

MARCH 2022

NEWSROOMS THAT CARE: how diversity and inclusion will define the future of journalism

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Publisher: European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

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International Press Centre, Residence Palace
155 Rue de la Loi, 1040 Brussels, Belgium



This publication is produced with the financial support from the European Commission grant under DG Employment Social Affairs & Inclusion. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the report lies entirely with the author and publisher.



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MATTER

Before Russia started the war in Ukraine, most efforts in the media industry centred around digital transformation. Let's get that done and then tackle newsroom diversity.

This was a common, if not always openly voiced narrative. Then came February 24 when Putin's forces invaded Ukraine while starting a propaganda war at home. Rightly so, issues of press freedom, disinformation, the sheer protection of journalists' working conditions and lives took centre stage. Diversity, gender equality? Let's leave that one for better times, some have been tempted to say. But not so fast.

Media organisations and managers should be aware of the fact that making newsrooms more diverse and inclusive will define the future of journalism and the industry. Not only is diversity at the core of digital transformation: Going digital means serving different audiences better and meeting them where they are. But it is also essential for an industry that increasingly suffers from brain drain and a talent crisis.

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DIVERSITY MATTERS FOR SERVING AUDIENCES BETTER

It has been a long-held illusion in journalism that there is just one public out there with a single need for information. The reality is that different audiences have different needs.

These needs should define choices of formats, topics, and subjects of coverage, language, products, scheduling, and the like. Defining and exploring the needs of different audiences requires empathy and experience, sometimes identification. Diversity in newsroom staff and leadership brings more perspectives into reporting, as well as in the development of formats and products that fit particular audiences' needs.

While well-educated, older audiences with an interest in breaking news tend to be over-served by today's journalism, there is an urgent

need to develop offers for the following groups that tend to disproportionately avoid the news, such as:

Young(er) audiences that tend to look for explanation, entertainment, and usefulness in journalism and rarely consult traditional platforms like printed products or home pages.

Ethnic minorities that are or might be looking for role models beyond the victim narrative, respect, acknowledgement and appreciation of cultural differences, accessible language and visual formats that don't require extensive language skills.

Socially disadvantaged audiences that are looking for respectful coverage and are likely to be less news literate.

Women, an audience that has been widely neglected by traditional news coverage, and is more prone to consume audio formats and to enjoy constructive journalism.

DIVERSITY MATTERS FOR IMPROVING CONTENT. BUT DIVERSITY NEEDS INCLUSION TO HAVE AN IMPACT

The more voices feel safe to speak up in newsrooms meetings, the broader is the range of topics and protagonists that will be covered by the journalism. It is essential to understand that diversity is not an end in itself but requires a cultural change in traditional news organisations that tend to be hierarchical and homogeneous. It matters how people in the newsroom feel treated and listened to, acknowledged, and rewarded for their contributions and competencies.

Companies like the New York Times have understood that it is not enough to keep track of the numbers. Based on a survey among employees that revealed a high degree of dissatisfaction with the company

culture, NYT leadership in “[A call to action](#)” promised “sweeping change” towards inclusion and “the most substantial investment The Times has ever made – in terms of time, money and energy”. Strategies to foster inclusion require scrutinising processes. A variety of steps can be taken, such as:

Survey and follow up: How satisfied are employees at work? Can everyone speak up and place an idea?

