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Creative Cycling of News Professionals

Astrid Gynnild, Ph.D.

Abstract

The theory of creative cycling emerged from my PhD study of news professionals in Norway. The study was carried out according to classic grounded theory principles (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001, 2005), and the area of interest was the performance of news journalism in the multimedia age. The theory runs counter to widespread tendencies of industrial age thinking in news media. It emphasizes news professionals' search for meaning in their daily work, and suggests that their main concern is self-fulfillment through original contribution. The dilemma and resolution, creative cycling, is a basic social process continuously going within inner and outer framings. It consists of three interrelated dimensions: productive processing, breaks and shifts and inspirational looping.

Key words: multimedia, news journalism, productive processing, inspirational looping, knowledge workers, self-monitoring.

Introduction

News reporters worldwide are facing the most extensive changes in media history. Digitalization and global networks have provided new options for instant news dissemination, and many news reporters are seeking to establish new work practices and exploring means of orientation and adjustment across publishing platforms. Multitasking, instant publishing and staff reductions require skill crossovers and new work approaches.

Being a news reporter and a manager for many years myself, I was quite curious about news journalists as shapers of new knowledge in the multimedia age. In my own career, I frequently experienced that many aspects of daily news production are taken for granted and as such, they tend not to be identified or conceptualized. News production is still an under-researched field.

By studying news reporters I also hoped to get in touch with tendencies in the job market that might apply to other groups of knowledge workers. To the extent that media organizations can be considered showcases for upcoming business trends, the tendency is clear: Competition in the job market is increasing; individuals tend to be more concerned about losing their jobs, more and more news reporters earn their living as freelancers, and the socio-economic motivation to be a skilful and attractive journalist is stronger than ever due to greater investment and stiff competition between news media.

The theory of creative cycling was generated from a grounded theory all-is-data-approach: oral, written, and observational data from a wide array of sources; visits to more than a dozen Norwegian newsrooms including multimedia corporations, newspapers, online newspapers, radio and TV; about 20 qualitative interviews with news reporters; many informal talks with news journalists, face to face and by phone, and data gathered from books, chronicles, magazines, news stories and the web.

When referring to individuals I have, for practical reasons, consistently called them “he”. Gender did not appear to be of significant importance to the theory so “he” is simply used as a unisex term. Moreover, the reader will find that the terms news professional, news reporter and journalist are used synonymously. The terms include writers, photographers, managers, graphic artists, producers, designers, copy editors and editors, in practice all professionals involved in daily news making.

The Theory of Creative Cycling

The main concern of news reporters is self-fulfilment through original contribution. Their aspiration is the development and realization of talents and capabilities through professional journalistic work. The main concern is resolved through creative cycling, which is a cyclic social process simultaneously going on at psychological and structural levels. Creative cycling is the opportunity and basic need for moving in and out, back and forth within and between inner and outer framings in such a way that individual creativity and innovation is invigorated. Creative cycling refers to a continuously ongoing

multiplicity of parallel processes at micro and macro levels in news reporters' lives, and is vital to personal, professional, and organizational development, learning and growth.

Creative cycling demonstrates the fundamental necessity of being in mental and physical motion in highly individuated ways. As will be further elaborated in the following, it represents both a dilemma and a solution to news reporters' needs for self-fulfilment through original contribution. In its essence, creative cycling is about ideas, how journalists as knowledge workers come up with ideas and develop ideas, and how ideas are handled, nurtured and eventually materialized within the frames of news dissemination.

Creative cycling consists of three dimensions which are closely intertwined with each other and with the core. The first dimension is productive processing, a sequence of stages similar to creative processes previously identified in creativity research. Productive processing concerns the basic transition from ideas to published products and is acknowledged as fundamental to any kind of knowledge work.¹ The stages in productive processing are preparing, concentrating, incubating, eureka, elaborating and presenting. It should be emphasized that typically, many productive idea processes go on simultaneously, both short-term and long-term.

