feels like SVT is totally indifferent to what I do.” Her diagnosis: “They were close to quitting because they couldn’t develop.”



Like many other media organisations today, SVT doesn’t just compete with commercial neighbours like the leading national newspapers but also with platform companies such as Spotify which have a lot to offer. These companies outbid public service media by luring staff with significantly higher salaries as well as the promise of a much better work-life balance than a breaking news media operation can offer — not to mention the freedom to explore.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Johannesson remembers: “First of all, we had to start with the ‘why?’ Why did generations of news consumers turn their backs to SVT?” A project was started in which hundreds of journalists ventured out across the country to ask the audience themselves. “Fika with SVT,” the Swedish version of a coffee break, turned out to be a success. “But we also needed to work on our leadership culture,” Johannesson says. It is only by being an agile and flexible company that SVT can be responsive to audiences’ needs and move quickly. “If an organisation is 65 years old, it is more difficult than for one that is ten or 25 years old. But you need to do it, because you are competing in the same field.”

In 2018, SVT News and Sports started to focus on leadership culture. Mia Costello, a leadership consultant, helped with the analysis. First, the management team diagnosed a lack of clarity in goals, roles, and mandate. The digital newsroom had grown fourfold. There were plenty of new roles, but many employees didn’t know exactly what their responsibilities and tasks were within these new structures. This created confusion. The same jobs were done by different people. “There was a lack of role descriptions,” Johannesson recalls, “and in cases when we had role descriptions, they were not clearly communicated. The result was a lot of stress. We were too slow in breaking news situations but also in digital transformation. A second problem was micromanaging. There was a huge sense of disempowerment.” Anne Lagercrantz, Head of News and Sports, says: “We discovered we had this ‘mother bird’ culture. Everyone went to their boss to ask for permission. We are now trying to empower leaders.”

Third, SVT leadership diagnosed a lack of honest feedback. The staff did not receive regular coaching. “We were tolerating poor performance and behaviour,” Johannesson explains. “That confused the ones wanting to follow the strategies.” Lagercrantz says: “As leaders, we always need to spend more time than we think on explaining why change is necessary. And we need to repeat it a lot more.” Another challenge was: “In journalism, we grew up acting on gut feeling. We have to teach people to act a lot more on data.”

Now there are clear objectives for every platform and every group. Examples of measurable goals are: SVT News has a strong position in target group 20 to 40-year-olds; SVT News provides the best news video in Sweden; SVT News builds loyal visitors.

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2
- PART 3**
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT

Product strategy	SVT News...	Key Success Factors Strategic KPIs Activities		
		Key Success Factors	Strategic KPIs	Activities
	👉 ... has a strong position in the target group 20-40 years	✓	✓	✓
	👍 ... provides the best news videos in Sweden	✓	✓	✓
	🔄 ... builds loyal visitors	✓	✓	✓
	🏃 ... provides the fastest and most user friendly service in Sweden	✓	✓	✓
	♥ ... builds a strong relation with the local audiences	✓	✓	✓

SOURCE SVT

CASE STUDY 14

SHAPING THE SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY OF
GERMAN *TAGESSCHAU*

"INNOVATION IS A GROUP EXERCISE"



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YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Clubhouse — is it better to love it or leave it? Deciding this is a challenge for any media organisation but particularly for those who are funded by the public. On the one hand, these are third-party hosts which don't necessarily share public service values: their algorithms follow business interests. On the other, this is where you reach the generation that is expected to pay for public service content in the future. And there are other issues to consider, some of them political. For example, many news organisations shy away from using TikTok as it is a Chinese owned brand. Not so German ARD's *Tagesschau*, which makes special features for the platform (see [EBU News Report 2020](#)). But for ARD this is just part of a broader social media strategy for the channel.

"We never use a one size fits all strategy for all platforms," Juliane Leopold, Editor-in-Chief Digital of ARD Aktuell explains. She was Editor-in-Chief of BuzzFeed News Germany before she moved on to head the digital newsroom of the rather conservative news brand that still has 12 million viewers glued to the TV screen at eight o'clock every night. "We take our time learning to understand a particular channel, to find out how to serve it well." This works best by recruiting talent from the generation the channel is targeting. "I'm 38 years old, I don't expect to understand every channel, and certainly not to use it," Leopold says. Her career had advanced with the development of Twitter, but these days video and audio features are much more important, she explains. "We succeed by incorporating fresh ideas and talent, so the teams in our lab belong to the audience we hope to reach." Obviously, there can't be new hires every time something interesting emerges; often *Tagesschau* uses freelancers to help. Investigating new platforms does not automatically mean they will be used. "Importantly, we invest time in developing pilots and testing them, before we start something on a regular basis," Leopold explains.

