LEOPOLDINA FORTUNATI

2011

Deuze, M., & Fortunati, L. (2011). Atypical Newswork, Atypical Media Management. In M. Deuze (Ed.), *Managing Media Work* (pp.111-120). London: Sage.

Atypical News work, Atypical Media Management

Mark Deuze and Leopoldina Fortunati

Contingency defines the lived experience of many, if not most, media professionals today. Of all the professions in the media production industries (such as advertising, film and TV, and digital game development), the labor market for journalism has arguably been the most stable for the longest time, particularly regarding newspapers as employing (until the late 1990s) the majority of the editorial workforce. This is rapidly changing, however. in April 2006, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) released a report on the labor conditions of journalists around the world, concluding that "journalists and media workers are increasingly being employed in atypical and contingent employment relationships—casual employment, use of contract work and the rise of the use of triangular, ambiguous and disguised employment." At the time, atypical news work made up around one third of the membership of IFJ affiliates, and it can be considered to be growing rapidly—as newspapers, magazines, and local broadcast stations around the world are either scaling down their content operations or closing their doors altogether. The percentage of atypical employment is significantly higher among newcomers in the industry and among those working in television and online. This not only suggests growing numbers of freelancers in the news industry—although that certainly has been the case. Even among contracted employees, many are doing freelance work—for other titles at the same corporate parent or by repurposing story ideas and materials across more media channels not necessarily owned by the original employer (Deuze, 2009). Some reporters are still permanently employed, but most others only parachute in for a period of time to work on a certain aspect of a project (a special issue or supplement, a specific program or reportage, a part of a news Web site); several people move in and out of projects and temporary labor arrangements all the time, and many if not most media workers swim in what Hesmondhalgh (2007) considers a pool of underutilized talent. Contemporary trends in new media technologies, changes in the ownership structures and production networks of cultural industries, an ongoing hyper-fragmentation of media audiences, and a gradual convergence of production and consumption in an increasingly participatory media culture contribute to this precariousness (Deuze, 2007; Jenkins, 2006).

Loss of Control

The increased contingency in work and employment does not mean media professionals are without power or without resources to counteract. But beyond the casualization of labor, a significant factor handicapping practitioners in making effective use of their power—to unionize or otherwise collectively take action—is the contemporary shift in resources away from journalists to their audiences (Fortunati & Deuze, 2010). These two factors deeply affecting the work and management of journalists' careers tend to get amplified by the ongoing computerization and convergence of news work. The implementation of such computerized information processes in the news industry signals the shift of journalism from being a liberal profession— requiring a highly

specialized and elite talent base—to becoming a simple labor—that is, a labor that requires a limited number of family and social resources to be produced and that from a technical point of view might be done by anyone. This shift implies a loss of authority and control on the part of journalists over their work—which is one of the foundational elements in their sense of professionalism (Beam, 2006). This sense of shared control and peer review used to be the benchmark of what it means to be a professional journalist. The results of journalists' work are primarily judged by their bosses and their clients, two audiences that often have different, if not contradictory, interests. Moreover, this judgment is expressed in a situation in which journalists are paying the price of the unfinished revolution introduced by the information process in newsrooms: the news-producing consumer (often constructed as a competitor-colleague: a "citizen journalist").

The advent of the Internet has in fact opened the door to a new role of audiences that the journalistic sector has not been able to handle in an appropriate way. As research across Europe in recent years by one of the authors shows (Fortunati et al., 2009), publishers and editors have not succeeded in taking advantage of the contribution of audiences, because they did not invest at the organizational level regarding new professional roles inside the newsrooms with the task to monitor, moderate, select, and convey the opinions and comments coming from the audience into the newsrooms. They preferred to confine audiences' voices, generally publishing them in separated and specific places mainly inside the forums of online newspapers, without interacting with them and without including them in their editorial strategy. Research in other aspects of news organizations making the transition to digital and online suggests similar outcomes: a lack of managerial commitment and organizational investment, the prevalence of turf wars over synergy or collaboration, and empowering innovations taking place largely at the hands of a select few enterprising individuals within the company—not supported by their colleagues, management, or even (most of) the audience (Deuze, 2004; Paterson & Domingo, 2008).