Movement from one stage of productive processing to the next is pushed forward by breaks and shifts, which is the second dimension of creative cycling. There are basically three types of breaks and shifts that regulate pacing and motion of productive processing: scheduled breaks, external interruptions and mental time-outs. The break-and-shift dimension is in reality a two-step sub-process, which starts with a break that in turn causes a shift of attention. In turn, breaks and shifts are both openers and closers for inspirational looping, which is the third dimension of creative cycling. Inspirational looping refers to individual movements and actions intended to stimulate, extend and improve quality and pacing of the productive processing of ideas.

Metaphorically outlined, productive processing is the engine in creative cycling, breaks and shifts mark the necessity of switching between the gears and inspirational looping is the continuous fuelling of the engine. Whereas the six stages of productive processing is usually experienced as going from one

step to the next, possibly back and forth between stages, inspirational looping is multi-cyclic and as such quite unpredictable. The six aspects of inspirational looping that consistently apply to news work short term and long term are concerned with motivation, roles, time and space, collaboration, feedback and stages in a career. Each loop in itself represents a sub-process which can be further generated into separate sub-theories.

Framings and Change

The outcome of creative cycling processes is conditioned by inner and outer framings for work. Outer framings refer to external limitations within which the daily news work is supposed to be carried out. Examples of outer framings are type, size and economy of a publishing platform, its daily formats, staffing, news criteria, working schedules and timeframes for publishing. On a day-to-day basis, outer framings are out of the individual news reporter's influence and control.

Inner framings concern news professionals' mastery of work within varying outer framings. Inner framings are the individual's latent repertoire of understandings, beliefs and potential actions. Which aspects of these variables the news professional applies in various contexts, and also develops over time, depends upon skills in professional self-monitoring based on practical, theoretical and personal competences.

Both inner and outer framings are changeable, and they have extensive consequences for the quality of news production. The deliberate use of framing instead of frames implies that the structuring of work, the structuring of an organization, and at a micro level, the structuring of the individual self, is a continuously ongoing process;² framings are changeable and developable.

The concept framing focuses on the way that anything is constructed or put together, shaped or developed right now, for instance a web newsroom, a complex news organization, or a news reporter's motivation for work. Moreover, framing is usually constituted by several systems of frames that operate simultaneously. From moment to moment the changes within one or more of the framings may not be overwhelming. But during a certain time span alterations may be more apparent, and all

kinds of changes at one level or other will influence surroundings and their response. Hence framing also means to adapt and develop for a special purpose; it contains both the possibility to form and the possibility to be formed. In the process of gathering facts, editing and publishing news, therefore, sets of both inner and outer framings are operative.

As Tuchman points out, news may itself be considered a frame through which a constructed picture of reality is presented.³ This frame is constituted by the ways both news organizations and news reporters structure and define their work tasks. And “by seeking to disseminate information that people want, need and should know, news organizations both circulate and shape knowledge” (Tuchman 1978, p.2).

A news reporter, who considers himself strongly intrinsically motivated, says “*the stricter frames I impose on myself, the more my journalistic creativity is challenged*”. The statement points to the fact that when framings are self-imposed, the individual is able to regulate them according to his own capacities. When new frames are imposed by others, the individual is less in control of events and hence more vulnerable to changes.

This two-sided approach to framings takes into account the fact that news work first and foremost is a set of collaborative actions between professionals in hierarchically structured organizations. Some framings emerge as important for enhancing professional creativity and innovation, whereas other framings are apparently counterproductive to journalistic creativity. Taking only outer framings for work into consideration would be an insufficient short cut since it emerged that a news reporter’s individual skills in relating to outer framings are just as important as outer realities per se. This study of news professionals during a period of intensive change in media organizations therefore supports the idea that the responsibility for developing innovative and productive newsrooms is indeed a joint venture between employers and employees.

In the following, I will first present the six stages of productive processing. From there, I will discuss the breaking and shifting dimension and then the properties of inspirational looping. The three dimensions and the framing conditions which together form the theory will consequently be discussed in relation to practical and theoretical implications of creative

cycling theory.

