

## 28 Opportunities and challenges of innovations for media practice

*Vinzenz Wyss, Mirco Saner, and  
Korbinian Klinghardt*

### **Introduction: organization does matter**

Three years of research have shown that innovations in journalism do not only manifest themselves on the mesolevel of news organizations, but that socio-political factors of specific countries also have an impact on the innovativeness of the news industry (Meier et al. 2022; see Chapter 3–7). Furthermore, there are also influencing factors on the microlevel, such as the motivation of employees or the willingness to let go of old habits and privileges and to adapt to new processes and technologies. Nevertheless, a central finding of the study is that the dominant supportive and obstructive factors regarding the implementability of innovations are to be found on the mesolevel (Meier et al. 2024). Innovations require the strategic governance of open-minded management, which allows a culture of experimentation without economic pressure, systematically approaches the promotion of journalistic innovations, and implements them permanently within the framework of organizational quality management.

The definitive aspect of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) interviews with the managers and project leaders about the goals of the innovations, as well as the factors that support or obstruct them, is the lack of a systematic view of the successful development of innovations within media organizations. This lack is certainly due to the complex subject matter, as the implementation of innovations in media organizations usually involves the interplay of organizational goals, interpretive patterns, role holders, structures, technologies, processes, and social practices, as well as performances (Evans 2018). Innovation dynamics are not only influenced by business models, organizational structures, predominant processes, and practices but also interact with quality goals and strategies, professional role expectations, and norms (Bélaïr-Gagnon and Steinke 2020).

The omission of systematics by interviewees becomes clear in instances of identifying structures without mentioning the interplay between the rules (of strategic objectives and normative quality goals) and resources (money, organizational structures, personnel, knowledge, and processes). The interviewees did not explicitly see innovation processes as a result of the complex interplay of structural factors related to organizational strategies, available

resources, newsrooms' own professional practices, standards, and culture (Koivula et al. 2023). A notable aspect is that the interviewees perceived many of the influencing factors as both supportive and obstructive without considering the recursiveness between rules and resources as an important condition for the implementability of innovations.

In this chapter, we intend to figure out the implications for media practice based on the empirical findings, and to do so, we are guided by the principle of “organization does matter”: media organizations and newsrooms are places in which social practices take on systemic forms through the continuous, recursive application of rules and resources. Wyss (2016) argues establishment of innovations is an outcome of structure being either a medium or a result. The former occurs when all organizational personnel refer to quality-oriented rules and resources in actions and the latter while simultaneously updating or changing them through their actions (Wyss 2016, 271).

We assume that the sustainable implementation of innovations will only succeed if the related rules and resources are linked to structures of editorial quality management (EQM). The structuration-theoretical perspective understands EQM as a set of formalized and legitimized practices of reflexive governance and control of journalistic organizations, which refer to quality goals supported by corresponding resources. The EQM goes into effect as soon as the goals of the organization's quality strategy are achieved and communicated internally and externally. The organization controls and monitors the ongoing success of the goals through a recursive process according to the organization's rules and resources.

In the remaining sections of the chapter, we start off by describing the structures and principles of EQM that make the implementation of journalistic innovations a matter of organizational quality assurance. We follow on from these theoretical considerations by making 18 elaborated recommendations, which should enable editorial managers to steer the development and implementation of innovations in media organizations.

### **Managing innovation within a quality management system**

Altmppen (2006, 119) uses structuration theory (Giddens 1997 [1984]) to describe journalistic organizations as “systems of organized action,” which are characterized by the interdependence of action and structure, whereby the latter is recursively produced through the application of certain mediation modalities (Wyss 2016). The structure is responsible for ensuring that social practices do not have to be constantly rebuilt in temporal, material, and social terms. Innovations must be planned, implemented, constantly applied and their impact evaluated in the long term to become established. In the context of establishing innovations as new social practices, media organizations should tie their efforts to the organizational structure. We argue that this can only be achieved by integrating innovation management into the structure of a comprehensive EQM system. The function of EQM lies in the

reflexive, quality-oriented further development or change of the organizational structure, of which innovations are to become part. Giddens (1997 [1984], 432) defines structure as “rules and resources recursively involved in the reproduction of social systems.”