Another critical factor for success from Leopold's perspective is to fully respect the core of the *Tagesschau* brand. "We are about reliable information, this is non-negotiable," she says. "Of course, we have items on social media that don't make it into the eight o'clock evening news. It is about serving new dishes and paying lots of attention to how they are prepared." At the same time, she encourages her team to try out off the beaten track items to which others might not have paid attention. "When we started to do Instagram, others had not been ready to explore this. This was a real opportunity for us."

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

The most important curve to watch is the growth chart, she recommends. Take the short audio app Clubhouse: “Growth exploded in the beginning but levelled off very soon. We have this checklist: It is not about total users but about how fast a channel reaches a critical mass.” If this looks interesting, the team starts exploring. How does it work, what could be an idea, what works for others? Can there be entertainment elements, are there possibilities for gamification, or a look behind the scenes? And what is the audience of a particular channel; what are the users’ needs?

“Innovation is a group exercise, and you have to pursue it in a structured and professional way,” Leopold says. One aspect is testing and checking for results. If they look good, resources need to be estimated. “A critical question is: Does it expand our audiences in some way or is it just more of the same?” she reflects. If value is indeed added, the project gets a green light. But constant evaluation is a requirement. “We have an audience developer in our team, which is a luxury in public service media,” she admits. He keeps track of the newsrooms Key Performance Indicators across platforms, guides the team to topics that have the potential to increase reach and is involved in innovation processes. Additionally, Leopold’s team can draw on the media research department.

Tagesschau decided against publishing on certain channels with which other media have been successful. Snapchat turned out to be a no go, as did gaming platform Twitch. “These are platforms that people don’t go to for serious information, so they were not for us.” The team wants to do more on YouTube, and expanding on live coverage is another goal.

Obviously, things are not always as easy as they sound in an environment where many people feel they can have a say. “An organisation like ours can never react as quickly as consumer innovation eats its way through an audience,” Leopold says. On some platforms, data protection has been an issue, for example. For her, it is important to offer opportunities for debate and dialogue in-house, even though some colleagues couldn’t care less. Leopold is fine with this: “It is absolutely legitimate that not everyone is always interested in innovation.”

Tagesschau’s social media numbers are outstanding in the German market. Leopold is not entirely happy though. “Looking at all our digital channels, we have a gap with young women on some platforms,” she says. Figures for female users are strongest on Instagram, on YouTube it is the other way round: more young men are attracted to the channel. But tweaking this is tricky: “We always ask ourselves how to gain new audiences without losing those we already have.” For those who are wondering, TikTok remains a success story. “We reach a different demographic there and they are significantly younger than our other users,” she says. Looks like there’s a chance for future funding after all.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 15

NEW WORK ENVIRONMENTS AT RTBF

FOCUSING ON AUDIENCES FIRST AND GOING FLAT: “WHO IS MY BOSS, AND WHO CAN HELP ME WHEN I HAVE A PROBLEM?”



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For many, this might sound like a luxury question: If you had 200 million Euros to spend on a new building for your media organisation, how would you fill it with life? The management team at Belgian RTBF knew instantly this was not trivial. “We knew we had to use this opportunity to change the way we were working,” says Benoît Balon-Perin, RTBF’s Innovation and Workflows Manager. The broadcaster takes pride in having operated with an integrated newsroom: for the past thirteen years, radio, TV and online news have all been managed jointly. “But we decided to go further,” Balon-Perin says, “this will be a big transformation for the whole company.”

Obviously, there was no copy and paste solution. And management didn’t want to wait for the builders. Some of this could be tested in advance. Planning started well before the pandemic arrived. The goal was to deeply change the organisational structure to meet the new habits of media consumption. This meant rethinking almost every element of traditional workflows. Many workshops later, the participating teams came up with a newsroom design that now resembles concentric circles. Balon-Perin describes: “The core of it all are the audience teams. Their job is to think about what the best programs for particular audiences are, for example, young adults, kids, the general public, rock music lovers.” They built the first hub with a focus on serving different platforms. The second hub is about content. And the third hub contains technology and administration. “Our main goals were to focus on audiences. And we wanted to be 360 as far as possible.” This means that any project must be developed for all platforms – online, social media, television, radio. The objective was not just to find an online version of a TV programme but to shape the project as a cross-platform programme from the start.