The combination of workforce casualization, a difficult economic context for advertising-supported media (such as newspapers and broadcast news programming), and the power shift from journalists to audiences and employers makes for a particularly challenging set of parameters for the management of firms and careers in journalism.

The Problems of Management

In many if not most countries, a drive toward convergence of formerly distinct news operations has been a staple of the business. Generally, such managerial initiatives have been initiated as a consequence of (or a push to) the ongoing integration, consolidation, and concentration of media ownership. It is important to note that the concentration of media ownership with the deliberate goal to integrate different departments and sections of the industry into cross-media enterprises is and always has been a top-down strategy, to the point that in a study carried out recently in 11 European countries on journalism and the Internet it came out that the majority of the journalists interviewed did not appear to be informed about other multimedia initiatives such as radio, TV, and SMS, WAP, MMS, or PDA news produced by their media organization.

Studying the institutional and cultural contours of innovation at two Dutch newspapers owned by publisher PCM, Ybema (2003) typified management strategies in this context as "postalgic," noting how the industry's executives tend to come up with all kinds of far-reaching plans and futuristic ideals that are primarily interpreted by the

journalists involved as unfair criticisms on their work. The direct result is the cultivation of some kind of nostalgia about the "good old days" among reporters and editors, which in turn leads to resistance to the proposed changes in the newsroom. A survey among hundreds of managers and journalists at U.S. daily newspapers about change initiatives shows that the implementation thereof caused conflict and hurt morale (Gade, 2004). Gade found in this survey how journalists appreciate the difficult and complex situation management is in today but still question the factors motivating change. This overall lack of (shared) vision or clarity of goals pursued in managerial innovation was also noticed in a study conducted in 2000 among news organizations and managers in Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland (Bierhoff, Deuze, & De Vreese, 2000; see also Bozena I. Mierzejewska, in this volume), while in the more recent European study mentioned above some managerial problems in the implementation of the Internet emerged.

In a critical assessment of the competences and skills on the level of management responsible for the implementation of convergence, Killebrew (2004) found most managers were not equipped to deal with these changes in their newsrooms. Managers have been told to implement change, argues Killebrew, but most have not been given the tools to successfully integrate converged (or multimedia) journalism into the workplace. Quinn's (2005) work on management and convergence journalism is based on "best practices "—based case study research in newsrooms in the United States, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong. Emphasizing the need for investment in communication, training, incentives, and rewards, Quinn makes a compelling case in favor of convergence—but only if it is done by organizations, managers, and journalists with access to significant resources, which is regrettably exactly what the business lacks at this point in time.

Although these and other studies suggest journalists are not necessarily opposed to change, they do tend to be cautious and skeptical toward changes in the institutional and organizational arrangements of their work, as lessons learned in the past suggest that such changes tend to go hand in hand with downsizing, layoffs, and having to do more with a smaller staff, a lower budget, and fewer resources. This in turn has consequences for the quality of the news that gets produced, as documented by numerous studies—for example by Avilés, Bienvenido, Sanders, and Harrison (2004) at television newsrooms in Spain and Britain and by Boczkowski (2004) in several U.S. print newsrooms (see also Pablo Boczkowski, in this volume).

McKercher (2002) argues that technological convergence and corporate concentration must be understood as part of the strategy of media owners to acquire new sources for profit, extending their control over the relations of production and distribution of news and aiming to undermine the collective bargaining position of journalists through their unions by shifting toward a model of individualized and contingent contracts. Gall (2000) further notes that the introduction of such personal contracts in the news industry, though allowing individual journalists some freedom to negotiate their own terms and conditions of employment, in fact has resulted in a deterioration of the working conditions of journalists: lower wages, less job security, and more contingent labor relationships (variable hours, job rotation, and flextime). Similarly, Marjoribanks (2003) notes that the contemporary organization of work in transnational and converged news enterprises has allowed for the creation of a more flexible, multiskilled, and highly moveable—at least in the eyes of management—workforce.

