CHAPTER 6

Exploring telework innovation's value for news workers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers a framework for examining the advantages and challenges associated with a significant innovation in newsroom work that emerged during the Covid-19 crisis: the introduction of teleworking. Applying service innovation research perspectives, which emphasise that innovations should create value for all stakeholders, our study explores how news workers experienced the swift and extensive shift to digital work modes during lockdowns and periods of strict social distancing. The analysis, based on interviews with reporters, developers, and newsroom managers in three leading newspaper companies in Norway, shows how working at a distance by means of digital tools generated complex and ambiguous value experiences among news workers. Based on this, we argue that future research applying service innovation perspectives on journalism needs to pay more attention to the value of innovations for employees. Otherwise, this research risks overlooking a stakeholder group which plays a key role in news media's service provision to the public.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, innovation, telework, value creation, news workers

Introduction

Perspectives from service theory have recently been applied in media innovation research to capture how news media are transforming into digital service providers through new service offerings and modes of operating (Cestino & Berndt, 2017; Olsen & Furseth, 2023). A key premise for research in this tradition is that value creation, be it economic, social, or any other value, is the main objective of innovation during crises and otherwise. Value creation for all actors involved is crucial for an innovation to succeed and be sustainable over time (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016). However, while asserting the importance of value creation for a firm's customers, business partners, and owners (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016), service innovation research rarely addresses whether or how innovations contribute to increased value for the *employees* involved in innovation processes. Consequently, this research tradition runs the risk of applying a too simplistic view of value creation and innovation by overlooking how new or improved value for some stakeholders, for example, a company's customers and owners, may in fact result in reduced value for the company's employees. As noted by Picard (2010), news workers, like journalists, are key stakeholders in value creation among news media. Value creation for news workers involves reasonable wages and non-pecuniary benefits related to their ability to pursue professional ambitions and conduct their work at desirable levels of quality. The latter kind of benefits are particularly relevant when assessing news workers' experiences with innovation that involves new newsroom practices, behaviours, and tools. During a crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, such innovation could have a significant impact on the well-being of news workers. Previous research has demonstrated how increasing reliance on new digital tools has been a source of mental and physical burnout for journalists working within new online and digital work environments (Bossio & Nelson, 2021). This suggests that innovations in newsrooms not only represent benefits but also challenges to news workers, and furthermore, that such ambiguity should be considered when assessing value creation for "all involved parties" as the overall goal of innovation.

With this study, we seek to enhance the understanding of innovation and value creation in journalism by examining how news workers experienced new technology and working practices during the Covid-19 crisis. Specifically, we address the central theme of this book by investigating how Norwegian news workers responded to the rapid transition to telework practices during the pandemic and by providing an analytical framework for evaluating their value experiences based on perceived benefits and challenges. We understand telework as "a type of work and/or provision of services done remotely, at a distance, and online using computer and telematics technologies" (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020: 2). The scale of teleworking during the Covid-19 crisis was a major innovation in the way newsrooms operate (García-Avilés et al., 2024). Moving the entire newsroom online and keeping it up and

running for weeks and months during pandemic lockdowns and strict social distancing regulations represented something fundamentally new for media organisations. The comprehensive shift to telework radically changed news media's service system, that is, their infrastructure for news production and distribution. Previous research has demonstrated how this innovation was essential for Norwegian news media's ability to create value for audiences by means of new journalistic services, which, in turn, generated economic value from subscribers (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). As such, the innovation of the service system created value for audiences and news organisations by enabling new and improved customer experiences and increased revenues. However, research on how news workers coped with this innovation of the newsroom has revealed several negative experiences, such as increased levels of stress (e.g., Backholm & Idås, 2022; Hoak, 2023; Tandoc et al., 2022), emotions of anxiety, frustration, loneliness, and nervousness related to work (Šimunjak, 2022), as well as managerial challenges such as difficulties with inspiring, supporting, and motivating newsroom employees (Appelgren, 2022; see also Rudningen, Chapter 3). This transition to telework amid Covid-19 is thus an interesting case that encourages a broader discussion of what value creation for "all involved parties" entails in the context of media innovation. This chapter enhances knowledge of value creation and innovation by considering news workers' perceptions of telework benefits and challenges as indicators of how they value this new way of working. Analysing how news workers experienced teleworking during the Covid-19 crisis can further our understanding of such innovations' sustainability over time. Moreover, it encourages us to critically reflect on the potential downside of technology in journalism, which is often overlooked in the news industry's overriding and celebratory focus on innovation (Creech & Nadler, 2018).