The second step was a huge programme called ‘Imagine’. It was designed to implement the new vision concretely from three angles: architecture, technology, and workflows. The architects came up with something they called an activity-based system. This is opposed to the individual user-based systems that still dominate most of today’s organisations – at least before the pandemic. Balon-Perin compares it to a residence. “At home, you have rooms to sleep, to eat, to rest. It is the same in your workday: you need different spaces for informal meetings, formal meetings, calls and other activities.” Consequently, in the new building, nobody has an individual assigned seat. Instead, everyone uses a variety of spaces: small and large meeting rooms, creation rooms, rooms to get some rest, quiet

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

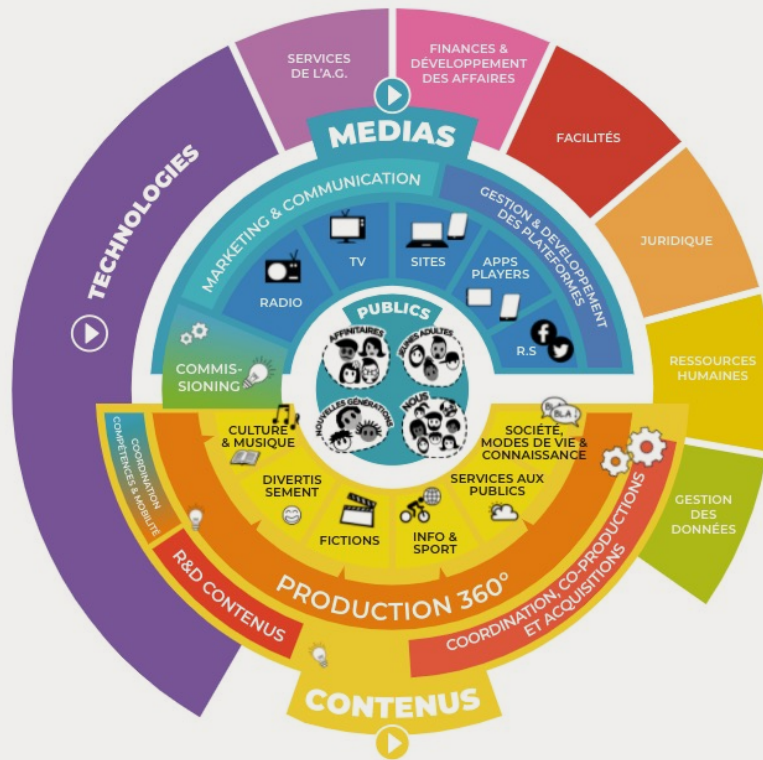
AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

spaces for confidential conversations or phone calls. “What we want to do in the new building is ‘flex desk, clean desk,’” Balon-Perin says. “So, no one will have ‘their’ seat, even the CEO. But, for practical reasons, each department will have its ‘home base’. So, HR, Finance, and so on will have their dedicated ‘zone’, but before leaving the office, everyone will ‘clean’ the desk where they worked.”

FIGURE 16 RTBF ORGANIZATION PLAN



SOURCE: RTBF

In line with agile culture, the idea was to not start with a big bang but small. The new structures were not only implemented in the new building but at local sites as well. With many people working from home during the pandemic, this provided an opportunity to test the idea in some locations. “In our locations in Liege, Charleroi and Mons, staff started to work in the new model last year. It is working very, very well; people are very happy in these new environments,” Balon-Perin reports. When the new news building is ready in late 2024, around 2,000 people will have been impacted.

All in all, the pandemic has been an accelerator of change, Balon-Perin is convinced. “It is a good thing that we had started to virtualise lots of processes six months before the pandemic began. It was not very difficult to move people to work from home, because the tech was already there.” His team found it easier than expected to produce a TV show from the host’s apartment, for example. Some RTBF radio presenters spent six months at home in 2020. “The pandemic was the opportunity to confirm that we were right.”