Convergence Journalism

A structure of convergent multimedia news organizations has been emerging since the mid-1990s, with companies all over the world opting for at least some form of cross-media cooperation or synergy among formerly separated staffers, newsrooms, and departments. Researchers involved in studying and observing convergence journalism ventures around the world note, however, how the biggest obstacles to seamless integration always boil down to cultural clashes. This goes especially for the print reporters, citing their deep distrust of broadcast journalists' work routines, their skepticism about the quality of news work when it involves having to do stand-ups for television or write blurbs for the Web, and their critical view of the quality and level of experience of their television and online counterparts.

On the other side, television people reportedly feel their print colleagues are conservative, slow, and oblivious to the wants and needs of their audiences (for instance as expressed through market research, sales figures, and daily ratings). Fortunati (2003) found, however, that in Italy many print journalists were aspiring to work for television channels for the wider popularity that TV could offer along with a higher retribution. Killebrew (2004) even reports how news managers charged with implementing the convergence processes often seem unprepared, skeptical, and ill prepared for the job. In effect they are required to produce technological and organizational innovations while the cultures that should sustain, support, and shape these changes are not still existing. These kinds of mutual stereotypes are not just the products of a stressful and confusing convergence experience but are exponents of the historical separation of different professional identities and work cultures— which also suggests that interpersonal relationships and communication across the different media can be considered the essentials in any managerial tool kit (Quinn, 2005; see also Jane B. Singer, in this volume).

There is always a large part of unspoken "knowledge in practice" at work inside any media company, in the context of which it is difficult to enact or inspire new ways of doing things during the convergence process, and which thus can become a terrible inertia or resistance against any proposed changes. Furthermore, this ongoing reorganization of news work requires a different type of journalist with multimedia skills and competences—including taking the coproducing consumers seriously. As with television news before, such cross-media approaches will transform news. Given the historical context of news transformations, this will most likely occur in the packaging of news first and in the content later (Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003).

Reporters and Editors

A survey by multimedia consulting firm Innovation—commissioned by the World Association of Newspapers—conducted in 2001 among media executives worldwide cited as the biggest obstacle to media convergence the individualistic nature of journalists (mentioned by 31% of all respondents). Using data from representative surveys among U.S. journalists, Beam (2006) found that "rank-and-file journalists are more dubious about the business goals and priorities of their organization than are their supervisors" (p. 180), showing that journalists in general tend to be more satisfied with their jobs if they perceive that their employer values "good journalism" over profit.

Research by Russo (1998) additionally suggests that journalists identify themselves more easily with the profession of journalism than, for example, with the

medium or media company that employs them. Journalists (and news managers) entering the changing and pressured industry today have to work in and through historically and socially constructed shared routines, knowledge, and "values that experienced members of a group transmit to newcomers through socialization and [that are] used to shape a group's processes, material output, and ability to survive" (Mierzjewska & Hollifield, 2006, p. 46). In this context, who journalists are becoming a fundamental element in understanding careers and companies in journalism.

Comparing results from surveys among journalists in 21 countries, Weaver (1998) found support for claims that the characteristics of journalists, including their demographics, are largely similar worldwide. Comparing findings from recent surveys among journalists in five countries—The Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, Australia, and the United States—several striking conclusions can be drawn, most notably regarding the general homogeneity among journalists in these different but equivalent countries:

- Journalists tend to share a distinct middle-class background.
- Journalists are generally college educated.
- Journalists have socioeconomic backgrounds firmly grounded in the dominant cultural and ethnic sectors of society, and thus newsrooms exhibit an overall low minority representation.
- There exists a distinct glass ceiling in terms of gender issues: Women are overrepresented in "feminine" news beats (lifestyle, education, fashion, health and beauty) and are underrepresented in managerial functions.
- Reporters and editors in modern Western democracies hold similar views on what is important in their work (in recent years, for example, privileging interpretation over breaking news as the most crucial aspect of their jobs).

Although it seems safe to argue that the professional group of journalists tends to be populated by generally the same kind of people as in the past, female journalists in Europe and to some extent North America today have begun to outnumber their male counterparts—particularly in the lowest positions in the professional hierarchy (Witt-Barthel, 2007).