In the next sections, we position our study within the field of service innovation research, which highlights the importance of value creation in innovation. We elaborate on telework as an innovation of news media's service system whereby journalistic practices are moved from the physical newsroom to digital spaces. We utilise pertinent research literature to construct an analytical framework, delineating emotional, functional, and strategic benefits and challenges as indicators of telework's value for news workers. Based on this framework, we delve into the experiences of Norwegian news workers with telework as a new working mode during the Covid-19 crisis. Our investigation draws from qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews with 45 participants across local, regional, and national news outlets in Norway, allowing us to uncover both positive and negative telework experiences and consider the long-term sustainability of this innovation.

Value-driven service innovation among news media

Applying perspectives from service innovation literature and describing newsrooms and news workers as a news organisation's "service system" may seem like an unusual approach to studying innovation in journalism. Two key premises underpin this choice of theoretical framing: 1) the business of journalism is shifting towards a "reader first paradigm", which emphasises value creation for audiences (Bakke & Barland, 2022); and 2) such value creation for audiences is increasingly based on the provision of intangible, digital news services, rather than physical goods, as well as on nurturing deeper, reciprocal relationships with audiences (Villi & Picard, 2019). As such, news media are experiencing a service shift which can be observed across a multitude of socioeconomic sectors (see Olsen & Solvoll, Chapter 1). Innovations in news media's services qualify as service innovations, as traditional forms of journalism, adapted to digital platforms, are supplemented by a multitude of innovative digital services distributed on mobile and social media platforms, often in personalised formats (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). Consider, for example, the launch of Covid-19 live trackers amid the pandemic, which, based on large datasets and interactive features, allowed users to search and find updated news information about Covid-19 in their own municipality or region (Konow-Lund et al., 2022; Olsen & Furseth, 2023; see also Mtchedlidze, Chapter 5). Such new services are examples of service innovations in journalism that require the newsroom to adopt a service-oriented mindset and integrate resources in a reliable service system which offers new or improved user experiences. Creating value for paying audiences by introducing new or improved services can be regarded as an innovation imperative for news media operating according to a "reader first paradigm" (Bakke & Barland, 2022).

The development of new digital services often requires close cooperation between the newsroom and the research and development department of the news organisation (Konow-Lund et al., 2022; see also Mtchedlidze, Chapter 5), which constitute key parts of the news organisations' service system. The service system integrates both technology and human resources from different parts of the organisation to deliver audience experiences which can be monetised through, for example, subscriptions. The service system is thus closely connected to the news organisation's business model. According to Furseth and Cuthbertson (2016: 124), the service system is "the culmination of processes and activities" required to achieve the intended customer experiences within the given constraints of the operation's business model to create the desired value for all stakeholders. Translated to media and journalism terminology, the service system encompasses the journalistic production process, including the people, technology, competency, and other resources required to provide news and information to the public. Notably, the service system of news organisations is not restricted to operating

and managing newsrooms and research and development departments but encompasses a variety of actors and activities such as quality management, information systems, and performance measurement. In the current context, however, we focus our analysis on service system activities that involve news workers, including newsroom managers, journalists, and developers.

In their proposed value-driven service innovation framework, Furseth and Cuthbertson (2016) described the service system as a key component of service innovation. Treating news workers as service system actors is arguably productive to capture the dynamics of service innovation among news media and the organisational resources and capabilities required to provide new audience experiences and increase revenues (Olsen & Furseth, 2023). However, as noted above, there is a risk of putting too much emphasis on customer value and economic value generation for the media organisation, without paying sufficient attention to news workers as key stakeholders in the innovation process. To address this shortcoming of the service innovation perspective in journalism, we turn to the case of telework to explore value perceptions among individual news workers when introduced to new technology and working modes. We incorporate research focusing on telework and virtual newsrooms to extract benefits and challenges that signal the value of this service system innovation for news workers.

Benefits and challenges of telework

The shift to telework during the Covid-19 crisis moved news production into virtual newsrooms with communication systems and workflows supported by digital tools like Zoom, Teams, Meet, WhatsApp, Slack, and Telegram (see, e.g., García-Avilés et al., 2024). As noted in the early research literature on telework (Baruch, 2000), the successful transition to such a remote, digital working mode depends on several factors, including the nature of the job (can it be digitalised?), the organisation (is management supportive of telework arrangements?), the home–work interface (is the home and family a suitable context for work?), and the individual (is the worker suited for this way of working?) (Baruch & Nicholson, 1997). The rapid and forced shift to virtual newsrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic did not allow news organisations to carefully consider these factors. As such, the service system was radically changed, even though the conditions for successful implementation of telework were not necessarily in place. This could have significant impact on how the value of this innovation was perceived among news workers.