- PREFACE
- SUMMARY
- INTRODUCTION
- Q&A NOEL CURRAN
- PART 1
- PART 2
- PART 3**
- CONCLUSION
- INTERVIEWEES
- AUTHORSHIP
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- ABOUT

WHAT'S NEXT?

To pretend that it all was big smiles and shiny solutions wouldn't do justice to the effort, though. "To be honest, it is not easy to convince everyone," Balon-Perin says. Because it is not just moving chairs around in some rooms. "We came from a pyramid. But this is a flat structure," he describes. "There are two questions all the time: Who is my boss, and who can help me when I have a problem? Even though we had a lot of workshops, some people are still confused." And others might pretend they are. "My feeling is, that some people are trying to go back to the old structure." But the output shows that RTBF is headed in the right direction. Balon-Perin: "We produce more than before. Our market shares are very good. I'd say it is a success. But it will still take time until it is accepted by everybody."

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CASE STUDY 16

A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

CONNECTING EUROPEANS THROUGH QUALITY NEWS CONTENT SHARING



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“If nations could see what news for others was, and how others lived, it would engender peace and understanding.”

EBU (THEN THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING UNION) FIRST SECRETARY GENERAL, ARTHUR BURROWS IN THE 1920s

Exchanging content among members started as a radical idea; today it is the core pillar of the EBU. The organisation has been sharing and distributing video since 1961. However, doing so in the digital sphere, across languages, with automated translation and curation, has added a new quality to co-operation. And its impact has been far from trivial. Welcome to A European Perspective, the latest EBU innovation. It was launched in July 2021, 60 years after the conception of content sharing through [the Eurovision News Exchange](#).

“The European Recommendation Box audience-facing idea was very much inspired by our Nordic members,” says Eric Scherer, Director News Innovation and External Affairs at France Télévisions and co-chair of the Members’ Project Core Working Group co-chair. “Most EBU members still think of themselves as broadcasters, not online content providers. This needed to change.” But not only that. The working group knew that members had to use the latest, cutting-edge technologies, new automation, and recommendation tools. In fact, they had to build them. It all started in March 2020 around the onset of the pandemic. The whole project was led and developed remotely, interacting via Teams. “First, we focused our efforts on the development of the Digital News Hubs for B2B use, incorporating an automatic translation system called Eurovox,” Scherer explains. News content from 14 public service media organisations was automatically integrated and translated into English in the monitoring tool. Then they sought to develop the idea further to see if it could be used to serve the public directly. “The idea was to open new windows on the European news situation,” Scherer says.

“This was easy on paper,” he remembers. But talks among the participants were a different matter. Managers from public service media in France, Finland, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland and the broadcaster ARTE had to find common ground. It took representatives from the ten members and editorial, legal, and technical taskforces over six months to develop and build a platform and a new European

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Perspective newsroom that had to go live on 1 July. This deadline was set by the EU, with partial funding coming from the EU Multimedia Actions programme. A large part of the project was funded as strategic innovation by the EBU and the Members. “Now we need to expand it,” Scherer says.

A European Perspective works like a hub, based on the bespoke media and distribution asset management system. Editors from member states propose copyright cleared content to the central platform hosted by the hub in Geneva. The pieces are automatically translated into English there, and members are obliged to check the factual accuracy of the translation. These stories are then made available to participating newsrooms which can handpick or use the custom-built EBU recommendation engine, [PEACH](#). When the members choose to publish specific stories, these are automatically translated into their publishing language. The goal is to broaden people’s perspectives on a variety of issues, learn how fellow Europeans respond to similar challenges, and enable intercultural learning. Or, as the project’s official description reads, “In a world where audiences are overwhelmed by an avalanche of information that has no editorial or ethical guardrails, ‘A European Perspective’ will serve as a beacon of trust and integrity. Its content will be deeply rooted in core European values such as respect for human dignity, equality, inclusion and the rule of law.”

Between July and September 2021, A European Perspective stories received 14.5 million views, with almost 600,000 articles read in eight different languages. “During the first months, articles were mostly about Covid, climate change and other science subjects,” Scherer reports. “We want to share uncommon stories that add value.” He thinks there is still room for improvement. “The translating tools are very, very accurate. But we need to further deepen the editorial focus. One of the areas that could have seen an impact might have been A European Perspective on Afghanistan,” Scherer reflects.