## Rules

There are, in the context of rules concerning the implementation and ongoing success of innovation, two categories. The first serves the common understanding within an organization, such as the communication of organization-specific quality goals. In newsrooms, these can be expressed through declarative mission statements or guiding principles, journalistic guidelines or department-specific concept documents. The second legitimizes rules. They serve to justify or sanction “correct” behavior and can be found in editorial statutes, codes of ethics, or even in checklists used in annual staff or qualification reviews. Such rules represent potentials that are updated situation-specifically in social practices.

One finding of the study concerning rules as structures of a newsroom made it clear that some innovations are associated with the *changed role expectations* of journalists. This was the case, for example, with projects that promoted *collaborative-investigative journalism* (with the roles of watchdog and controller), *data journalism* (explainer), *new digital storytelling* (storyteller), or innovations that are intended to lead to greater *citizen participation* (enabler) and *entrepreneurial journalism*. These are roles that may conflict with each other, which requires media organizations to regulate their application within the framework of the EQM system. After all, some of these role patterns contradict the widespread postulate of objective reporting. While objectivity is the basis of neutral reportage, the roles of storyteller or citizen journalist, for example, are more involved in both subject matter and outcome. The media organization’s editorial culture must, therefore, resolve this possible conflict.

Rules are also addressed when, for example, organizations make explicit the *goals of the innovations*, such as opening up new markets or increasing market share, reducing labor costs, strengthening manufacturing flexibility and diversity, or simply improving product quality. These goals are both partly economic and journalistic goals, which may well be in conflict with each other. Media organizations must regulate these partial goals internally as to their position in the hierarchy of aims and how to appreciate their achievement. However, this activity is only possible if the organization makes such goals explicit, documented, and, if necessary, even operationalized so that it can measure the level of success.

Individual innovations are also linked to specific goals. For example, the project’s interviewees expected *podcasts* to reach new and primarily young target groups, to strengthen community building, to promote other content of the media company, or simply to enhance its reputation. The initiators of *fact-checking* want to emphasize important journalistic quality criteria, such

as factuality and truth, objectify emotional discourse, and promote the audience's media competence. *Mobile-Live Journalism* projects should promote interactivity, and *newsletters* should promote dialogue with the audience. Projects to promote *new digital storytelling* should contribute to a better understanding of the news, promote participation through interactive elements, and also contribute to the company's image and, finally, even to economic profitability. These are all goals that the Deming cycle of quality control recognizes, enabling organizations to plan, implement, control, and standardize (plan, do, check, act) within the framework of an EQM system that parallels the "kaizen" (continuous improvement) principle.

The interviewees also mentioned normative requirements that are related to certain innovations, i.e., legitimacy rules: the implementation of *collaborative-investigative journalism*, as well as *data journalism*, requires competences in handling data and statistics. *Citizen journalism* requires journalists with a sense of community. The application of artificial intelligence (AI) confronts journalists with ethical norms, challenges transparency rules, and causes a fear of job losses.

Still, the interviewees repeatedly complained about a lack of error culture in the media organizations, which they saw as an obstacle to the implementation of innovation. A lack of intrinsic motivation of employees and mistrust from colleagues, the interviewees also saw as obstacles. They noted that innovations like *automation* and *AI* are threats to journalists because they are often grounded in the traditional understanding of the profession. Organizations must address these conflicts within their human resources policy and management as part of their EQM system with rules that are binding for all personnel.