Moreover, virtual newsrooms represent a distinct working environment, not only in physical terms but also regarding the experiences, relationships, and power dynamics they generate among news workers (Bunce et al., 2018). Thus, the virtual newsroom and the telework taking place in this digital space have certain characteristics which may or may not create value for the

individual news worker. Pre-pandemic research had already identified advantages and disadvantages of teleworking, which are relevant for understanding the value creation potential of this service system innovation for news workers. Baruch (2000) summarised the possible benefits and challenges of teleworking for individuals, describing how working remotely offers opportunities for improved performance and better productivity, more autonomy, less time spent on commuting, less work-related stress, and more time for family life, while simultaneously increasing risks of detachment from social interactions and weaker affiliation with colleagues, less influence over people and events in the workplace, and increased home-related stress. More recent studies have described how working from home limits the opportunities for face-to-face interaction and may reduce the ability to learn through informal interaction with co-workers (Allen et al., 2015). Moreover, while telework could facilitate interdepartmental collaboration, it does not necessarily result in new relationships being formed in the organisations. As noted by Azarova and colleagues (2022), barriers between different employee groups could be higher in the digital space, and this in turn could lead to digital joint conversations changing to individual one-on-one conversations. Regarding telework in the context of Covid-19, research has described isolation, a lacking sense of belonging, and lower-quality relations as the "dark side of telework" (Miglioretti et al., 2021; Wöhrmann & Ebner, 2021). The lack of ad-hoc meeting venues and physical interruptions in everyday work has been found to create a higher threshold for interaction between employees, as well as less knowledge-sharing and spontaneous coordination, as communication became more targeted and effective (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

In journalism research, studies of newsroom collaboration on digital platforms have demonstrated that digital communication tools have the potential to facilitate increased interaction and collaboration among news workers (Bunce et al., 2018; Koivula et al., 2023), and that digital communication tools can help break down hierarchies (Gibbs et al., 2015; Moran, 2021) by allowing communication to be more simultaneous and transparent (Bunce et al., 2018). Furthermore, working together by means of digital platforms has been identified as an opportunity for solidifying as well as developing new friendships with colleagues (Bunce et al., 2018). On the other hand, previous studies in journalism also show how telework has disturbed news workers' work–life balance and created challenges for managers in supervising their employees (Bunce et al., 2018; Owen, 2015). Research on telework during the Covid-19 crisis confirms that working in digital spaces reconfigured relationships among colleagues, encouraged less hierarchical decision-making, increased collaboration, and shaped new practices and communication protocols, while simultaneously raising problematic issues regarding work-overload and psychological distress (García-Avilés, 2021). There are also reports on how telework made newsroom creativity more challenging during the pandemic. For example, Appelgren (2022) observed

how managers found it difficult to keep the energy flowing in the news organisation, spur creativity, and motivate employees when teleworking. Similarly, García-Avilés (2021) concluded that digital tools cannot replace the creative environment of the traditional physical newsroom. According to Koivula and colleagues (2023), the role of telework in creative work and innovation in journalistic teams is full of tensions: On the one hand, technology serves as a facilitator of communication in dispersed teams and thus also as a requisite for creativity and innovation, but on the other, it also induces uncertainty in dispersed journalistic teams, which could constrain creative work and innovation.

Assessing the value creation of telework for news workers

The foregoing literature review reveals a complex mix of empirical findings, exposing advantages and disadvantages of telework for employees. Drawing from this research, we distil telework benefits and challenges, which inform our empirical investigation of teleworking experiences among news workers during the Covid-19 crisis. These benefits and challenges fall into three categories – emotional, functional, and strategic – with the latter being primarily relevant to the managerial level of the newsroom, while the former two apply to both regular employees and managers. We consider these benefits and challenges as value indicators, forming the foundation for evaluating whether and how the transformation of the news organisation's service system to telework created value for news workers during the crisis.

Emotional benefits and challenges emerge from the research literature that describes how telework impacts news workers' well-being and feelings about their work life. Benefits include the positive experiences of work autonomy and a more manageable workday, as well as feelings of inclusion and impact in the workplace due to less hierarchical and more transparent work structures (e.g., Baruch, 2000; Bunce et al., 2018). Challenges included discomfort and concern related to, for example, weaker work affiliation, isolation and detachment from social interactions, disturbance of work–life balance, and more stress (e.g., Baruch, 2000; Bunce et al., 2018; Miglioretti et al., 2021; Wöhrmann & Ebner, 2021).