Overall, the project could signal a departure from the old ways, when EBU members produced their own stories and used shared content solely as raw material. Scherer: “This project is not a race for clicks and audiences. It is a strategic move for public service media to leverage public service journalism potential.” In other words, the benefits of networking and collaborating might even outweigh those of content sharing. “We now understand better how Brussels works, for example, and how different members are driving digital innovation.” The project has also taught patience. “We tend to be in a hurry. But with this project we learned to listen to each other better, and to get to know each other and our cultures.” While there were some conflicts, as Scherer reports, there was also immense pleasure. “We are trying to lead the way in broadcasting. EBU has mostly been B2B, now we are shifting to B2C. And while there were some difficult talks, we have had an open and trusting attitude. We share the same journalism standards.” Scherer regards this as a real advantage over private sector competitors and social media networks which don’t have this sense of purpose. Scherer: “This has been an amazing project; we are very proud of it.”

Justyna Kurczabinska, EBU Project owner, is happy that for the first time in the history of the EBU news content exchange, members promote each other’s brands and journalism

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

in the digital space. In doing so they strengthen the value of the public service media alliance overall, and its contribution to society, by capitalising on national public service media investments to benefit pan-European audiences. For Kurczabinska, the key project ingredients are open and trustful collaboration, shared values, quality journalism and the willingness to learn together and break language barriers. It might not be an exaggeration to talk about a new era of cooperation.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

CONCLUSION

So, what's next? If public service media are to defend their space in an increasingly dense environment of information, entertainment, and distraction, they need to do so confidently and collaboratively, and of course, for the public good. In an age of rising fragmentation and — in some areas — polarisation, the *raison d'être* of public service media should be to emphasize connection and shared value, and to act as the glue that holds communities and societies together. They should also reflect the fact that societies and values are constantly developing and changing. They need to guide the public on this journey to help people feel safe to explore what's possible. Every organisation must establish the reason for its existence, a 'why'. Only then can they summon sufficient strength and support to keep moving forward.

Then there is the 'what'. The preceding chapters have attempted to outline what the flesh and blood of public service journalism could look like. A reliable, independent, and fact-based news service that cuts through opinion and serves everyone should be at the core. A service that thrives with strong journalism which is lively, eye-opening, and inclusive. Its purpose is to inform, educate, and enlighten. But this needs to be embedded in a world of shared interest and common ground which provides people with a sense of belonging. These include music, sports, fiction, and other markers of regional and cultural identification.

To do this properly, the possibilities of modern technology must be exploited. Communities exist through communication. Never before have there been so many channels to use and people with whom to connect. But access is one thing; harnessing opportunities is another. Public service media need to set incentives for public engagement. They should facilitate interaction, conversation, and participation rather than solely delivery. As former CBC Editor-in-Chief Jennifer McGuire puts it: "If public media didn't only focus on what they can contribute but refocused on journalism and the public conversation, being able to create collective discourse with diverging views, that would be a real opportunity."

While the 'what' will likely require most of the work, the 'how' — the strategy — needs some intense thought as well. There are increasing demands that leadership create responsive, curious, inclusive, and forward-looking organisations which are attractive to talent and honest about where they are at. Monitoring performance is the first step to improving it. Public service media needs to become more ambitious in setting, pursuing, and evaluating goals, but also in developing focus. They need to serve everyone, but not with everything. While human spirit, empathy, reason, and determination will be at the core of this, technology, again, will help significantly.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

Unfortunately, threats to public service media and their mission are all too prevalent and real. Certain political forces wish to undermine or abolish public service media due to their concerns that transparent reporting will reveal their intentions and practices. Some of these forces have already achieved this aim. The question is, what can be done to help brave individuals within challenged organisations and, ultimately, those societies where public service media is no longer perceived as providing a 'public service' but as partisan or state media. Then there are critics who think that the market will provide the public with what they need, unaware of (or unconcerned by) the multiple ways the market can fail to serve audiences with reliable news. In the best case, these actors engage in vigorous debates. In the worst, they will tamper with public service medias' independence, thus eroding their credibility and trust. Emboldened by both are the few but noisy forces in many societies which treat journalists as the enemy, with harassment and attacks that at times extend from the digital to the physical space.