Productive Processing

The following stages of productive processing account for a basic movement in creative cycling:

At the preparing stage, the news reporter sensitizes himself to a task or situation which is to be solved. For instance, at a conscious level, news reporters may prepare by reading background material, making appointments, notifying and discussing with other people involved and visualizing possible outcomes of the assignment. They open up to what is going on through scanning news updates, investigating facts, doing person research, being in touch with a broad spectrum of people and environments, and collaborating with colleagues. Preparation also typically includes atmospherizing;⁴ getting oneself and other people in a good mood for doing a task. Considerable information gathered at the preparation stage is subconsciously stored and might later be brought to consciousness when the situation calls for it. Consequently, all kinds of knowledge and experience may contribute to the fund of productive processing.

At the concentrating stage, the news reporter and possibly his co-workers intensively work to find out what is really going on and how it is going to be handled. In this phase, the news reporter is action-oriented and extendedly focused on relevant solutions to be reached rapidly. The more he digs into something however, the more complicated it tends to be. Shaping news is intermittently a condition of tension, discomfort, despair and extensive stress for the individuals involved, compromising and improvising in order to keep deadlines and other absolute limits for work. The time and space absoluteness of the news frame frequently force news reporters into the next stage quite quickly.

The third stage, incubating, could just as well be called the chaos stage. The individual news reporter, or a collaborative team, may find himself or themselves in a state of confusion and bewilderment, sometimes feeling overwhelmed by facts, data, and other kinds of impressions waiting to be sorted. The more data, the more chaos one must be able to bear and explore. The incubation stage is critical for productive processing to continue. This period of chaos calls for individual withdrawals that are often difficult for outsiders to respect and understand. The news

reporter needs to be mentally or physically “alone” in order to concentrate. It is a phase where apparently nothing interesting happens. Apparently, he just messes around “not doing proper work”, waiting for the best idea or approach to become conscious.

Put simply, the reporter needs frequent timeouts from the tasks he is struggling with. It manifests itself for instance through bathroom visits, getting a cup of coffee, going outdoors to have a smoke, a random walk or other more plausible excuses for keeping the head focused by giving the body a break. In extreme cases, news reporters may withdraw for instance to their home office or another protected shelter for months while working on tasks of some dimension. It frequently turns out that it is the ability to tolerate and accept one’s own messing around that prepares and makes ready for the next stage. Incubating usually involves breaking up one’s mindsets in order to create an openness that prepares for eureka. Incubating may last from seconds to years. It is a more or less subconscious phase of testing out a variety of solutions or alternatives, and it is usually very introvert.

The fourth stage, eureka, is the moment of discovery, the moment when new insight breaks through. Eureka is brought about by a real encounter with for instance people, places, situations or new data.⁵ For instance, the photographer gets a glimpse of the ultimate visual scene; the writer gets an incidental phone call which causes a breakthrough in his investigative reporting. Eureka, the real encounter, is identified first and foremost through its effect on the individual news reporter. The E-moment evokes the yes-I’ve-got-it feeling among people. Eureka is an ideational breakthrough and as such, a phase of very short duration. It is associated with high spirits, exhilaration, relief, glow, and energy and is often spontaneously expressed verbally or physically. When the E-moment is reached, the rest of the task is done with more ease, since energy arousal is a physical sign that one is intuitively heading in the right direction.

Eureka originally stems from Greek, meaning “I have found” (it). According to Webster’s New World Dictionary, the exclamation was first uttered by Archimedes when he discovered a method for determining the purity of gold. Finding a good intro to a story, a surprising headline or an original lead are all eureka moments in news reporters’ daily work.

The fifth stage, elaborating, identifies work that needs to be done next for the productive processing to result in a practical, real world solution to the initial problem or task. The elaborating stage is hence a period of carefully working out of conceived ideas. Journalistic elaboration includes detailed, goal-oriented gathering of facts and information relevant to the superior idea or problem discovery, and it includes the subsequent sequencing of data and editing.

At the last stage, presenting, something that began as an idea among many other ideas is elaborated on and ready for sharing. The purpose of developing ideas is to give them a form and a format for presentation. At this point, it becomes clear that the six stages of productive processing do not necessarily follow a linear pattern. Instead, individuals might jump back and forth between the stages and work parallel with many different ideas or projects.