Functional benefits and challenges encompass experiences with practical or technical dimensions of teleworking identified in the research literature. Benefits include technological solutions which enable people to work together and communicate in more efficient ways, as well as more flexible work environments (Baruch, 2000; Bunce et al., 2018; García-Avilés, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2015; Koivula et al., 2023; Moran, 2021). Challenges encompass technological problems and shortcomings with digital communication tools that are not experienced in face-to-face interaction (e.g., Azarova et al., 2022; Waizenegger et al., 2020).

The third strategic dimension derives from research describing the strategic benefits that telework could have, for example, regarding the news operation's cost, productivity, and attractiveness as an employer (Baruch, 2000), and strategic challenges of telework such as decreased creativity and innovation (e.g., Appelgren, 2022; García-Avilés, 2021; Koivula et al., 2023), which are particularly relevant for individuals on the managerial level in the newsroom.

Material and method

To address our research question, which asks whether and how the telework transformation of news organisations' service systems created value for news workers during the Covid-19 crisis, we follow a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews in 20 news organisations in Norway. All but one of the media outlets in our sample are legacy news media organisations with a history of print newspapers combined with an increasingly digitally oriented news production and distribution strategy. The case organisations are thus undergoing a service transformation whereby innovation efforts are directed towards new, digital audience experiences. As we wanted a broad sample representing the diversity and breadth of newspapers in Norway, we included local, regional, and national news outlets in our study, while simultaneously incorporating newspapers owned by the three leading newspaper companies in Norway: Schibsted, Amedia, and Polaris. The data is based on semi-structured interviews with news workers, that is, people working as reporters, programmers, or managers in these case organisations. Specifically, we combine three datasets on experiences with telework during the pandemic collected among news reporters in *Aftenposten*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Bergens Tidende*, and *VG* (*N* = 12); among programmers, reporters, and newsroom managers in *VG* (*N* = 13); and among newsroom managers in *Adresseavisen*, *Avisa Nordland*, *Bergensavisen*, *Budstikka*, *Firda*, *Fædrelandsvennen*, *Glåmdalen*, *Harstad Tidende*, *iTromsø*, *Jærbladet*, *Lofot-Tidende*, *Moss Avis*, *Namdalsavisa*, *Nettavisen*, *Sunnmørsposten*, and *Varden* (*N* = 16). In addition, three top management team representatives from Amedia and Polaris were interviewed, resulting in a total sample of 44 respondents.

The datasets were collected within three separate research projects, taking advantage of the considerable overlap between projects in the efforts to explore experiences with telework. This method, known as pooled case comparison, is based on the sharing of qualitative data for the purpose of investigating new questions or verifying previous studies (Heaton, 2004). Raw data from separate studies are pooled to create a new dataset from which fresh categories and properties are derived (West & Oldfather, 1995). Through a careful assessment, we identified data from each dataset that could be merged within a common analytical framework. This research design did not facilitate a systematic analysis of differences and commonalities between

different news worker groups or media outlets in our material, which is a limitation. However, the pooled case comparison allows us to obtain a broad sense of news workers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of telework during the Covid-19 pandemic, in line with our overall research objective. For each individual dataset, we used a purposive sampling strategy, which means that participants were selected in a non-random manner based on the knowledge and experiences they possessed regarding telework during the pandemic (García-Avilés, 2021).

To capture how the participants perceived the value– or lack thereof – of telework, we relied on open-ended questions regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the news operations under study, combined with in-depth questions regarding creativity, cooperation, working processes, and culture, as well as newsroom management in a telework context.

The interviews for the individual studies were carried out via the Zoom platform from March to June 2021 and lasted for approximately one hour each. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. As some of the participants were granted anonymity, the confidentiality principle was followed in the handling of all the interviews, ensuring that the information provided could not be traced back to the individual participant or media outlet. The data collection, handling, and storing was assessed and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). One of the researchers behind this study, Cecilie Asker works as an editor at *Aftenposten*, one of the organisations under study. This insider role is considered an advantage, as it provides easier access to participants and knowledge of context and internal codes. This allows more precise questions when collecting data and conducting the analysis. On the other hand, research in one's own field also comes with the risk of losing analytical distance, over-identification with the participants, and forgetting to problematise the customary (Støkken & Nylehn, 2002), while simultaneously influencing the way participants respond. While this is another limitation to our study, which should not be ignored, we countered such negative impact by being open and conscious about the insider role and making implicit normative stances explicit throughout the research process (Henriksen, 2011).