A large majority of people in many countries are thankful for strong public service media, particularly in times of need. They find plenty of content and services there which help them with their daily life choices and struggles. But there is room for improvement. Not all parts of society are represented as they deserve. As the former editor of *The Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger, says, some of journalism has lost its connection to the people by becoming too academic, too politicised, too 'elite'. It took a pandemic to demonstrate that the connection still exists. Now it is up to public service media to capitalise on these gains. Newsrooms must be their audiences' allies.

Whether you are an optimist or a little less confident about the future might depend on personality, but perhaps even more so on the environment in which you find yourself.

Martin Řezníček of Czech TV expresses doubts that the Czech population would turn up in droves to march for its public broadcaster as they did 20 years ago when the broadcaster came under political attack. Even if they do appreciate its work: "I doubt we would see that response now. People are more complacent. The public is ready to send tweets, not to go out; it is a bigger pattern in society; many people would rather have more pay and less freedom."

Pascal Doucet-Bon of France Télévisions, which operates in a market with exceptionally low trust in media, is on the cautious side, too: "We will see more of misinformation. It is only the beginning. Particularly deep fakes will be an issue. (...) We will see more cyber harassment; it is already increasing every week. We will also see an increase of physical violence, especially during demonstrations." Marcel Gelauff, Head of News with NOS in the Netherlands, emphasizes hope instead: "We feel increasingly confident that as a society we need trustworthy organisations and reliable information. It is so fundamental. My fear that it might vanish is not as big as it was on rainy days. I am more optimistic than I have been."

There are technological possibilities suited to fuel that optimism. According to several of those interviewed, one of the next steps will be the increasing personalisation of content,

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

thanks to innovations in artificial intelligence technologies. The intention here is not to feed people only what they are interested in but to help them navigate a high choice media environment. This has long been fought against by editors whose careers have been spent in one-size-fits-all platforms like newspapers or linear television. Radio used to be slightly ahead of the game by providing a broader array of choices for different generations and tastes. And it has proven to be quite resilient, having provided targeted services for different audiences and possibilities for interaction from the outset. Trust figures for radio consistently outperform those of other media. But customisation has been one of the overarching concepts of the digital world. Any industry that does not get ahead of this trend will likely have a tough time surviving.

In terms of journalism, public service media's task might increasingly be to unify rather than polarise – the latter having been turned into a business model by some private media. Maïke Olij, independent researcher and one of the authors of the previous EBU News Reports, is certain: “It is about finding the middle and not polarising. People are becoming really fed up with differences and how these are enlarged by news media.” There is indeed evidence that media coverage of misinformation has led people to believe the problem is much bigger than it is. Also, in many countries, the debate about vanishing trust was perhaps more alarming than the actual trust figures suggested.

Public service journalism needs to find a better balance between reporting the drama and presenting perspectives and nuances. Many newsrooms are putting their hopes on constructive journalism to battle some of the negativity bias in news. This will be desperately needed, especially with climate change reporting, a topic on which journalists are only starting to get a grip. Newsrooms should emphasize reporting on solutions to the climate challenge rather than simply highlighting catastrophes. Journalists should also stick to the science rather than presenting it as a political battleground. Undoubtedly, this will be a tricky task. While the facts about climate change as a result of human activity are uncontested, the strategies for combatting it likely never will be. Newsrooms need to come up with a plan to cover what is possibly the most important topic of our times before it is annexed by those who want to frame it as green or left-wing politics. Climate change reporting will put the concept of impartiality to the test, and public service media need to fill it with life. This means they should be precise about the facts but broad and inclusive in opening spaces for debates. The climate challenge will provide plenty of opportunity to show what “due impartiality” is all about.

International co-operation will make public service media stronger and more resilient against attacks.

If there was one thing that emerged again and again from our conversations, it was the desire for more collaboration across borders. This was emphasized particularly by smaller media organisations with less financial resources, or those who have come under political pressure. Many of the interviewees suggested that the EBU has an impact with national governments and legislators, and just as importantly gives solidarity and support to those working to promote the values and aims of public service journalism. There is a broad

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

array of tools the organisation can employ to strengthen its members and the individuals who work for them, and to hold to account those who breach public service values. Promoting regulatory action, helping those under pressure and instigating cross national campaigns are some of these tools. “The EBU is important as a platform, as lobbying organisation that keeps us together, that stimulates an exchange by journalists across countries,” says Marcel Gelauff of NOS.