*Social media projects* quickly come into conflict with the attributes of the digital environment because the boundaries and norms separating business and state-oriented accounts (e.g., public relations, entertainment, news) and private ones have become blurred. Furthermore, there is increasing skepticism about the market power of platforms and their data protection regulations. The interviewees also noted cultural reservations about data collection in audience *engagement projects* (e.g., restrictive data protection laws) but also the danger of creating echo chambers through personalized content. The solution for media organizations would be to clarify these problems within the framework of a defined data philosophy in the editorial guidelines.

The use of *digital tools*, *teleconference apps*, and *teleworking* has resulted in the dependency of media companies on technological corporations and digital infrastructure providers. This reliance ensures there are many new normative conflicts that organizations must resolve within their EQM systems.

## Resources

Rules cannot be implemented without the existence of resources because their use is the expression of the exercise of power. Allocative resources enable control over material aspects (e.g., control over money, goods, personnel,

or technology). Authoritative resources are capabilities and capacities that enable the exercise of power over other organizational role owners. This includes quality-oriented structures and processes, organizational knowledge, competences, and organizational techniques, but also planning, research, control, and feedback or evaluation processes that organizations use to achieve the quality goals communicated as rules in a systematic and controlled way or to check the achievement of those goals. This is where the EQM system can intervene in a steering and controlling manner. The media institution would require all personnel to apply the rules in their daily actions using the pertinent resources. The aim of doing so would be to reproduce or change the organizational structure in a quality-oriented way or even to implement innovations.

In the context of identifying factors that obstructed the implementation of innovations, one of the most frequently mentioned factors by the interviewees was the lack of resources, primarily the lack of a budget. Money is not only a supportive condition (if sufficient funding can be obtained), but also the main obstructive factor, especially when start-ups in particular are unable to secure sufficient funding.

In addition to insufficient funding, the interviewees also complained the lack of time to concentrate on new projects was a major obstacle to innovation. The examples of investigative journalism combined with international or domestic collaboration, as well as data journalism, show the necessity of decoupling these innovations from day-to-day business because the analysis of complex data requires intensive planning. In addition, interviewees also cited the lack of technical equipment and know-how in companies as allocative resources that are primary obstacles to innovation growth. For example, the interviewees mentioned the specialized technical knowledge required of *fact-checkers*, who must also be present on social media platforms and be familiar with various verification and social listing tools to be able to check texts, images, and moving images for their truth content. Another allocative resource consists of staff who are not only willing to experiment and are committed but also have specialist knowledge.

The interviewees also said authoritative resources were both supportive and obstructive factors. On the positive side was cooperation within the organization in multidisciplinary teams (*fact-checking, data journalism, media labs, and engagement on the basis of data*) and collaboration with external experts (*podcasts*). The interviewees viewed knowledge exchange within the industry with colleagues working in the same areas of innovation (e.g., *collaborative-investigative journalism*), as well as with external, non-journalism partners who have technical expertise (*data journalism*), as important drivers of innovation.

The authoritative resources also include new forms of organizing. For example, the experts included the dismantling of old structures and the cooperation of all departments and hierarchies, as well as the inclusion of young colleagues and the need to define new professional roles and responsibilities

in personnel policy. Authoritative resources also include the promotion of employees who persistently push forward their own innovative projects (innovation champions).

The interviewees, in the context of monitoring and management of social media platforms, emphasized that this field would create new responsibilities, coordination, and workflows, with new forms of project management being applied. Hybrid teams would be formed and editorial processes redesigned.

The need to adapt authoritative resources in the establishment of *new organizational forms and teams* is clear. The media industry needs a flexible and collaborative organization in which teamwork is more important than individual work. Synergies between various channels need to be created; the boundaries between departments will be removed; in product development, people with different competences will work together (editorial knowledge, coding, marketing, advertising, and social media).

All these applications of allocative and authoritative resources are structures supportive of the implementation of innovative ideas and are set up in a quality-oriented manner within the framework of an EQM system. However, because various innovation projects may be pursuing conflicting quality goals, management must decide which resources are to be used where and for what reason.