The data analysis process followed an iterative approach in which the analysis alternated between emergent readings of the data and the use of existing models, concepts, and theories regarding (newsroom) telework (García-Avilés, 2021). We carried out a series of meetings, during which we identified commonalities in respondents' experiences with telework. We categorised these experiences based on the three types of perceived telework benefits and challenges – emotional, functional, and strategic – forming our analytical framework. Subsequently, we identified common themes within each category, offering a more detailed understanding of how news workers valued telework. We recognise that value perception is a multifaceted con-

cept. In light of this, perceived emotional, functional, and strategic benefits and challenges serve as proxies for value perception, allowing us to evaluate how news workers experienced both the positive and negative aspects of teleworking during the pandemic.

Findings

New opportunities to connect versus feelings of isolation and stress

Regarding perceived emotional benefits of the shift to telework during the Covid-19 crisis, some news workers described how the digital mode of working provided new opportunities for increased cooperation, stronger relationships with colleagues, and new ways of meeting other people in the news organisation, which made them feel good about their role in the news production. For example, there were reports of how the telework mode of editorial operation reduced the distance between the newsroom managers and journalists. As noted by one reporter regarding communicating with superiors via the chat platform Slack:

> Being able to send a message on Slack to the news editor – or even the chief editor – who is above me in the system, is a good thing, really, which could even out hierarchies. It's easier than interrupting them in the office where they always seem to be very busy.

Other accounts revealed how digital communication tools and the telework situation supported a new sense of togetherness, even though people were physically further apart than before. In the words of one editor:

> It's a larger (sense of) community – at least on the managerial level where I am. We're close to each other during the day, due to the number of video conferences. You make up for remote working practices by having more meetings which mean that you have a closer collaboration across the management level. The whole working from home situation has forced us to think differently about how the working day should be arranged and how to cooperate and nurture relationships with colleagues.

Digital tools were also seen to enable more equal opportunities for people to participate and have an impact on the news production process and product, leaving less room for personalities who used to dominate physical meetings. As such, telework provided new opportunities "to shine" for some workers. The fact that much of the communication throughout the day took place in writing on chat platforms like Slack was considered a benefit to some of the less vocal people, like younger and less experienced employees. One editor succinctly described how telework had democratised the workplace and made it easier for more people to "take the floor":

> I think in a strange way it has become easier for more people to voice their opinion, make suggestions and comments compared to the physical environment where all the funny and loud people used to dominate […] All these digital systems make it easier for more people to present ideas, thoughts, concepts, input, and criticism.

These accounts suggest that telework created value for news workers by connecting people and promoting communality while also supporting their sense of purpose and impact in the news production. However, replacing the buzz and noise at the office with the silence and serenity of home also entailed emotional challenges. While some felt closer to their colleagues in the telework environment, others reported experiences with social isolation and weaker relationships with colleagues. According to these latter accounts, the feeling of being an important contributor to the news cycle was weakened when the news workers and managers were no longer together in the physical newsroom. One of the journalist participants described the importance of being present in a physical newsroom like this: "When you are in the newsroom you have your finger on the pulse. You are updated on the latest news. You are part of what's happening, and part of the big picture".

Due to the absence of daily office interactions, participants reported reduced interaction with colleagues from different teams and departments. Their daily routine circled almost entirely around the people they met in their scheduled online meetings. In other words, digital interactions did not replicate the serendipitous encounters that occur naturally in a physical workplace. According to one of the journalists, the sense of being part of a larger community was lost when teleworking: "Now, I'm only part of a small community and know so little about other people". Another reporter noted that the "love and friendship in the newsroom" was difficult to maintain digitally. The data material reveals how meeting colleagues physically on a daily basis was seen to create a sense of comfort: "They sort of become your second family", according to one reporter. Several attempts were made to replicate culture-building activities from the physical environment in a digital context. However, according to the interviews, such attempts were not very successful. Digital meetings with the purpose of socialising, snacking, and chatting were launched and tried out, only to disappear after a short while. These initiatives were described as "forced and unnatural".

Another emotional challenge that stands out in the interview data is managing work–life balance and coping with increased stress due to telework. Spending work hours and leisure hours in the same physical space was perceived to blur the line between work and private life. One reporter described it as "easy to do some extra work, when you're in the same space and just sitting there". Another reporter added that it was more difficult to take natural breaks during the workday when alone, and that lunch was often forgotten.

Even though the digital newsroom at home could be experienced as a lonely place, participants also reported that being constantly digitally available, including outside of work hours, caused increased levels of stress. "The distinction between work and private life has largely been erased", one reporter explained. Another reporter described how the digital chat tool Slack "feels really intruding with the pinging at all hours". Some of the participants described how they tried to reduce the stress with new routines – like ignoring the red light that showed unread messages in Slack. In the words of one reporter: "Sometimes I mute channels, because they're always flashing red, and I feel I have to check who it is".