Martin Řezníček of Czech TV suggests developing more products together. “The Eurovision song contest is the best-known public facing product. Yes, it is watched by millions, but it doesn’t tell us much about the rest of what we do. We have more and more in common than we had in the past.” Benoît Balon-Perin of RTBF thinks along the same lines: “It should be possible to produce more content together rather than just exchanging content.” ‘A European Perspective’ is a showcase project in this respect that has unlocked a lot of potential (see case ‘A European Perspective, p. 151. Sveriges Radio’s Olle Zachrisson is also open to more co-operation: “Having constant exchanges with trusted partners within EBU family is so important. We have limited development resources; if we can get help within EBU projects, that’s great.”

There have been suggestions of building a joint European content platform which stretches beyond public service media. But most media leaders would agree that waiting for a big, all-out-effort project would not be a sound strategy, just as it is not advisable for companies to wait for the next Steve Jobs to solve their problems. Instead, everyone needs to start right now if they did not start yesterday.

The key to success is talent building. It is vital to develop and attract leaders and managers who foster organisational cultures that are responsive, inspiring, inclusive and innovation-enhancing. Kai Gniffke says: “One of my mottos is: the best people win, not the best structures. When leaders live and breathe a different leadership style, they can operate within outdated structures for a while. Eventually these structures will change.” Bringing in diverse voices that reflect changing societies is essential, as it will open up even richer and broader perspectives than the ones public service media is already reflecting.

Media leaders and their teams will be busy embracing change while defending values in the years to come. The pandemic provided a much-needed opportunity to counter the narrative of declining trust. Now the industry needs to focus on what’s possible and deliver on the trust which has been vested in them. Douglas Smith, who helps newsrooms with digital transformation, reflects: “I have been surprised how many journalists so easily embrace and stick to the narrative of doom and gloom. We have many exciting and positive developments in journalism. Think about online start-ups, the growing number of legacy news groups turning things around, the enthusiasm of younger people, and real progress with change management efforts around the world.” EBU Director General Noel Curran has a similar message: “It is important that leaders don’t get complacent. And they should be positive. Positivity is not complacency,” he told us (see Q&A with Noel Curran, page 11. In thinking about what’s next for journalism and public service media, constructive inquiry and a healthy dose of optimism should make for an exciting journey.

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Balon-Perin, Benoît	Innovation & Workfl ws Manager	Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté française (RTBF), Belgium
Berdzenishvili, Tinatin	Director General	Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), Georgia
Bobiński, Krzysztof	Board Member	Society of Journalists, Poland
Coveney, Rory	Director of Strategy	Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), Ireland
Curran, Noel	Director General	European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Switzerland
Doucet-Bon, Pascal	Deputy Director of News	France Télévisions (FT), France
Dragomir, Marius	Director, Center for Media, Data & Society	Central European University
Erdelyi, Peter	journalist	444.hu, Hungary
Gelauff, Marcel	Editor-in-Chief	Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS), Netherlands
Gniffke, Kai	Director General	Südwestrundfunk (ARD), Germany
Haagerup, Ulrik	Director	Constructive Institute, Denmark
Hinrichs, Thomas	Director of Information	Bayerischer Rundfunk (ARD), Germany
Ibrahim, Aya	Creator, Executive Producer, Flipping the Script	Deutsche Welle, Germany
Jauhainen, Petri	Head of Media	Oy Yleisradio Ab (YLE), Finland
Johannesson, Christina	Project leader Nyhetsledarna	Sveriges Television Ab (SVT), Sweden
Kasper-Claridge, Manuela	Editor-in-Chief	Deutsche Welle, Germany
Köppen, Uli	Head of AI + Automation Lab, Co-Lead of BR Data	Bayerischer Rundfunk (ARD), Germany
Krupa, Jakob	Senior Correspondent	Mlex news agency, Poland
Küng, Lucy	indep., Senior Research Associate	Reuters Institute, UK/Switzerland
Lagercrantz, Anne	Director of News and Sports	Sveriges Television Ab (SVT), Sweden
Leopold, Juliane	Editor-in-Chief Digital	ARD Tagesschau, Germany
Liubakova, Hanna	Independent expert, non-resident fellow	Atlantic Council
Marchand, Gilles	Director General	SRG-SSR, Switzerland
McGuire, Jennifer	independent expert, former editor-in-chief	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Canada
Newman, Nic	independent expert, Senior Research Associate	Reuters Institute, UK
Olij, Maike	independent Researcher	Netherlands
Posetti, Julie	Global Director of Research	International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)
Reeves, Martin	Chairman	Henderson Institute and Managing Director and Senior Partner, BCG, USA
Řezníček, Martin	Deputy editor-in-chief of news	Ceská Televize (CT), Czech Republic
Roose, Erik	Director General	Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR), Estonia
Sambrook, Richard	Emeritus Professor	Cardiff University, UK
Scherer, Eric	Director News Innovation & External Affairs	France Télévisions (FT), France
Sehl, Annika	Professor of Digital Journalism	Univ. Bundeswehr, Germany
Shabbir, Nabeelah	Senior Research Associate	International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)
Shishkin, Dmitry	independent consultant	UK
Smith, Douglas	independent consultant	USA
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Steenfadt, Olaf	JTI Project Director	Reporters Without Borders
Unsworth, Fran	Director, News and Current Affairs	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), UK
Walden, Bakel	Director of Development and Offering	SRG SSR, Switzerland
Wegner, Jochen	Editor-in-Chief	Zeit Online, Germany
Zachrison, Olle	Head of Digital News Strategy	Sveriges Radio Ab (SR), Sweden