Most journalists today still work for traditional print media, newspapers in particular, although reports over time show that the fields of broadcasting and new media are gaining ground in terms of new openings and jobs offered to newcomers. Magazine, broadcasting, and online newsrooms tend to be significantly smaller in staff size than newspaper newsrooms, and the work for these news media gets done almost exclusively on a contract-by-contract, freelance, or stringer basis. The recent European survey, already mentioned, shows that the journalists interviewed do not perceive the recent innovations in their working environment as a process that can enhance their political roles, understood as defense of democracy, control on politicians, influence on public opinion and the political agenda, and analysis and interpretation of complex issues (Fortunati et al., 2009).

Considering the primacy of the individual journalist and his or her traditional orientation toward peers rather than publics or employers, it is fascinating to note a

conclusion from Journalism.org's 2009 State of the News Media report in the United States, suggesting that "power is shifting to the individual journalist and away, by degrees, from journalistic institutions Through search, e-mail, blogs, social media and more, consumers are gravitating to the work of individual writers and voices, and away somewhat from institutional brand. Journalists who have left legacy news organizations are attracting funding to create their own websites. "

The individualization of news work as implied by a new capitalist culture of workforce flexibility, the ongoing information processes of convergence and computerization, and the emergence of audiences increasingly focused on individual rather than institutional voices may prove to be a fertile ground for future professionals to explore. One of the key areas in this future development of the field is, for example, the intrinsic weakness of online information: its unreliability. Journalists are uniquely equipped with the skills and mind-set critically needed in the validation of information online. This, combined with their individual and perhaps idiosyncratic added value as well as professional self-perception, is at the very least an interesting, even if unresolved, trend.

Discussion

Journalists today enter a workforce that is built on the heyday of the 20thcentury era of omnipresent mass media but that is expected to perform in a contemporary news ecology where individualization, globalization, and the pervasive role of corresponding networked technologies challenge all the assumptions traditional news making is based on. When considering the current developments in the lived reality of news work, evidence can be found both of things staying the same and of trends producing profound change. Technology further amplifies these trends as it primarily gets introduced in news organizations to standardize existing ways of doing things and to act as a cost-cutting measure by enabling reporters to do more general work with less specialized staff or resources (other than portable, networked equipment). Within organizations, newsroom socialization has long been a staple of the production of culture. As part of this, the routinization of news work becomes a crucial strategy in managing the accelerated news flow—a flow further supercharged by the addition of citizens as producers next to consumers of news through online platforms.

All the processes analyzed in this chapter suggest that we are witnessing a shift toward a new stage of industrialization in the news sector. The gradual transition toward a postindustrial and precarious organization of labor in journalism is the result of a business strategy that through the computerization of newsrooms and the development of convergence has consistently aimed to reduce costs and effect more managerial control over reporters and editors. Atypical news work and atypical media management describe the increasing weakening of the journalistic profession with its craft tradition in the production of news, the presence and prestige of the byline, and the art to write, shoot, record, edit, and produce an authoritative narrative. Journalism today, as it is practiced in most mainstream news organizations, is being reduced to a simple form of labor, where journalists (from the perspective of management) are cast as flexible, multiskilled, and highly moveable news workers. The enforcement of this post industrialization process is bringing to this sector, as well as to the other industrial sectors, standardization, homogenization, and uniformity of the labor force (as also reflected in the coherence and isomorphism of news stories around the world) with the purpose of obtaining its interchangeability (thus the need to have anonymous, nonspecialized journalists, for example). In this stage there is also a new role of

audiences—perhaps emerging as an unexpected side effect of the ongoing convergence in the sector—one with which managers have not yet decided how to deal. These "new" audiences of producing consumers, or "prosumers," can prove to be a disruptive force for established business models in news, but they also may represent a wealth of people available to work without being paid.