### **Recursiveness and viability**

An important principle of quality management is the principle of recursiveness, which explains the need to design quality management as an iterative process. In this context, organizational actors refer to quality-oriented rules and resources in their routine actions (structure as a medium) and at the same time update or change them through their actions (structure as a result) (Wyss 2016, 271). The principle of recursiveness corresponds to the principle of kaizen, continuous improvement. All core processes repeatedly go through the Plan-Do-Check-Act-phases of the Deming cycle of quality control. In all these phases, reference must be made to the rules, as expressed, for example, in publishing guidelines or checklists. For example, evaluating an innovation only makes sense if it relates to predefined quality goals and if the findings of the evaluation in turn flow into the updating of them.

Recursiveness thus refers to the processual aspect of the reproduction of social practices in action. Hence, structure is a process in which rules and resources are applied in an interactive relationship. Organizational actors, managers as well as journalists, refer to rules and resources through the application of interpretive schemes, norms, and facilities, and thus in reproducing them, structure becomes manifest. The emphasis on the recursive character of structure formation also points to the potential for change and innovation. Structures enter every action as “input,” but at the same time, they are also the “output” (intended or not) result of the actor (Ortmann and Sydow 2001, 426). Thus, references to rules are prerequisites for the use of

resources, and rules should not emerge beyond the availability of resources. The enforceability of innovative social practices thus depends on whether they prove to be “viable” in the order of rules as well as in the order of the structures of resources.

So, an example is needed. The innovative quality goal of diversity and inclusion to prevail within an editorial office must also meet normative requirements (e.g., the willingness to invite female experts). The goal must also be viable in relation to the order of the structures of resources because only the application of authoritative (intercultural composition of the editorial office) and allocative resources (e.g., knowledge about people with a migration background) makes it possible to achieve the aim. However, in the absence of corresponding resources, it would also make little sense to formulate diversity and inclusion as a quality goal in the editorial mission statement.

### **An organizational application for innovation management**

In the sense of recommendations for media practice and media managers, some findings from the study will now be compiled. These findings are examined against the background of structuration theory explanations to enable a more systematic control of innovations within the framework of an EQM system. Media organizations must take appropriate measures within the framework of their own quality assurance systems.

Table 28.1 illustrates the structures of quality assurance that would be the starting point for applying steering instruments at various points in the organization. The table shows an organizational complex in which rules for quality assurance are used and applied. The first type serves the common

*Table 28.1* Components of an EQM system for journalism organizations

<i>Rules</i>		<i>Resources</i>	
<b>Quality Goals</b>	<b>Norms</b>	<b>Allocative</b>	<b>Authoritative</b>
diversity and inclusion, community building, citizen participation			
<b>Journalism Concepts,</b> collaborative-investigative journalism, data journalism, citizen participation, new digital storytelling, diversity and inclusion	editorial statutes ethics code checklists autonomy laws rules	personnel knowledge money time infrastructure	organizational structure hierarchy responsibilities processes: planning, fact-checking, evaluation, audience research
<b>Organizational Concepts</b> guiding principles guidelines			

*Source:* JoIn-DemoS project’s own illustration.

understanding of organization-specific quality goals. The second type comprises normative rules that express correct actions, for example, in ethical guidelines or legal standards.

Rules can be expressed as quality goals, such as diversity and inclusion, community building, or citizen participation in mission statements, journalistic guidelines, or format-specific concepts. Furthermore, certain journalistic concepts such as collaborative-investigative journalism, data journalism, citizen participation, or digital storytelling with their strategic goals should be described here. The description of these concepts, the rules associated with them, and the resources required for them are the only ways to evaluate these innovations.

The associated rules cannot be implemented without reference to resources. Allocative resources enable, for example, personnel development, including recruitment. But they also enable access to knowledge, money, and time, as well as infrastructures. Authoritative resources include organizational structures, hierarchies, responsibilities, and quality assurance processes such as project planning, fact-checking, and evaluation processes, taking into account audience reactions and audience research data. These are processes that refer to the goals and norms set out in the rules.