For instance, there are many levels of presentation. An idea developed by a news reporter might first be presented to a colleague, then go through a new round of collaborate incubation, eureka, and elaboration before it is presented at a staff meeting or to a manager. Then possibly new rounds of elaborating, eureka, incubating, eureka, elaborating and presenting, and finally the news story might be disseminated to the public. Moreover, as mentioned above, ideas or news that do not arrive at any presenting, either to be submitted to colleagues or the public are not necessarily lost or gone. They are just left dormant for the moment. Although quick dissemination to the public is always the ultimate goal in news journalism, most news reporters have many stories on how ideas they got and almost forgot might be recovered and further processed much later, when suddenly the right moment comes.

Often, productive processing does not require any conscious effort or focusing. It just “happens”. At other times, a news reporter might struggle for months or years with questions to which he is searching for answers or solutions. He is stuck at one stage in the process and does not know how to continue to the next – until suddenly something happens which provokes the eureka moment. Such occurrences are explained and understood by the breaks and shifts that keep the creative cycling process going, and by individual skills in inspirational looping.

During the study of news professionals in the multimedia age, the six stages of productive processing were generated ahead of the overall creative cycling concept. It emerged that when shaping of new knowledge is involved, it presupposes productive processing going on. News reporters are continuously involved in many parallel aspects of productive processing, and it typically goes on without notice. After the stages of productive processing were identified, however, it became apparent that something was still missing. What happens before, between and after the stages? What causes the jump from one stage to another? And how do we know when an individual, a team or a group has moved from one phase of productive processing to the next? It emerged that the various phases of productive processing call for different kinds of breaks and shifts, and that productive processing is materialized in a number of ways, according to what aspects of inspirational looping that are operant.

Breaks and Shifts

The second dimension of creative cycling, breaks and shifts, contribute to fluency in productive processing, and provide the individual with options for quick switching between ways of approaching people, situations and tasks. For productive flow, moments of breaks and shifts are just as important as that which is traditionally considered journalistic “work”. Breaks and shifts are concerned with moments of letting go, and are caused by combinations of outer and inner framings. To create something new, one has to let go of something old, May (1975) points out. The circulation of letting-go moments in news journalism is for the most part extremely high. In their daily work, news professionals are continuously exposed to a multitude of situations that call for speedy sorting and quick decision-making of ideas and possible actions.

News reporters typically have specific, unspoken rituals to which they turn in pressed situations. When they are on track of something important or a time limit is getting close, they may use a whole set of possible breaking and shifting strategies to increase awareness of important moments and simultaneously speed up production. Many such breaking rituals are caused by a real encounter related to the E-moment.

There are constant flows of selections related to all aspects of news production going on within strict time frames. The moments

of letting go are concerned with quality assessments of ones own news work, and are influenced by three aspects of breaks and shifts:

Scheduled breaks refer to end points or intermissions that are planned and known to the people involved beforehand. Scheduled breaks are caused by formal outer framings such as deadlines, meetings, working hours and other preset conditions. External interruptions are also caused by outer circumstances. External interruptions include for instance unexpected news events that call for immediate action, phone calls, SMS, e-mails and other unexpected messages, spontaneous chats or discussions initiated by others, sudden group get-togethers and other kinds of sudden happenings that capture a news reporters attention for shorter or longer periods of time.

The third property of breaks and shifts, mental timeouts, serves as think-breaks that often spring from mental and physical restlessness connected to the intensity of productive processing. Mental timeouts help the news reporter empty his head when he is stuck in a certain mindset or perspective. Mental timeouts are achieved for instance by surfing apparently purposelessly on the web, chatting, paying e-bills, writing e-mails, even playing darts or going for a walk. Mental timeouts also manifest themselves as bathroom visits, lunching, phoning, coffee supplying, collegial pep talks, and equipment checks.

Mental timeouts that include physical breaks and shifts are observable to the surroundings, whereas others are carried out only in the individual's mind. Many times, physical breaks and shifts might appear weird and meaningless to others, a waste of time that does not make sense. Five minutes before deadline, for instance, when the collaborative atmosphere in a department is really hot and people's shoulders are close to their ears, a reporter suddenly leaves his computer and goes to get a coke instead of finishing his work task. An unwise desk editor might think he is totally out of control and that he needs quick-fix managing. In reality he is in full control, he just needs a short think break before the final letting-go of the story; the break is just a part of his creative cycling.