These processes certainly have the effect of provoking an inevitable devaluation of the quality of news. This further development of the commodification and serialization of news is related not only to a strategy of cost reduction but also to the formalization of less freedom for journalists. Elsewhere we have argued (Fortunati & Deuze, 2010) how this may bring about a situation of a journalism without journalists. If this catastrophe comes true, perhaps this is the time to signal for individual journalists an alternative route to professionalism and the production of quality public information: outside of the institutions that thus far have defined the news as a business and a commodity.

References

Avilé, J., Bienvenido, L., Sanders, K., & Harrison, J. (2004). Journalists at digital television newsrooms in Britain and Spain: Workflow and multi-skilling in a competitive environment. Journalism Studies, 5(1), 87—100.

Beam, R. (2006). Organizational goals and priorities and the job satisfaction of U.S. journalists. Journalism Quarterly, 83(1), 169—185.

Bierhoff, J., Deuze, M., & De Vreese, C. (2000). Media innovation, professional debate and media training: A European analysis. European Journalism Center Report. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/6601

Boczkowski, P. (2004). Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

Deuze, M. (2004). What is multimedia journalism? Journalism Studies, 5(2), 139—152. Deuze, M. (2007). Media work. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Deuze, M. (2009). Technology and the individual journalist: Agency beyond imitation and change. In B. Zelizer (Ed.), The changing faces of journalism: Tabloidization, technology and truthiness (pp. 82—98). London, England: Routledge.

Du Gay, P. (2000). In praise of bureaucracy. London, England: Sage.

Fortunati, L. (2003). The information society at the service of tradition. In C. MacKeogh & P. Preston (Eds.), Strategies of inclusion: Gender in the information society: Vol. Il. Experiences from private and voluntao.' sector initiatives (pp. 283—302). Center for Technology and Society. Trondheim, Norway: Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Fortunati, L., & Deuze, M. (2010). Journalism without journalists. In G. Meikle & G. Redden (Eds.), News online: Transformation and continuity. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fortunati, L., Sarrica, M., Balcytiene, A., Harro-Loit, H., Macgregor, P., Roussou, N., et al. (2009). The influence of the Internet on European journalism. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14(4), 928—963.

Gade, P. (2004). Newspapers and organizational development: Management and journalist perceptions of newsroom cultural change. Journalism Monographs, 6.

Gall, G. (2000). New technology, the labour process and employment relations in the provincial newspaper industry. New Technology, Work and Employment, IS (2), 94-107.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2007). The cultural industries (2nd ed.). London, England: International Federation of Journalists. (2006). The changing nature of work: A global survey and case study of atypical work in the media industry. Research report. Retrieved from http://www.ifj.org/pdfs/ILOReport070606.pdf

Jenkins, H. (2006). Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide. New York: New York University Press.

Journalism.org. (2009). The state of the news media. Project for Excellence in Journalism. Retrieved from http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2009/narrative_ overview_maj ortrends .php ?cat= 1 &media=l/

Killebrew, K. (2004). Managing media convergence: Pathways to journalistic cooperation. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Marjoribanks, T. (2003). Strategising technological innovation. In S. Cottle (Ed.), Media organization and production (pp. 59—75). London, England: Sage.

McKercher, C. (2002). Newsworkers unite: Labor, convergence and North American newspapers. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mierzjewska, B., & Hollifield, C. A. (2006). Theoretical approaches to media management research. In A. B. Albarran, S. M. Chan-Olmsted, & M. O. Wirth (Eds.), Handbook of media management and economics (pp. 37—66). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Nerone, J., & Barnhurst, K. G. (2003). US newspaper types, the newsroom, and the division of labor. Journalism Studies, 4(4), 435—449.

Paterson, C., & Domingo, D. (Eds.). (2008). Making online news. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Russo, T. C. (1998). Organizational and professional identification: A case of newspaper journalists. Management Communication Quarterly, 12(1), 72—111.

Quinn, S. (2005). Convergence journalism. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Weaver, D. (Ed.). (1998). The global journalist: News people around the world. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Witt-Barthel, A. (2007). EFJ survey: Women journalists in the European integration process. Brussels, Belgium: European Federation of Journalists.

Ybema, S. (2003). De koers van de krant. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Vrije Universiteit.