11.

The Gap
J-School Syllabus Meets the Market

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 Abstract

From a market-oriented point of view, J-schools should produce candidates with classic communications skills, able to take on any role in the news factory of the future. Classes on globalisation and press history should be replaced with training in platform-independent news production. However, in the development of a J-school syllabus, these demands from the market meet normative ambitions for a development of the profession of journalism.

Key words: journalism education, market orientation, scenario planning, competences, teamwork, freelance, Norway

Introduction

The market demands critical journalists with good communication skills. But journalism schools (hereafter *J-schools*) do a better job on competences regarded as less important to recruiters, such as genre- and medium-specific knowledge, and the role of the journalist in society.

 This basic contradiction is visible in a case study of a market-oriented approach to developing a J-school syllabus in a Norwegian context. Senior news executives responsible for recruiting new candidates from J-schools were asked to rate the importance (in relation to recruitment) of competences outlined in the Bachelor of Journalism syllabus at the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA), and rate their general impression of the performance of HiOA candidates in these competences. They were also asked to identify critical competences not mentioned in the Bachelor of Journalism syllabus.

 Two scenarios for the future of news production were developed based on the interviews: (1) news work will be teamwork, and (2) fewer journalists will be employed full time; more use of freelancers.

 From a market-oriented strategic point of view, the J-school should focus on the competences regarded as important for the market in which their candidates are not meeting expectations. In the HiOA case this would entail going back to basics, pro-

ducing candidates with classic communications skills, able to take on any role in the news factory of the future. And classes on globalization and press history should be replaced with training in platform-independent news production. However, in the development of a J-school syllabus, these demands from the market meet normative ambitions for a development of the profession of journalism.

This chapter will identify the gap in a Norwegian context, and reflect on its consequences for J-school syllabus development.

Internationally, a similar debate has been underway for over 20 years on the need for reform in journalism education. Dennis (1984) argued that the rapid pace of technological change "will push journalism/mass communication schools away from industry-oriented sequence programs and toward a more generic mass communication study". Medsger (1996) saw this wind of change – promoting the removal of journalism as a separate academic discipline and merging it into communication courses – as being in conflict with the vision of journalism education, and recommended hiring more professionals as teachers.

Reese (1999) warned about embracing the perceived needs of the industry and argued that for journalism to preserve its value, the field must "[model] an intellectually independent integration of theory and practice, supporting not just a media labor pyramid, but also a press-literate public". He urged for an "educational commitment to the professionalism of scholarship, as opposed to the more conventional view of media 'professionalism' in the academy increasingly promoted by the media industry" (Reese & Cohen, 2000). Adams (2001) argued for a more "careful articulation between core journalism subjects and cognate academic disciplines".

A recent debate on how to save the profession in light of the structural and economic changes in the industry follows the same dichotomy of professional training versus critical analysis of journalism's role in society (MacDonald, 2006). While media systems and journalistic cultures may differ widely, Deuze (2006) found the changes and challenges facing journalism education around the world to be largely similar: An on-going debate on the combination of practical and contextual training.

Theoretical framework and method: scenario planning

The starting point of this case study was a request from the Advisory Board of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at HiOA, asking for a presentation of possible scenarios based on insights from key stakeholders in the media industries. This paved the way for the first market analysis conducted by this J-school after 47 years of operation.

Scenario planning is a systematic method for imagining possible futures. Schoemaker (1995) argues that scenario planning differs from other planning methods, such as contingency planning, sensitivity analysis, and computer simulations. While contingency planning examines only one uncertainty and presents a base case and an

exception or contingency, scenarios explore the joint impact of various uncertainties, which stand side by side as equals. Sensitivity analysis examines the effect of a change in one variable, keeping all other variables constant, while scenarios change several variables at a time without keeping others constant, hence trying to capture the new states that will develop after major shocks or deviations in key variables. Scenarios are also more than just the output of a complex simulation model, as they attempt to identify patterns and clusters among the millions of possible outcomes a computer simulation might generate:

> They often include elements that were not or cannot be formally modelled, such as new regulations, value shifts, or innovations. Hence, scenarios go beyond objective analyses to include subjective interpretations. (Schoemaker, 1995)

The first step in developing scenarios is to *define the scope*. The time frame of this analysis corresponds with the HiOA strategic plan aiming at the year 2020. Bachelor of Journalism candidates are defined as the products offered to the market, and the market is identified as traditional Norwegian news media institutions, i.e. national, local and niche newspapers, and national public service broadcasting. The unstructured concerns and anxieties of the Dept. of Journalism and Media Studies Advisory Board were used as a starting point for the scenario planning process. This included concerns about social media not being part of the syllabus.