Developing sensitivity for optimal shifting moments is a constant challenge to most news professionals. One news reporter says,

The most important thing I learned from an older colleague, whom I have always admired for his speed, effectiveness and surprising solutions, is the courage to let go. If you're stuck in a work task, let go! Have a break and let the mind work! If there is time, he taught me, it's a good thing to sleep on it, but one or two swallows of coffee is better than nothing. This simple rule has got me out of a range of difficult situations, but it took me quite a few years before I realized that that's the way it is. Breaks are there to get you unstuck.

Sometimes, mental timeouts are simply needed for recovery after intensive encounters with tough reality. For instance, many news reporters need breaks after covering severe accidents. Usually such breaks are of short endurance such as taking the rest of the day off, or a few hours the next day. Sick leaves, daily leisure time and holidays also exemplify mental timeouts.

Various newsrooms typically develop their own norms and unwritten rules for acceptable, informal breaking and pausing. These habits are part of what "sits in the walls", as the saying goes. In general, smoking breaks tend to be less accepted than formerly. For instance, an online editor exclaimed, "I will never hire a smoking journalist. We can't afford people who have to take breaks every hour in our business". In quite a few newsrooms, one can observe tendencies to neglect each others' needs for breaks and shifts and to misinterpret the processes that are actually going on. In reality, both personal and leadership awareness of individual needs for breaks and shifts is crucial in keeping a healthy newsroom atmosphere, particularly in periods of intensive change.

In the multimedia age, skills in holding back emerge to be just as important as the courage to let go. With the introduction of online newspapers and instant publishing, the pressure of escalating the letting-go-moments to increase productivity is delegated to individual levels. The tendency is that the faster the medium, the harder the time competition and the more short-staffed the newsroom, the more short-cuts reporters are willing to take. News reporters who experience being under constant time pressure and with little individualized action space, approach productive processing more routinely than they would otherwise

have done. There is a constant rivalry between letting go caused by felt extrinsic expectations and holding back to ensure quality in accordance with own professional values and standards. The quality dilemma frequently calls for next-best solutions, and professional judgment is continuously challenged. In a sense, a news reporters' professionalism stands and falls with optimal breaking and shifting sensitivity.

Since needs for breaks and shifts are highly individual, their content vary a lot from day to day depending on work tasks and how processes develop. In short, the repertoire of breaks and shifts depend on both inner and outer framings for work, and are to a large extent integrated sets of action within the individual; it might be more or less subconscious, and it frequently goes without saying. It appears that to stimulate journalistic innovation and courage to create, breaks and shifts must be self-imposed to the extent that the news professional feels somehow in control with the situation. Many reporters suffer from an interruption overload that makes it difficult to be productive, whereas others strive with resolving needs for a higher frequency of mental timeouts.

Breaks and shifts are operative at a micro level, focusing on day-to-day varieties, and at a macro level, taking more long-lasting processes into consideration. Macro shifts deal with changes during a career, and include any change of field within the profession; change of work tasks, change of employment ties, even change of profession.

Inspirational Looping

In-between moments of breaking and shifting, news professionals are engaged in patterns of inspirational looping. In practical work situations, a diversity of inspirational loops supplies the individual with energy, strength, confidence and stimulation to continue discovering and producing news items. The better mastery of practical, theoretical and personal skills, the more exciting and stimulating the inspirational looping gets.

The first aspect, motivational switching, accounts for individual decisions on the apportionment of ambitions, talent, time, and energy. The inherent ability to respond to outer events with immediate action requires frequent shifts of focus within the individual, alternating rapidly between issues in the foreground

and issues in the background. Motivation is a driving force in this internal decision-making process. Motivation is the individual drive, impulse or intention that causes a person to do something or act in a particular way. Motivation is closely related to will, choice and to action. The dilemma, at least from a management perspective, is that motivational aspects which in a given setting are likely to be decisive to one reporter might be indifferent to others. At another time and in another setting, the opposite could be true. Thus no general formula can be guaranteed to work when we discuss journalistic motivation, except that motivation is by nature cyclic and not static. Decisions might be deliberate and planned, or carried out more or less unconsciously.