In sum, these reports of isolation, detachment, and stress reveal considerable ambiguity regarding the value of teleworking among news workers. On the one hand, this transformation of the service system was perceived as a valued opportunity for collaboration, communication, and participation, which created positive feelings about work and colleagues. On the other hand, those who felt alienated and stressed by telework expressed how they perceived this as an inferior working mode, which created negative emotions and less value than meeting colleagues face-to-face.

Increased efficiency and flexibility versus communication difficulties

Turning next to the functional benefits of the telework transition during the pandemic, we observe how the digital tools and platforms employed by the news organisations were often described as useful and timesaving by the news workers. For example, some participants described how quick and easily accessible messages on Slack replaced more formal and arduous e-mail correspondence with colleagues, and how digital chatrooms provided an efficient way of working together in small groups. One editor described how the news staff explored the technological advantages of chat rooms as a digital meeting venue that was always accessible: "Smaller groups and closer cooperation work well in chat rooms. We use it a lot. With only 5–6 people in the room, the chat is going on throughout the day".

Supplementing this account, a senior developer in another news operation described how they had developed an entirely new service for audiences mostly via a chat channel: Being able to exploit the possibilities of the tool – sharing videos, text files, and so on – meant that the news workers were "technically equipped" to innovate without any physical interaction. The way digital communication platforms enabled people to work closely together regardless of geographical distance was also seen to encourage new ways of organising news work and bringing together people who had previously been regarded as too far apart to cooperate in an efficient way. One editor described how the technical advantages of digital communication tools had been an eye-opener for cooperation between different newsrooms in the

company: "We have realised that it's fairly easy to have people sitting in six different locations in Norway and produce a newspaper together. I don't think we believed that would be possible before the corona crisis".

Others emphasised how the digital tools at hand offered better ways of streamlining work processes and increased autonomy in the news production process. For example, some of the journalists described how they did not have to run decisions by managers from various departments in newsroom meetings. As such, telework was perceived to reduce bureaucracy and increase autonomy. Others emphasised how communication with digital meeting tools became more targeted and to the point, with less time for chit-chat. As noted by one reporter:

> You remove the unnecessary stuff. You spend your time more efficiently and make discussions shorter. Everyone has the same objective: OK – we're going to talk about this for 15 minutes and find a solution to this, and not talk about what we're having for dinner or the last stupid thing our kids did at school.

Being able to shift working hours around to accommodate other activities during the day was also described as a good thing about teleworking. For example, one editor noted how telework had made it easier to combine work with family life, allowing more space in the daily schedule for "exercising, for taking care of oneself and making dinner for your family". Others described reduced absenteeism as a functional benefit of telework, as people could contribute and be part of the news production even if they were unable to come into the office. For example, staying at home with a kid who was not feeling well could more easily be combined with working. One manager emphasised how telework was thus seen to enable a more inclusive work environment during the Covid-19 crisis, "making it easier to take care of employees who otherwise would have been excluded from the workplace".

In sum, these accounts suggest that telework represented multiple opportunities which were highly appreciated by some of the news workers. These functional benefits of teleworking were seen to create value by making news work more efficient, flexible, and autonomous, which in turn had a positive impact on how people felt about their job. As such, functional and emotional benefits often went hand in hand, resulting in an overall favourable perception of telework. There were also, however, multiple negative experiences with technology that nuance these positive accounts. These were often related to interface and user experience issues with digital communication tools. Some news workers described how they found it more difficult to interrupt people during a digital meeting than in real life, because of the half-second delay that is common on video conference platforms. This delay led to people talking over and interrupting each other. The participants described how in a physical meeting they could interpret the body language and tone of voice of the other participants, which helped them understand when a person had finished

an argument and provided an opportunity to interrupt in a slightly more comfortable way. As described by one reporter, with teleworking, there was a fear of hurting or offending colleagues by saying something critical – or being perceived as rude. According to one journalist, "it's easier to get around those things when you're in the same room". Another reporter mentioned the fear of being misunderstood or just saying something stupid, which was perceived as being more difficult to sort out in online conversations than in "real life". Once again, we note that the functional challenges of working solely through digital communication were accompanied by emotional challenges, particularly among those who felt insecure and awkward when required to communicate via screens instead of in person. There were also accounts of managerial challenges, such as following up on employees' everyday lives and having an impact on the staff's professional development. As pointed out by one manager, communicating solely on digital platforms made it more difficult for leaders to notice when people were struggling, and to take the right course of action. Supplementing this, a reporter described changes in power dynamics whereby the managers had become "instructors". According to these participants, digital meetings reduced discussions between employees and managers, emphasising a traditional hierarchy in which leaders assign tasks and employees execute them.