The second step is to *identify the major stakeholders*. The Head of Department and the Advisory Board have the power to propose changes in the syllabus. These issues will affect students, and the faculty can influence them. Editors in charge of recruiting were defined as representatives of the customers.

The third step is to *identify basic trends*. Based on three main drivers for change, i.e. the *digitization* (Deuze, 2004; Ottosen, & Krumsvik, 2012), *globalization* (Doyle, 2002), and *commercialization* (McManus, 1994) of media, four basic trends were identified: (1) technological – more and more mobile platforms; (2) political – towards a liberal media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); (3) economic – fewer and larger owners (Krumsvik, Skogerbø, & Storsul, 2013); and (4) user behaviour – the role of social media (Ihlebæk, & Krumsvik, 2014; Krumsvik, 2012a). These trends were discussed thoroughly and agreed upon by stakeholders and informants.

Step four is to *identify key uncertainties*. Statements describing future situations based on the identified trends were formulated, and scored by the informants. Statements with high variance on scores represent key uncertainties. Once we identified the *trends* and *uncertainties*, we had the main ingredients for step five: *scenario construction*.

In a qualitative interview study, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually in person with a strategic sample of seven senior news executives responsible for the recruitment of new candidates from J-schools in the spring of 2012.

Findings

The scores given to statements describing future situations based on the identified trends found the statements "more content collaboration within media groups", "journalists will work more in teams", and "fewer employed journalists, more freelancers" to be the *most likely outcomes (high mean score, low variance)*. The *least likely outcomes (low mean score)* are situations in which "the majority of journalists are outside the journalist union (NJ)" and "joint press ethics rules disappear".

Key *uncertainties (high variance)* were the questions of "platform-independent production vs. tailoring", and "more revenue will come from new rather than old media" (Table 1). The informants also disagreed on the statements about "higher demands on earnings from the owners", and "requirement of college degree to become a journalist".
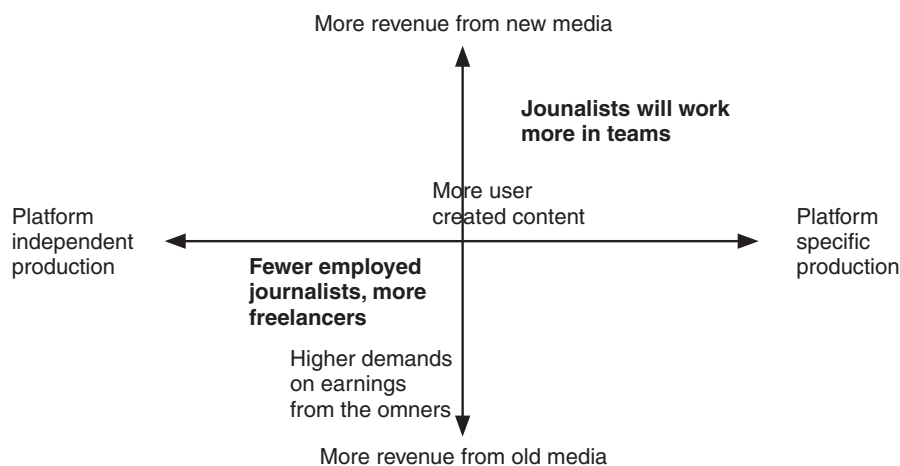
Table 1.   Key uncertainties for trend identification on the journalism market

Question	Min	Max
Platform-independent production vs. platform-specific production	2 (platform-independent)	5 (platform-specific)
More revenue will come from new rather than old media	1 (old)	6 (new)

Note: Scores given to statements describing future situations based on identified trends (N=7).

Based on correlation between the key uncertainties and more likely outcomes, a compass for scenario planning can be created (Figure 1).

Figure 1.   Compass for scenario planning

Note: Based on scores given to statements describing future situations based on identified trends. The compass is based on the key *uncertainties (with high variance;* see also Table 1), and the correlations of other identified likely outcomes are visualized.

In addition to rating the statements describing possible future situations, the informants were asked to rate and argue for the importance (in relation to recruitment) of

competences outlined in the Bachelor of Journalism syllabus at HiOA (Table 2), and rate their general impression of the performance of HiOA candidates in these competences (Table 3). They were also asked to identify critical competences not mentioned in the Bachelor of Journalism syllabus.