News reporters tend to switch between seven motivational states: curious enquiring, interrogating, risk-taking, socializing, influencing, competing, visibilizing and storytelling. In each state, the news professional can be predominantly intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. For instance, the extrinsic aspects of competing mean that a news reporter mainly compares his own achievements with those of others. Journalists compete with each other to be first, for the most prestigious assignments, the best cover stories and so forth in order to get as much recognition from their environment as possible. When intrinsically motivated, by contrast, the news reporter is mainly challenged by self-competition. He compares his achievements with his own previous performances and tries to improve and develop as best he can. Sometimes it is a dilemma that self-competition, as a very strong motivational drive for the individual, is not apparent to his environment. In states of intrinsic motivation, news reporters tend to be more innovative and devoted to quality improvement than reporters motivated primarily through carrot-and-stick.

Role switching refers to cyclic patterns of behaviour concerned with movements within and between publishing arenas, physical arenas, content arenas, administrative arenas, proficiency arenas and socio-emotional arenas of news work respectively. Depending on outer framings, journalists either perform parallel cycling across the various arenas of work or they focus on in-depth aspects of one arena at the time. Parallel pacing is characterized by patterns of multitasking where the switching between a great variety of professional roles is integrated into short term or day-to-day work. When parallel medium switching is at the fore, for instance, the news reporter shapes news for

several media on a daily basis; focus is on mastering several publishing platforms simultaneously. Parallel switching stands in contrast to serial switching, which in practice means options for specializing in one field at a time. Serial switching typically involves concentrating and focusing on one particular aspect of news making over a longer period of time, and subsequent periodical moves into other areas. Switching across arenas is performed by generalist reporters, whereas switching along one arena strengthen specialist skills.

In most newsrooms, there is a tension between news reporters' evolving need for specialization and management's need for flexible generalists. Dependant upon direction and time span, any switching, horizontally and vertically, between the listed variables is possible. In the multimedia age, the most challenging alterations relate to the great expansion of publishing platforms and subsequent managerial expectations of and requirements of parallel switching between media. Running successful news websites is a matter of great organizational prestige, and so far it has been prevailing corporate thinking that parallel media switching is a more time-saving and efficient use of human resources than serial media switching. Accordingly, the conglomerate of possibilities for professional growth and development implicit in extended options for media switching stands in paradoxical relief to the general reluctance among experienced news reporters to grasp new opportunities.

In a newsroom survey of about 30 news reporters, I asked whether the opportunities for cross-media work made the corporation more attractive to skilful journalists. Almost everybody agreed but, as most professionals added, people need to be interested in cross-media publishing to do it. The emphasis on personal dedication to cross-media multitasking points to inspirational looping as a dimension of creative cycling that cannot be forced on reporters, only stimulated.

The third aspect of inspirational looping, temporal-spatial switching, concerns patterns for dealing with structurally imposed time and space limitations in the newsrooms. The two main outer framings that regulate the collective and personal pacing of news work are deadline and instant publishing. Deadlines involve an ordering of temporalities whereby times for news publishing is prefixed according to specific intervals.

Deadlines are practiced in the traditional media, TV, radio and newspapers, whereas instant publishing refers to opportunities for constant news release on new media platforms such as websites and cell phones. Most news professionals work cross-media and therefore relate continuously to both types of timeframes.

Within these given framings, news professionals constantly search for creative ways to fulfil inherent needs for tempo shifts and also, needs for mental and physical switching of space. The less time disposable from preparing to presenting, the less visible the breaks and shifts and the more routinized the news production. The more short-staffed the department and the less time disposable, the more widespread are time saving strategies such as minimizing field work, minimizing sources, recycling of news through cut and paste, and limiting news criteria. In particular,

There is a general progression from operating in real settings to operating in virtual settings. In the era of 24/7 news, reporters are expected to be accessible irrespective of the time of the day and news work can be carried out from anywhere. Logically enough, it emerged that the harder the production pressure and the higher the degree of managerial control of time as experienced by the individual news reporter, the less movement in physical space.