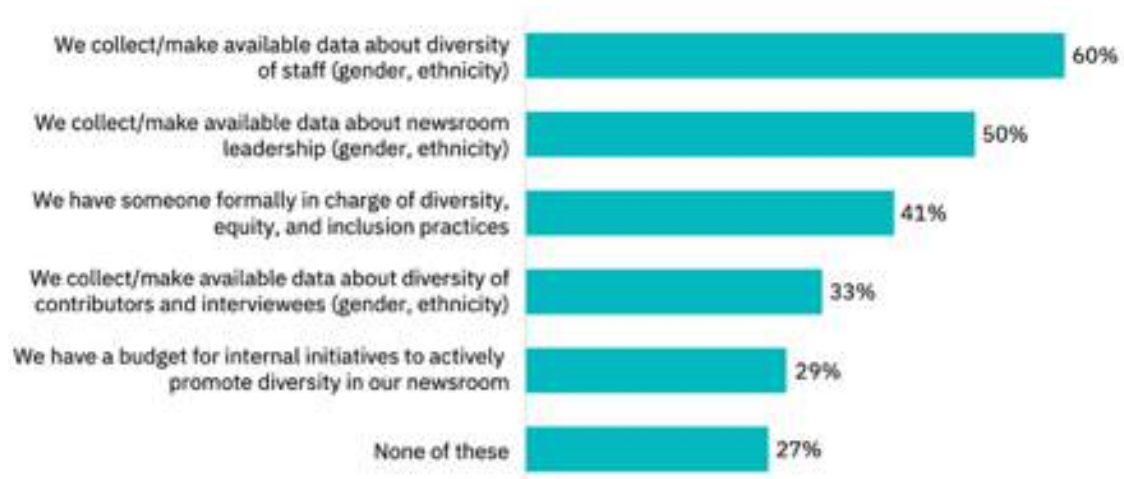
Track and shape: Who takes part in innovation projects and teams, who decides about it?

Track and shape: What kind of achievements get praised and rewarded in the newsroom?

Check and solicit: Do leaders fully support inclusion and are they prepared to define and follow through with red lines for disrespectful and bullying behaviours?



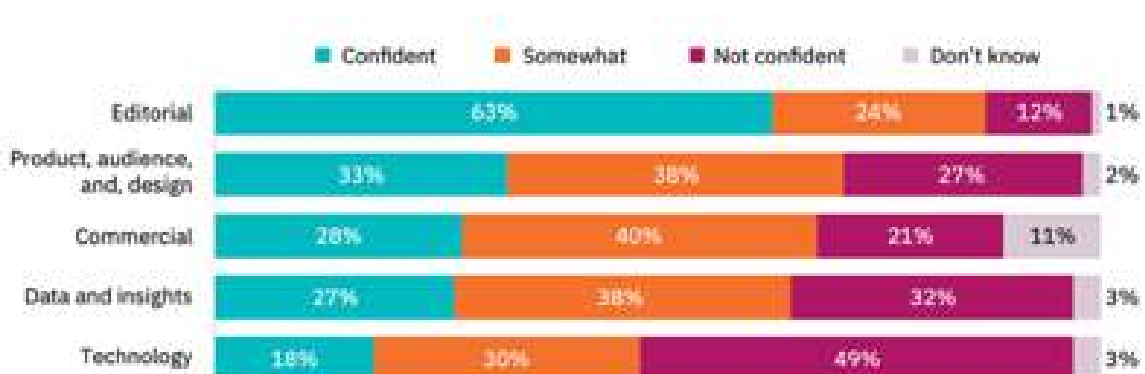
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: WHAT ORGANISATIONS ARE DOING IN TERMS OF INITIATIVES



Q13. To the best of your knowledge, does your organisation do any of the following? Select all that apply. N= 123.

Source: F. Cherubini, N. Newman, R. Nielsen, "Changing Newsrooms 2021", non-representative survey of international media leaders, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021

MEDIA LEADERS' SURVEY: CONFIDENCE IN ATTRACTING TALENT



Q15. How confident are you that your organisation can attract and retain the talent you need in the following areas? N=124.

Source: F. Cherubini, N. Newman, R. Nielsen, "Changing Newsrooms 2021", non-representative survey of international media leaders, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021

DIVERSITY MATTERS IN LEADERSHIP AND TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Journalism is facing a talent crisis.

One challenge is attracting talent: Becoming a reporter or an editor is not that enticing any more for many young people who are less inclined to consume traditional journalism than older generations, lacking role models and facing low barriers to becoming their own publishers.