Table 2.   Rating of competences relevant for recruiting journalists up to 2020

Ranking	Competences	Rating of skills (Mean)
1	Be critical regarding sources and structures of power	5.4
2	Communicate information in an accurate, precise and vivid language	5.3
	Updated on current affairs	5.3
4	Using social media as a journalistic tool	5.0
	Presenting material on various media platforms	5.0
6	Take responsibility for professional role	4.6
7	Reflect critically on media and journalism's role in society	4.3
8	Understanding genre	4.0
9	Specialist in one medium	3.7
10	Minorities	3.6
11	Innovation and creativity	3.4
	Working as a journalist in an internationalized and multicultural society	3.4
	Convey information that is tailored to target groups	3.4
14	Freedom of expression	3.1
15	Equality	2.7
16	Knowledge about press history	1.9

Note: Skills mainly from HiOA 2012 syllabus. Ranking of skills based on the informants' average rating of importance. 6=Very important; 1=Not important (N=7).

The informants rated classic journalism skills the highest (i.e. *'Be critical regarding sources and structures of power', 'Communicate information in an accurate, precise and vivid language',* and *'Updated on current affairs'),* while the role of journalists in society (i.e. *'Working as a journalist in an internationalized and multicultural society')* received a lower score, with *'Knowledge about press history'* at the bottom of the list (Table 2).

While the skills *'Communicate information in an accurate, precise and vivid* language' (Table 3, #14) and *'Be critical regarding sources and structures of power'* (Table 3, #11) were regarded as very important, the candidates did not perform to the standards expected by the media executives. On the other hand, *'Using social media as a journalistic tool'* (Table 3, #1) was rated as both important and performed, even if it was not explicitly mentioned in the syllabus. *'Working as a journalist in an internationalized and multicultural society'* (Table 3, #6) also received an approved score in performance, but was not seen as the most important skill.

Table 3.   Rating of HiOA candidates (vs. rating of competences)

Ranking of candidates	Competences	Rating of candidates (Mean)	Rating of skills (Mean)
1	Using social media as a journalistic tool	*1.00*	5.0
	Understanding genre	*1.00*	4.0
3	Updated on current affairs	*.75*	5.3
	Specialist in one medium	*.75*	3.7
5	Reflect critically on media and journalism's role in society	*.71*	4.3
6	Minorities	*.67*	3.6
	Working as a journalist in an internationalized and multicultural society	*.67*	3.4
	Presenting material on various media platforms	*.67*	5.0
9	Take responsibility for professional role	*.60*	4.6
10	Equality	*.50*	2.7
11	Be critical regarding sources and structures of power	*.33*	5.4
12	Convey information that is tailored to target groups	*.25*	3.4
13	Innovation and creativity	*.20*	3.4
14	Freedom of expression	*.0*	3.1
	Knowledge about press history	*.0*	1.9
	Communicate information in an accurate, precise and vivid language	*.0*	5.3

Note: Skills mainly from HiOA 2012 syllabus. Ranking of skills based on the informants' average rating of candidates. 1=Strong; 0=Weak (Compare to rating of importance: 6=Very important; 1=Not important. See also Table 2). See Figure 2 for an illustration of key findings.

Other relevant competences identified by the informants, not covered explicitly in the syllabus

- Knowledge about the media business (value chain)
- Technical knowledge (both publication platforms and tools for computer-assisted journalism)
- Able to analyse Big Data and complex issues
- Languages
- Knowledge of access to public records
- Able to build one's own network of sources
- Burning soul (a wish to change the world)

Based on the compass outlined in Figure 1 and the evaluation of competences, two initial scenario themes might be derived – (1) teamwork and (2) freelance (Table 4) – each with new skills to be learned by future journalists:

Table 4.   Possible future situations in relation to the initial scenario themes

	1. Teamwork	2. Freelance
Assumptions	– Tailor-made news for each channel – New media financing journalism – More user-created content	– Multiple channel distribution – Old media financing journalism – Owners demanding higher profits
New skills	– Teamwork	– Platform-independent news production – Entrepreneurship

Note: Describing possible future situations, not mutually exclusive. See also Figure 1.

Discussion

In Norway we might expect to find indications of a move from a Democratic Corporatist system towards a Liberal model, driven by a digitization and commercialization of news media, and the professionalization of journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, analysis of recent issues surrounding the revision of Norwegian media policy reveals a continuous high degree of state intervention through regulation and subsidies. While both journalists and media institutions demonstrate a high degree of professionalization, key policy measures are still grounded in the era of the political press (Krumsvik, 2013). This is supported by the finding in this case, with the informants finding typical characteristics of the liberal model, such as a diminishing role of both journalist unions and institutionalized press ethics, to be "least likely" outcomes.