Online news work in particular challenges skills in self-monitoring and sensitivity for balancing through weighing up: The less temporal-spatial cycling during work time, the greater the need for long leisure breaks and mental timeouts. In general, web reporters need longer periods off than their colleagues in traditional media due to the intensity of web news watch responsibilities. In order to balance the constant news flow at work, a web editor reports, he usually engages only in slow-time activities when off duty. Moreover, he needs considerable private space and withdrawal from other people. Also, the higher intensity of work tasks, the greater is the need for contrastive temporal-spatial switching. Sometimes, news professionals engage in daydreaming as a means of temporary survival of monotonous news work and lack of options for temporal-spatial switches.

The fourth aspect of inspirational looping is collaborative

switching, which means going in and out, back and forth between cooperative situations with others. The more restricted the time limits, for instance during a newscast, the more dependent collaborative participants mutually respect and trust each other to make things work. Collaborative switching points to the degree of engagement when participating in smaller and larger groups within or between newsrooms, and can intuitively be measured by sensing the level of invested energy. Engagement typically varies between vigorous contributing, practical adjusting, active resisting, passive resisting and focused retreating. Frequency of shifts and the dwelling at the various approaches depends on experienced inner and outer trust and recognition in the situation.

Vigorous contributing is characterized by high energy levels and third-solution approaches to issues. Efforts are focused on here-and-now aspects of an issue. To work at its best, vigorous contributing relies on a fluent switching between the other four ways of approaching collaborative situations. For instance, knowing when to withdraw from cooperative situations is just as important as knowing when to rebel and knowing when it is best to practically adjust to a situation. In practice, alternating between the approaches implies that the news reporter acts within his current circle of influence in order to widen it. By contrast, news reporters who repeatedly engage only in one or two approaches, in reality display signs of imbalance and temporary fixation. Particularly during periods of great structural change, staffers' collaborative skills and competencies are tested. It emerged that the most widespread way of dealing with expectations of collaborative change, irrespective of hierarchical role, is practical adjusting. In reality, practical adjusting is a way of adjusting to changes in outer framings without investing too much energy.

Feedback switching, which is the fifth aspect of inspirational looping, is the possible shifting between giving, getting, and seeking response. Included are frequent alternations between various providers of feedback. News reporters' most important sources of response are editors, co-workers, friends, family, news sources and the public. The last source of feedback is the news reporter himself. In reality, self-evaluation is fundamental in all kinds of work. It is done continuously and clearly affects further actions.

Principally, feedback switching operates in much the same way as triangulation in research. Getting formal and informal response from a broad variety of sources provides the news reporter with multifaceted information. By approaching the same situation from a number of viewpoints, the bias involved in considering something from one perspective alone is reduced. It makes it easier for the reporter to sort, synthesize, discriminate and apply information from others. It also helps him not to lose his way when he is under pressure from one group or another, since different feedbackers will usually contribute different perspectives on the same issue.

Whereas most news professionals tend to claim that there is too little evaluation and too little coaching in the newsrooms, that is, too little formalized feedback, it emerged from the data that informal feedback is more important than can be imagined. Non-scheduled, spontaneous, accidental and individually given responses are frequently a source of creative joy, development, motivation and pride which is hardly achieved in any other way. Depending on career stage, the feedback news reporters appreciate the most is provided by editors, colleagues and the public respectively. A good way of testing whether a journalist really wants to learn and produce to the maximum of his capacity, is simply to observe how he gets the feedback that he needs to improve. Successful news professionals make use of a great number of feedbackers and manage to convert any kind of positive or negative response or slice of information into professional development and benefit.

The last aspect, career switching, binds together the other aspects of inspirational looping as they emerge in the long-term temporal perspective of a career. Careers can be pursued within specific organizations and as such are typified as organizational careers (Glaser 1968), or they can be pursued through freelance work and looser attachment to one or more organizations and as such can be typified as professional careers (Glaser 1964). Many news reporters will cycle periodically between the two main types of organizational affiliation. Moreover, reporters might pursue parallel or serial careers by combining for instance journalism and fiction writing, journalism and farming or journalism and teaching.

