

Diversity Management as Innovation in Journalism Project

Methodology and theory paper

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What is the goal of the project?

The Managing Newsroom Diversity Project (2021-2023) aims to find and study cases of the occurrence of innovative approaches to diversity management in journalism, launched by newsrooms and media organizations in Poland, Sweden and the UK with the objective of increasing newsrooms' discursive diversity, including in talent management and programming.

Why do we need innovation in diversity management?

There are only a few studies about that look at innovation in journalism beyond the technological realm. Meanwhile, according to media leaders surveyed for the Reuters Institutes' study, level of staff diversity in the newsrooms remains among top three challenges faced by the news industry today (EFJ, 2020; Borchardt et al., 2019). Innovation is thus clearly needed also in organizational adaptation and the change management challenge (from “the Broadcast first” approach to the “People first” approach). The European Commission vice-president Věra Jourová argues that the current progress in diversifying newsrooms is too slow, and the Commission launched a ‘news initiative’ to support the challenges facing the news media industry (Brzozowski, 2020).

As initiatives aimed at diversifying newsrooms are receiving attention (and financial support) it is important to keep in mind that diversity and inclusion initiatives (D&I) and diversity management (DM), both as a field of study and a field of practice, have been around for more than twenty years, including in the media industry. Along with a myriad of good practices (for examples see AGEMI), researchers and critical scholars have pointed to several unintended consequences and failed promises of diversity initiatives that often end up reinforcing marginalization of those intended to benefit.

Theory: Diversity management as ‘polyphony’

We propose a **communication-centered perspective of polyphony on diversity management in news media** (Trittin, Schoeneborn, 2017; Belova et al. 2008, Shotter 2008).

Discussions around diversity in news media largely spread across two traditions reflecting the field of diversity management research more broadly: the instrumental tradition (which argues the ‘business’ case for diversity management) and the critical tradition (which argues the normative case of social justice and fair representation for diversity management). Isabel Awad Cherit’s article from 2008: “Cultural diversity in the news media: A democratic or a commercial need?”¹ illustrates this ‘spread’ quite well. A study from 2020 assessing how leading news organizations in three European countries cope with implementing diversity related measures in their newsrooms demonstrates this duality (Lück et. al.²). Diversity is discussed on one hand from the perspective of the newsrooms’ own needs (better access to minority or marginalized sources, cultural environments, and communities). On the other hand, diversity is discussed from the normative perspective of better and more equal representation of (changing) societies by news media, and hence news media’s ability to serve societies better (ibid. p. 10).

What both these traditions have in common is they conceptualize diversity based (largely) on psycho-sociodemographic individual differences (e.g. gender, age, or ethnicity). In this project we want to depart from this and instead focus on **conceptualization of diversity as plurality of voices**. Evidence of such conceptualization of diversity management in news media exist already and hence the focus of the **project is on finding and studying how occurrences of diversity management as polyphony work in day-to-day newsroom activities**.

A communication-centered perspective of polyphony on diversity management argues a more dynamic understanding of diversity management as a process of polyphonic voice articulation and mediation (Trittin, Schoeneborn, 2015³). This, Trittin and Schoeneborn argue, allows to reconcile the idea that DM is necessary for innovation, creativity, and change that lies in the communicative appreciation of otherness (key focus in instrumental tradition of DM), with normative consideration for inclusion and social representation (key focus in the critical

¹ Javnost-The Public 15 (4): 55–72. doi: 10.1080/13183222.2008.11008982

² Julia Lück, Tanjev Schultz, Felix Simon, Alexandra Borchardt & Sabine Kieslich (2020): Diversity in British, Swedish, and German Newsrooms: Problem Awareness, Measures, and Achievements, *Journalism Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2020.1815073

³ Hanna Trittin, Dennis Schoeneborn (2015): Diversity as Polyphony: Reconceptualizing Diversity Management from a Communication-Centered Perspective. *Journals of Business Ethics*, 144:305-322.

tradition) (ibid). A different kind of representation, in the sense of a representation of societal voices and discourses in organization settings (discursive diversity), helps DM to account for the fundamental embeddedness of newsrooms in a ‘networked society’.

Polyphony⁴ of voices, including dissenting and dissonant voices, in an organizational setting, can be understood as the range of individual opinions and societal discourse that get expressed and find resonance in organizational settings. This is important, both from the perspective of members (all journalists, not only journalists with various minority backgrounds in the newsroom) and non-members (audiences and larger societal discourses) that add significantly to newsrooms diversity. A “polyphonic’ newsroom results from the expression of multiple voices, and when the newsroom speaks (as news), many voices (i.e. individual and societal) speak through it (Trittin, Schoeneborn, 2015).

Research Questions

The focus of the project is thus on processes that allow for a range of individual opinions and societal discourses to be expressed and find resonance in a newsroom setting. In Bakhtin’s view ‘polyphony’ is inherently relational and dialogic.

Project is guided by three broad research questions:

RQ1. How is „diversity management as polyphony” motivated, managed and organized by people occupying different positions across national and regional, print, broadcast and digital born newsrooms in Sweden, the UK and Poland?

RQ 2. How members (journalists), working in newsrooms where the objective of increasing newsrooms’ polyphony is explicit, experience their work and relationship with other members and non-members?

RQ 3. How non-members (representatives of civil society, including minority media outlets), with whom newsrooms are working with the objective of increasing their polyphony, experience their relationship with these newsrooms?

⁴ A concept from Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian literary scholar (1981. *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press).