The "most likely" outcomes of (1) more content collaboration within media groups, (2) more teamwork in journalism, and (3) fewer employed journalists and more freelancers indicate increased commercialization. The key uncertainties (Table 1) are also partly related to the business of media, i.e. the question of whether new or old media will fund journalism in the future (see also Krumsvik, 2012b). This is the issue with the highest variance among the respondents.

The other main uncertainty is related directly to the production and distribution of journalism, i.e. multiple channel distribution vs. tailoring, the former rating slightly higher than the latter (Table 2).

The new skills of teamwork (Scenario 1), platform-independent news production, and entrepreneurship (Scenario 2) identified in this analysis were not explicitly mentioned by the informants. However, several of them highlighted the need for knowledge about the business mechanisms of the news industries. It is important to note that the informants were asked to identify skills in the situation in which they would be hiring new talent. In a scenario in which more of the workforce would be

independent freelancers, new skills not recognized by representatives of traditional institutions will be needed.

In the case of HiOA, the J-school needs to decide whether to educate news workers with competences needed to succeed in both scenarios. Hence, the discussion on the role of entrepreneurship in J-school education needs to address whether journalism education should prepare news workers for a professional life beyond employment at the traditional news institutions.

From a market-oriented strategic point of view, the J-school should also focus on competences regarded as important for the market, as their candidates are not meeting expectations (see Figure 2). The skills *'Communicate information in an accurate, precise and vivid language'* (Table 3, #14) and *'Be critical regarding sources and structures of power'* (Table 3, #11) were regarded as very important, but the candidates did not perform to the standards expected by the media executives.

A hypothesis that social media needs to be part of the syllabus was not strengthened by this analysis. It was rated as both important and performed, even if it was not explicitly mentioned in the syllabus (Table 3, #1). Classes on globalization and press history could also be given less emphasis.

This would entail going back to basics, entailing producing candidates with classic communications skills, able to take on any role in the news factory of the future. However, in the development of a J-school syllabus, these demands from the market meet normative ambitions for a development of the profession of journalism (Deuze, 2006; MacDonald, 2006).

Figure 2.   Strategic focus: journalism skills with high importance and low evaluation score on competence
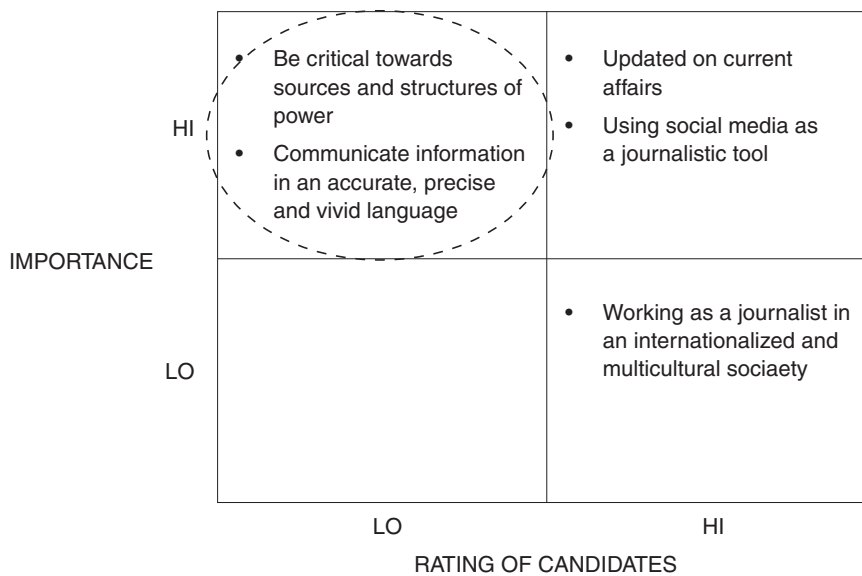
Note: Illustration of key findings presented in Table 3.

Table 5.   The informants

Editor-in-Chief, local newspaper (owned by A-pressen)
Editor-in-Chief, local newspaper (owned by Edda Media/Mecom)
Editor-in-Chief, regional newspaper
Executive News Editor, national newspaper
Head of Department, national public service broadcaster
Senior News Editor, commercial national public service broadcaster
Senior Editor, niche newspaper

Note: 4 male, 3 female

These findings were presented to the internal stakeholders at HiOA (i.e., Advisory Board, students and staff) in the spring of 2012. While relevance for the media industries was considered a key variable in strategic development, very high numbers of applicants to the J-school did not create any imminent sense of urgency to make radical changes to the syllabus based on this market-oriented approach. It was also concluded that the educational institution should play a role as a normative corrective to the market, hence continuing to prioritize the public service aspect of journalism in the combination of practical and contextual training.

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