PREFACE

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

INTERVIEWEES

INTRODUCTION

AUTHORSHIP

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PART 1

ABOUT

PART 2

PART 3

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT



SENIOR EDITOR OF NEWS STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT, EUROVISION NEWS - EBU

Justyna Kurczabinska leads the News Strategy and Development of [Eurovision News](#) at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU- the world's leading alliance of public service media. Until recently she was also the Head of the Eurovision News Exchange providing EBU Members with round-the-clock access to live and edited news stories as well as eyewitness media. The most recent initiative she has championed aims at redefining digital news online collaboration among public service media organisations with the objective of providing audiences across Europe with powerful and relevant public service journalism through the project called "A European Perspective".

She has been overseeing the [Public Service Journalism Initiative](#) aimed at strengthening and supporting independent trusted news since 2017. The annual EBU News Report has become one of the crucial elements of this initiative.

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Ed Mulhall is an editorial advisor and media consultant. He is a former Managing Director of RTÉ News and Current Affairs and previously worked as a radio producer, television producer, news programme editor and managing editor of TV News. He was an elected member of the EBU News Committee for several terms during his time with RTÉ News. Since leaving RTÉ he has worked as an editorial advisor and consultant as well as writing on history, literature, and media topics. He has acted as an Editorial advisor for Eurovision News on many projects including successive EBU News Reports.

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Prior to that she worked as a news reporter and foreign news editor for both public service and commercial media organisations, MTVA and RTL KLUB, as well as newspapers in Hungary and in the US.

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We, the authors, editors, and commissioners of this report, are deeply grateful for the support we were fortunate enough to rely on from outside and inside the EBU community. First, we would like to thank the more than 40 media leaders and experts who openly shared their insights and thoughts with us. They devoted major chunks of their precious time to being interviewed and repeatedly contacted. Their contributions — whether explicitly mentioned or not — are at the very core of this work.

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PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

ABOUT THE EBU



The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is the world's foremost alliance of public service media (PSM). Our mission is to make PSM indispensable.

We represent 115 media organizations in 56 countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa; and have an additional 31 Associates in Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas.

Our Members operate nearly 2,000 television and radio channels alongside numerous online platforms. Together, they reach audiences of more than one billion people around the world, broadcasting in almost 160 languages.

We strive to secure a sustainable future for PSM, provide our Members with world-class content from news to sports and music, and build on our founding ethos of solidarity and co-operation to create a centre for learning and sharing.

Our subsidiary, Eurovision Services, aims to be the first-choice media services provider, offering new, better and different ways to simply, efficiently and seamlessly access and deliver content and services.

We have offices in Brussels, Rome, Dubai, Moscow, New York, Washington DC, Singapore, Madrid and Beijing. Our headquarters are in Geneva.

Discover more about the EBU at www.ebu.ch

PREFACE

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Q&A NOEL CURRAN

PART 1

PART 2

PART 3

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEWEES

AUTHORSHIP

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT

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