At the same time publishers cannot offer much, as they are pressed for resources and need to invest in digital transformation. They depend on attracting talent for new roles particularly in tech while in many cases offering old-style, hierarchical, and innovation-reluctant work environments. The other challenge is retention: Many driven and talented individuals leave the media industry when sandwiched into impossible roles and overburdened with work.

In **recruiting journalists**, broadening the scope for potential candidates beyond the traditional applicant with academic background and superior writing skills is mandatory for an industry that needs to serve different audiences with innovative formats.

In **recruiting for the tech and business sides**, stating the case for journalism and its role in a democratic society is the major attraction for those who are looking for jobs with purposes.

Promoting **diverse candidates into leadership roles** is essential to showing others potential pathways to the top and helping with retention and the inclusion effort.

Quotas for female journalists might be necessary to make sure that half of the potential talent pool is not neglected. Note: Diversity and gender equality should not be mixed up.

Bridging the generation gap is essential to unleashing power and creativity in newsrooms. Young and older talent can profit from each other's unique insights and experiences. Both need career perspectives and appreciation. Diversity in age matters, too.

Leadership needs to be trained in spotting and materially supporting victims of harassment and (online) attacks or those who are prone to be targeted, in many cases women or journalists covering certain beats. Strengthening the resilience of staff and opportunities to fight back should be key concerns.



DIVERSITY MATTERS IN TECHNOLOGY, IN PARTICULAR IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Newsrooms will increasingly use Artificial Intelligence to feed their home pages and news feeds, target their audiences, and proceed with personalisation. But what will be the results? Publishers need to make sure that AI doesn't reproduce or amplify biases that are inherent in humans and – obviously – software that is produced and tested by humans. When Andreas Marckmann Andreassen, editor-in-chief of the Danish marketing magazine *Markedsforing*, researched and wrote a book on AI in journalism, he was surprised about the result: "Diversity ended up being a central part of the book, I didn't expect that", he said at an EFJ conference. There is a huge interest in the impact of AI on newsrooms, a good starting point for reading up on this is the [Journalism and AI Initiative at the London School of Economics](#).

AI can be used to reduce bias in content curation when certain diversity requirements or targets are included. News organisations like Canadian [Globe & Mail](#) were among the first to adopt this approach.

Softwares can help to track diversity, for example when it is used to analyse sources or pictures.

Newsrooms need to give themselves **ethical rules** for the use of AI and technology. A good example is the AI [ethics rules of public broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk](#) and the "News automation and ethical guidelines", conducted by the Council for Mass Media in Finland.

Algorithms can be consciously employed to promote news values as in [Swedish Radio's \(SR\) public service algorithm project](#).

Algorithms can be audited to make sure that they don't contain and amplify biases.



DIVERSITY MATTERS IN GROWING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND MAKING THE MEDIA INDUSTRY MORE ROBUST AND RESILIENT

Supporting and implementing diversity is essential to create and maintain sustainable business models for journalism and a lively and pluralistic media environment. All kinds of actors can contribute to fostering this diversity through various means: foundations, governments, unions, platform companies, and educational institutions. While direct funding might not always be suitable since it can compromise the independence of journalism, creativity is asked for to come up with indirect models of support. Diversity matters for all kinds of media outlets from small to large:

Public service media have a particular **obligation to reflect society** as it is and give all kinds of people a voice, be it in their own staff or reporting. Diversity is at the core of their legitimacy.

Engaging diverse parts of society with quality journalism will increase the chances of healthy funding through paid content or membership models.

A **flourishing creator economy** makes sure that all segments of society can be served with quality journalism. It is essential to support founders and start-ups with training, funding, and coaching.

Developing and supporting special interest media will also contribute to a rich and diverse media environment.

Promoting diversity and inclusion on all levels of the media industry is the right thing to do, of course. But the talking points listed above show that there is much more to it than that. The very future of journalism and the media industry depends on it.



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