Diverse experiences with the functional aspects of telework highlight the ambiguous value of this working mode for news workers. While some embraced the opportunities offered by online collaborative tools, others struggled with a multitude of technical obstacles such as muted microphones, glitches in the system, and video images that froze. These technical issues were perceived as obstacles to collaboration and cooperation, which in turn could lead to digital fatigue when a telework meeting did not fulfil its purpose. One reporter described the exhaustion of trying to contribute to the digital conversation: "When it fails, it's easier to resign and just passively answer some e-mails".

Saving costs and increasing productivity versus decreasing creativity

Regarding strategic benefits of telework, several managers emphasised how telework saved costs and increased productivity. As described by one of the management representatives: "We don't have to be concerned if people working from home actually produce news – because they really do". Echoing this observation, another manager described the increased productivity as a persistent phenomenon with telework:

> At the beginning of the pandemic, the biggest surprise was that productivity did not go down because of people working from home. Instead, productivity increased. You might say that this was not that surprising during the first two–three weeks when everybody realised that there is a global crisis going on. But this has continued, and it has made us realise that we will benefit from having a more flexible workplace in the future.

Other managers reported how teleworking had made it easier to recruit and retain highly qualified staff. As one described: "One of the consequences of the pandemic is that we recruit people who live elsewhere". Telework was thus seen to expand the labour market for news organisations competing for competency. There was, however, considerable ambivalence regarding this potential. While some managers were optimistic about recruitment, others were concerned that they would lose skilled news workers who felt less attached to the news organisation when working from home. As stated by one of the editors:

> Some are drawn to other industries, as they discover how the competence they have developed within the media industry can be applied in other organisations. This change could be the result of many people working from home and not being part of their regular environment.

There was also concern among managers regarding the negative impact of teleworking on organisational culture and creativity. They described how small talk by the coffee machine, and random meetings between colleagues in the hallway or the lunchroom used to play a key role for idea generation in the journalistic process. When these meeting points disappeared, journalists as well as managers found it difficult to keep the energy and creativity flowing. The exchange of ideas and the bouncing back and forth of thoughts that normally take place at these meeting venues were not merely a social activity, but a core component in developing and refining journalistic content, according to our participants. One manager put it like this:

> A physical newsroom is organic. So much happens there during the day. You talk to so many people. People who do the same thing as yourself. And you pitch ideas at such a low-threshold level. This is completely lost when only working digitally. Work becomes less exciting. There are fewer exciting ideas emerging. Too few out-of-the-box ideas.

This was experienced as a problem on a day-to-day basis, with fewer stories being developed through the sort of collective process that produced high-impact journalism in the physical newsroom in pre-pandemic times. It was also perceived as a challenge for journalistic innovation in a longer-term perspective, as innovation processes came to a halt, strategy workshops were postponed, and the general inventiveness in the newsroom was reduced. Several of our interviewees described how sharing ideas and brainstorming processes require a physical and social organisation to work well. As noted by one manager: "I experience the pandemic as an obstacle for idea generation and other things that are important for innovation because people are most creative when working together". Supplementing this, another manager emphasised how business critical innovation was suffering due to teleworking: "If we want to increase our subscriber base, we can't do more of what we are

already doing. We need to make something different […] This slows down when people are working from home". This quote points to what seems like an innovation paradox: By shifting to telework, news organisations innovated their service systems in ways that enabled them to keep the wheels of the news production running and the news business afloat during the crisis. However, the shift to telework could have a negative impact on future innovations. Even though several of the news organisations in our sample had launched new services while working remotely during the crisis, the management participants in this study seemed less optimistic about their ability to nurture such innovativeness in a telework setting after the pandemic. As such, the strategic benefits of cost reduction, efficiency, and increased production were coupled with concern regarding loss of innovation ability in a telework setting.

Discussion and conclusion

This study has shed light on how a major innovation in the production of news during the Covid-19 crisis was perceived by news workers. While the rapid transition to telework created value for stakeholders such as audiences and news media owners by keeping the news production up and running, and even enabling news organisations to launch new services in response to public information needs (Olsen & Furseth, 2023; see also Solvoll, Chapter 2; Mtchedlidze, Chapter 5), the insights presented in this chapter reveal the significant challenges that many news workers faced during the telework transformation of news organisations' service systems. The analytical framework in our study provides a productive perspective for dissecting these intricate value assessments. The emotional, functional, and strategic challenges perceived by this stakeholder group contribute to a more nuanced understanding of innovation and value creation during the pandemic and prompt us to contemplate the sustainability of this new working approach in a post-pandemic setting.