According to Nicola Pless (cited in Trittin & Schoeneborn), there are several important prerequisites for a polyphonic dialogue “all voices different by equal” to happen (Pless, 1998, p. 321)

1. Mutual recognition
2. Reciprocal trust; the establishment of long-lasting relations between members and non-members
3. Mutual enabling; give people room to develop and express voice, actively encourage people to bring their (marginalized) voices to the forefront
4. Mutual understanding of different viewpoints, by addressing directly underlying assumptions or biases
5. “Multiloguing” – the negotiation between multiple logics of the participants of a dialog

Our research thus aims to focus on the conditions and the day-to-day newsroom activities where polyphony in the sense of discursive diversity is encouraged. Innovative occurrences of diversity management in newsrooms could include examples of communicative procedures, structures and cultures that are designed in a manner that increases the likelihood of the ‘polyphony’.

Examples of diversity management as ‘polyphony’ could include:

1. In the field of human-resource management: examples could include guiding principle in the recruitment, retention, and promotion of candidates that work against newsroom homogeneity. The earlier mentioned study from leading news organizations working with diversity related measures found example of measures to prevent unconscious bias in recruitment (remove personal details from applications, pay attention to how and where positions are advertised, diversify recruitment panels, remove the ‘higher education’ requirement from applicants’ requirements, instead focus on less common life experiences, etc.) (Lück et. al., 2020).

2. In responsible and adaptive leadership: examples could include leaders who encourage journalists to bring in various, potentially dissonant voices into the conversation, including the contextual voices of non-members (absent stakeholders or wider societal discourses). Responsible leader fosters the ability of all people to raise their voices and to engage with each other in an inclusive way. In the earlier mentioned study commitment of people in leading positions was found to be a driving factor for long-term strategic diversity management, including innovative ideas and strategies in place (Lück et. all. 2020).

3. In the field of inclusive (human-centric) organization culture: examples could include attempts to integrate different and multiple voices into the organizational discourse, for example through the implementation of spaces that explicitly allow dissenting and dissonant voices to engage together in open-ended dialogues. In the study mentioned earlier examples included measures to enhance working routines and practices in newsrooms, but also routines to enhance connections with the audiences (formats where journalists move to a more low-profile communities to find stories and present perspectives of people living there) (Lück et. all. 2020).

4. In the field of educational initiatives: examples could include initiatives to develop competence of organizational members and non-members to engage in newsrooms polyphony, including enhancing skills to recognize (acknowledge) and value (embrace and respect) different voices. In the study mentioned earlier examples of educational measures included unconscious bias training, mentoring programs, leadership training, including initiatives directed at non-members, for example understanding why less well-off audiences and communities remain ‘unheard’ and ‘invisible’ from the newsrooms’ perspective (Lück et. all. 2020).

Methodology

We begin with “window studies”, designed to find and choose research sites (this primarily includes sending emails to newsrooms and the third sector, including through the researchers’, project’s Advisory Board and Network of Partners professional networks, requesting information on examples of ‘diversity management as polyphony’). We will choose research site based on information that “something interesting” is happening in these newsrooms.

We strive for ethnomethodology (Latour 2004), which means we want to attribute special value to **spontaneously occurring actions and events**, or in other words, actions and events not elicited by us/researchers. We will primarily rely on different types of interviews (Czarniawska, 2014⁵).

1. Interview as a site of narrative re-production

We recruit people who are willing to talk to us about their organization’s ‘diversity management as polyphony’ initiatives; leaders, diversity managers, newsroom seniors who are responsible for initiating such DM programs. We recruit non-members to talk to them about their relationship with these newsrooms.

⁵ Barbara Czarniawska (2014): Social Science Research. From Field to Desk. London: Sage Publications.

2. Interviews as observation opportunities

We want to ‘observe’ how news media organizations practice diversity management as polyphony. We aim for at least three newsrooms in three different countries. A simple calculation means we need to be in nine organizations at the same time. **Our solution is to conduct ‘observant participation’.** We need to secure interviewees in all locations and “come back” to interview them, for example every second week, for 12 months. If we find good cases of non-members dialoging with newsrooms, we will include them in this phase of the study. We will guide our interviewees on how to become ‘internal observers’ in this project.

Techniques/tools we will ask our ‘internal observers’ to use (Czarniawska, 2014).

Journalists/subjects of ‘diversity work’:

- A version of a diary technique, called “**information capture**” will be used. Journalists are searching and finding information all the time. We ask them to capture (for example with their phones) images, films, text, documents, anything that they think is relevant/represents ‘polyphony’ in their newsroom. This technique allows to collect naturalistic data without a large overhead of observational approach.
- These images/pictures/text are used as ‘memory joggers’ in **semi structured ethnographic interview**: repetitive, open, extensive interviews aimed at **achieving an account** of the events that occurred between the interviews. We strive for 10 interviews in a period of 12 months. From what they tell us, we select narratives for analyzes.

Managers in news organizations:

- Similarly, we ask managers to “capture” (in any form they want, image, text, audio recording, email) important decisions or events, that they think reflect best what ‘diversity management as polyphony’ entails.
- Ethnographic interviews are conducted with the help of ‘memory joggers’. We strive for 5 interviews in a period of 12 months. From what they tell us, we select narratives for analyzes.

Internal observers dialoging

After a round of analysis we put these two groups of interviewees (through their ‘memory joggers’) in a dialogue. We strive for one ‘dialoguing’ focus group/workshop in newsrooms participating in the study.