Are Journalists Today‘s Coal Miners?

How to attract and retain talent for newsrooms that are diverse and sustainable

Findings from a comparative research project of the UK, Sweden and Germany

Dr Alexandra Borchardt, Senior Research Associate, EFJ Conference on Managing Change in the Media, 10th October, 2019
A dangerous profession
An endangered profession?

Journalist salaries

Germany
Assumption #1: The talent challenge will be the next big challenge for journalism
New competitors

“They could choose Google, Spotify. Why would they choose public service? We don’t pay as much. And the work might not be as creative.”

Anne Lagercrantz, Head of News, SVT.
“The number of applications we receive has definitely narrowed, and the people that are coming forward tend to be people that have got a lot of technical skills but not necessarily the interpersonal skills to be able to talk to people and go and find stories.”

Ian Carter, Editorial Director Kent Media Group
Different heroes

“We have problems explaining to young people what journalism is. If you take a look at the journalism films of recent years: Spotlight, The Post... it’s all about newspapers in the 1970s or 20 years ago. There are no role models for contemporary journalism.”

Sven Goesmann, Editor-in-Chief, Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa
The “fake news” debate

“In the past five years, more than 50 prime ministers, presidents and other government leaders across five continents have used the term ‘fake news’ to justify varying levels of anti-press activity.”

A.G. Sulzberger, Publisher The New York Times
Concern about talent and diversity in the newsroom

- Retaining talented staff: 74%
- Attracting talent (given pay and conditions): 73%
- (overload, relentless nature of the job etc): 62%
- Level of diversity in the newsroom: 56%

Q9 Rate your level of concern about the following issues (showing code for concerned and very concerned)

Digital leaders survey, N=196
Assumption #2: Diversity in newsrooms will be decisive to regain trust

“The disconnection is partly due to the lack of diversity in colour, opinion and experience.”
This was funny

This? Well ...
European journalism Is a largely male affair

“Across all 11 countries, men wrote 41% of the stories, compared to just 23% written by women, while almost half of all the pictures (43%) that were published were just of men, compared to just 15% featuring only women.”

Where are the Women Journalists in Europe’s Media?, European Journalism Observatory, 2018
But isn’t there great journalism?
Assumption #3: Diversity affects content
Are Journalists Today’s Coal Miners?
The Struggle for Talent and Diversity in Modern Newsrooms – A Study on Journalists in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom

Alexandra Barsharß, Julia Lück, Sabine Kieslich, Tanjev Schults, Felix M. Simon
Our study:

- Talent pipeline: Who wants to become a journalist these days?
- How important do editors think diversity is?
- Best practice: How to attract diverse talent?
- Comparison: Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom
- Method: More than 30 structured interviews with editors-in-chiefs, heads of journalism schools, interviews with trainees
- Team: Universitaet Mainz, Reuters Institute University of Oxford
- Funding: Deutsche Telekom Foundation
- Published: July 2019
Some findings: talent pipeline

• Most editors mention talent among the top three strategic challenges.

• There is a talent shortage of journalists away from the big cities. Big brands still attract talent but rarely „diverse“ talent.

• Today’s young journalists are mission-driven, not fun-driven.

• All leaders perceive diversity as important challenge but emphasize different things: social background, rural vs. urban, ethnic minorities, political views.

• Gender diversity is not a problem of numbers but of status.
What editors think about diversity

“(The state of diversity in newsrooms) is generally very poor. There has been so much focus on digital transformation in recent years, the question of diversity has had to stand aside.” Olle Zachrison, Head of News, Sveriges Radio

“We have to reflect Sweden as a whole. Sweden has changed quite a bit, but we haven’t at the same pace.” Anne Lagercrantz, Head of News, SVT

“I don't think it’s just an issue of fairness. I think it impacts our ability to create world-class journalism. It impacts our access to stories; it impacts our ability to reflect the world in creative ways. And also, I think it impacts our ability to attract and retain talent. If individuals come into a newsroom and don’t see diverse groups of people, it would be an unattractive place for people to work.” Joanna Webster, Managing Editor EMEA, Reuters
Some findings: challenges with diversity

• Diversity needs to be managed, it is no box-ticking exercise.
• The decline of local media leads to less diverse experiences.
• Lack of language skills is a barrier to hiring talent with ethnic minority and lower social class background.
• Families of many cultures don‘t consider journalism to be an honorable profession, the trust debate reinforces this.
• Awareness about need of diversity is there, but taking next steps appears to be hard.
• Predominant differences among countries: Britain struggles with class, Sweden with ethnic minorities and urban/rural divide, Germany with gender.
Some findings: best-practice strategies

- Active recruiting rather than waiting for candidates to show up.
- Professionalise recruitment.
- Support diversity candidates at work (social/financial support, language training).
- Clear commitment from the top and keeping metrics are essential.
- Developing different career tracks for different talent.
- Adressing injustices like gender-wage-gap.
- Reviving career tracks for non-academics.
Conclusion:

- No one has nailed it, exchange of best-practice is vital.
- Cultural change in newsrooms is essential to attract and particularly to retain talent: employees need to feel safe.
- Real diversity improves content.
- No talent, no product, no trust, no business model.
Let’s discuss!

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