In line with research by Baruch and Nicholson (1997), Baruch (2000), and Miglioretti and colleagues (2021), our research identifies advantages as well as pitfalls associated with telework, demonstrating how the value of this innovation to news workers was ambiguous and complex. On the one hand, telework was perceived to provide opportunities for a more efficient and flexible work life. Digital tools allowing news workers to interact with their colleagues and to have more control over the time, place, and pace of their work were seen to generate functional as well as emotional benefits. The flexibility of teleworking has potentially been a giant leap forward in the modernisation of the journalistic workplace, making it more aligned with the expectations of a new generation of employees. Younger people have been found to appreciate telework, considering it a source of freedom to plan time

and enjoy work autonomy (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). For this group, telework is arguably a working mode that creates value by improving their ability to conduct their work at desirable levels of flexibility. The Covid-19 crisis, serving as a massive real-life telework experiment, has made news organisations more experienced in facilitating and managing this kind of work. Offering teleworking opportunities is likely an important element in recruiting highly skilled news workers for the future. Our findings also suggest that some news workers became accustomed to and enjoyed the flexibility that telework entails (see also Rudningen, Chapter 3). Consequently, it seems difficult to turn back the clock to pre-pandemic times and demand that all news workers return to the physical office on an everyday basis, particularly as productivity was reportedly high and news production more efficient with teleworking. Indeed, offering telework opportunities may become an important strategy not only for recruiting but also for retaining employees in the post-pandemic work environment, as flexibility and autonomy reportedly create substantial value for some news workers.

On the other hand, our research brings to the fore the disadvantages of news workers not being together in a physical newsroom and the shortcomings of "the screen" as an arena for generating journalistic ideas and for nurturing organisational culture. This cultural deficit could be particularly taxing for newcomers who are unfamiliar with organisational routines, manners, and jargon and who lack a well-established network of co-workers to lean on for professional guidance and support. Considering physical, digital, or hybrid newsrooms for the future, it is important to critically assess which individuals in the workforce are most in need of the networking and learning opportunities offered in the physical newsroom, and who are unlikely to thrive without such stimuli from their colleagues. In other words, news organisations need to be attentive to how the value of telework is experienced individually and how it influences the employees' ability to pursue professional ambitions and conduct their work at desirable levels of quality which, as noted by Picard (2010), is essential for news organisations' value creation for news workers. Our study suggests that nurturing news workers' creativity represents a particular challenge in a telework setting. Supplementing previous observations by García-Avilés (2021) and Appelgren (2022), we find that reporters as well as managers found it problematic to nurture creativity when working remotely. Based on these negative accounts of telework, we posit that moving forward, news organisations must consider which journalistic jobs can be fully digitalised and which ones require news workers to meet physically. Creative processes may be one area where employees – even those thriving in their working-from-home solitude – are expected to participate physically as team members. Other tasks, such as passing on information or updating your colleagues on your work status during the day, may be better suited for digital meetings.

While these findings on how news workers perceived the benefits and challenges of telework provide important insights regarding the value of this innovation, one cannot ignore the impact of the crisis itself on people's general well-being, socially as well as professionally. The forced implementation of telework ruled out a *voluntary* transition to this mode of working, which would be expected under normal circumstances. While telework otherwise typically offers flexibility, it was an inflexible solution during the pandemic, since for many news workers, this was the *only* work option available. The news workers we interviewed were living through one of the largest societal crises of our time, resulting in substantial emotional distress and discomfort likely to have affected job satisfaction. When assessing the value of telework for news workers, and its suitability for newsroom cooperation post-pandemic, such contextual conditions cannot be ignored.

Having said that, this study has demonstrated how applying an employee perspective provides a more complex picture of innovation and value creation among news organisations. Contrasting the somewhat simplistic assertion that innovation should create value for all actors involved (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016), the mixed experiences reported by our respondents suggest that the value of innovation could be highly individual and ambiguous. This represents a challenge for the research field as well as for media organisations. Value creation, albeit a laudable objective of innovation, may prove difficult to achieve for all relevant stakeholders. We posit that future research applying service innovation perspectives on journalism needs to be more attentive to value creation dilemmas and contradictions. Based on the insights in this study, we argue that sustainable innovations in journalism must create value not only for the firm's customers, owners, and suppliers (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016), but for its employees as well. Without sufficient attention to news workers as key stakeholders in service innovation, media organisations may push through service system changes that alienate their workforce and create problems for future innovation in journalism.

Acknowledgements

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