Finally, 18 recommendations for the corresponding innovation areas are summarized in Table 28.2, which should enable editorial managers to steer the development and implementation of innovations in media organizations.

*Table 28.2 JoIn-DemoS project's top innovation categories (ranked alphabetically) and their relation to either or both quality objectives (QO) and resources (R)*

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*Automation (QO) (R)*

AI is arguably one of the most important innovations in journalism. It is also clear that AI will become more widespread as companies seek to automate processes and increase efficiency. However, management does have the challenge of countering the fears of change associated with AI.

*Tools and remote working (R)*

Automated tools, teleconferencing applications, online databases, and access to digital infrastructures have revolutionized the work of journalists, as they can facilitate flexibility in tasks and collaboration between professionals. Teleworking resources and hybrid models (a combination of face-to-face work and teleworking) are expected to improve relations between the actors and increase the efficiency of some processes. However, that face-to-face contact does offer important advantages in solving everyday problems and in creative activities.

*Citizen participation (QO)*

This innovation offers the opportunity to improve the current relationship between the public and journalism and has the potential to reduce social fragmentation, e.g., of groups hostile to mass media, as people feel represented and included. Moreover, journalists and users are meeting more face-to-face, and audiences are increasingly involved in the journalistic message-making process, from topic identification to research. When management promotes citizen participation initiatives, care should be taken to ensure that this initiative corresponds with the concept of diversity and that it is adequately represented in the audience. There is also the challenge of staying true to the traditional norms regarding autonomy while being more responsive to the audience.

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Table 28.2 (Continued)

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*Collaborative-investigative journalism (QO)*

Even though deadline pressure is a recurring problem in all areas of innovation, the use of time as a resource is an essential feature of collaborative-investigative journalism, which relies on the long term as its unique selling point and is thus detached from day-to-day journalism activities. Research and (international) cooperation require intensive planning and organization without distractions. The management must, therefore, be able to provide the necessary time resources. Another prerequisite is the willingness to share the research results with other media organizations and to cooperate with them, so here the conflict with the goal of exclusivity must be resolved. Small investigative start-ups have special expertise and approaches that can be helpful for large media organizations.

*Data journalism (QO)*

Data journalism is clearly related to new formats and forms of organization. On the resource side, there is an increased need for statistics, measurement methods, and data when implementing this concept. Data journalism has evolved from “nice to have” to “must have” for any media brand of at least medium size. This is, therefore, also associated with professionalization and institutionalization. Here, management may have to reduce reservations and skepticism. Furthermore, data journalism is expensive (software, personnel, training) and should not be developed with the aim of monetarization or profits.

*Diversity and inclusion (QO)*

The quality goals of diversity and inclusion cannot be implemented in one department or in a single project: all levels of the company are involved. On the resource side, it requires building an editorial team with various skill sets able to produce diverse reporting and adapting editorial structures and processes. Resources enable not only personnel recruitment and development but also access to knowledge. For sustainable implementation, editorial teams should, therefore, include diversity and inclusion as quality goals in mission statements and ensure that they are supported by appropriate human resources policies and format development. This can also draw on existing charters in other branches.

*Donations and crowdfunding (QO)*

This innovation is designed to give the media organization financial independence from the advertising industry. Donations and crowdfunding should primarily enable investigative journalism and research projects to focus on socially relevant topics. Management must communicate this aim together with the goal of community building because donors want to know how their money is being used.

*Engagement on the basis of data (QO)*

To successfully collect user data, the media business must first raise brand awareness so that user behavior can be observed. In addition, data specialists need to be recruited to deal with data collection. To promote the data philosophy, data protection can be taken out of the way and documented as rules in appropriate guidelines.

*Fact-checking (QO) (R)*

This innovation requires a high level of technical competence. Fact-checkers must additionally have a certain degree of stress resistance and resilience because they are often berated for serving the mainstream media with supposedly government-compliant fact-checks. Management should, therefore, make sure that, in addition to setting up technically competent fact-checking teams, it also communicates the need for this innovation to the outside world and counteracts possible external criticism.

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Table 28.2 (Continued)

*Media labs (QO) (R)*

This innovative facility creates flexibility, teamwork, experimentation, and a willingness to share knowledge. Collaboration between the lab team with professionals from other departments in the organization is important. The innovation strategies of media labs are based on the idea that media organizations need to find new ways to improve processes and products and increase the value of the news brand. These strategies can only be brought to fruition if they are met by media organizations that have a robust culture of experimentation and freedom.

*Membership models (R)*

Introducing a successful membership model takes time and a lot of communication effort. This includes preventing conflicts of norms, such as perceived pressure to engage in clickbait practices. Membership models can be combined with other revenue streams (advertising, micropayments, donations) and are excellent ways to contribute to community building.

*Mobile-live journalism*

This innovation is valued in the study for its ability to pick up current issues, be where the audience is, and even encourage participation and interactivity. However, this also shows the need to embrace new ways of working and to overcome the inertia characterized by the print press. The motto should be “think vertically, not at a desk.” Build teams that focus on these formats while maintaining journalistic standards, especially for live news. Mobile-live journalism needs a significant cultural change and a new understanding of professional roles.

*New digital storytelling (QO)*

Digital storytelling projects require forward planning, multidisciplinary work, and execution with large production margins and detached from the immediacy of daily news reporting. There is a need to go beyond the traditional article to convey the important issues narratively through innovative formats. Technologies play an important role in this innovation. So, while developing the concept, the management should also consider the required resources like multidisciplinary teams, time away from day-to-day business, and the appropriate tools, as well as leadership skills.

*New organizational forms and teams (QO) (R)*

To create products that meet audience needs, media organizations should adopt collaborative practices and workflows in which diverse professional profiles come together in multidisciplinary teams to rethink content, products, processes, and even editorial structures. Furthermore, professional skills, attitudes, and cultures should also change to strive for innovation through leadership and empowerment. The establishment of a newsroom requires the organizational culture to adapt accordingly.

*Newsletters (R)*

This innovation is an excellent way to create bonds and address the audience in an informal way. Given the tendency of digital media to publish endless feeds, audiences appreciate a product that is briefer and more manageable. Newsletters can also be seen as a marketing tool. However, this can potentially lead to conflicts in how journalists view their roles.

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Table 28.2 (Continued)

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*Paid content (R)*

The study has shown that the paid content strategy must be accompanied by clear communication. The marketing and editorial departments should not operate separately but should be in knowledge exchange from the outset. The introduction of pay barriers can help to tear down the dividing walls between marketing and editorial departments and make journalists think more entrepreneurially. However, the management must be concerned that increased interdepartmental cooperation does not at the same time contradict the concept of journalistic independence but remains viable within normative rules.

*Audio and podcast (R)*

Coined as a word in 2004, podcasts do not require expensive digital equipment to record, upload to the internet, and distribute through RSS feeds. Consequently, podcasts often have the appearance of being produced amateurishly. Despite their popularity (statistics for September 2023 indicate there are globally 3.2 million podcasts) and partially because they are free to consume, no one has yet devised a viable podcast revenue model. Still, as part of staff development, management should work to ensure that journalists are willing to work with experts from outside journalism.

*Social media (R)*

When media publish news on social media platforms, management is confronted with an innovation dilemma, as the boundaries between PR, entertainment, drama, and the private accounts of journalists become blurred. This can result in conflicts of norms that management must resolve. The examples mentioned in the study have shown that a balance between journalistic self-image and the logic of the platforms is possible.

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Source: Authors.

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