Career switching involves cycling between three distinct

stages; accessing, qualitating and individuating stage. Within each stage, particular aspects of problem solving are focused. In the accessing stage, strategies for getting a job and being accepted by gatekeepers such as managers and editors are the most important. The entry level journalist concentrates on demonstrating flexibility through a variety of fitting-in qualities in order to be socialized and integrated into the newsroom; primarily, norm adapting through extended flexibility. The most important aspects are flexibility as for news issues, presentation formats, publishing platforms, pace of work and wages and length of contracts. In other words, a willingness to serve managerial needs in the newsroom is implicit in such entering flexibility, no task being too small and no task too big. Conforming to the informal saying-yes-rule is essential if one is to be allowed to stay long enough in the accessing stage to advance to the next stage. It means being willing to let go of individual preferences for the greater good – for a while.

The shift from the accessing to the qualitating stage is marked by a break and shift that involves a change in outer framings for the individual. The relationship between employer and a news reporter is formalized through written contracts in which wages and fields of work are specified. Such formal contracting provides the individual with job predictability and financial security that opens for further development and exploration of individual competencies relevant to the profession. The news professional is now predominantly concerned with quality development.

In this context, the concept qualitation is a synthesis of two concerns at this stage of careering, namely enhancing quality through individual qualification actions. Professional quality and competence concerns how well news work is done, both in relation to performers' own expectations and quality standards, and to the expectations of management and colleagues. This duality is demanding to cope with, since it touches on the individual's fundamental values and hence identity and work ethic.

Whereas the accessing stage requires a high degree of convergent thinking, adapting to norms and following superior's instructions, divergent thinking is of greater value and influence during the qualitating stage. Contrary to convergent thinking, which is strongly evaluative, divergent thinking is about ideation.

It is about seeing aspects of a topic in new ways, and the courage to take risks by taking unconventional actions when you are not sure about the outcome. It entails the courage to test out several ideas before consciously choosing the best one, and the courage and social skills to convince others that the ideas are worth going for. It is implicit in the qualitation concept that individual capacities, understandings and skills change and develop over a period of time.

Moving from the qualitating to the individuating stage is frequently marked by breaks and shifts that involve a change in outer framings, too. In contrast to shifts between the accessing and qualitating stages, however, the shift is now initiated or controlled by the news professional himself. Consistency between actions and personal principles is crucial. The shift often entails breaking away from a position, department or an organization, followed by an individual restructuring of work tasks and affiliation. Whether he is attached as a staffer, freelancer or temporary employee is not in itself important, as long as the attachment is consistent with the individual's needs and wishes. In the individuating stage, the various competencies that constitute the professional self are synthesized so that there is a consistency between a news reporter's action and his basic values.

The breakthrough or eureka that leads to outer change is often the result of a build-up of frustrations that waits to be resolved at the incubating stage of productive processing. Such frustrations are typically concerned with aspects of journalistic quality and the news professional's influence on news priorities, working processes and sorting by competence in newsrooms.

The three stages of career cycling are not static or given at any point in a person's working life. Moving from one stage of career switching to the next provide the individual with new insights and competence in intrapersonal and interpersonal collaboration, and resemble stages of dependency, autonomy and interdependency known from gestalt psychology. When the first of the two initial stages are passed, individuals may switch back and forth between the stages according to context. A conglomerate of learning curves and career directions are operative.

A Theory about the Development of Skills: A Skills Development Theory

Creative cycling is a process basic to professional development, learning and growth. It is about staying open to new experiences and new knowledge and the flexible switching of mind-sets and actions. The theory suggests a direction for increasing the efficiency and innovative quality of knowledge production at the individual and organizational levels. As such, creative cycling is a theory about self-monitoring and the development of creational skills in relation to inner and outer framings. Creational skills entail the ability to synthesize insight, experiences and knowledge from different fields into new ways of seeing, understanding and shaping societal issues. In most media research, such skills have tended to be taken for granted and have therefore not been questioned. Self-monitoring refers to self awareness and capabilities of productive performance through self-regulated learning.

For most news reporters, it is a question of balancing between "how to fit in and still be yourself" and "how to be yourself and still fit in". Inner framings vary according to level of professional expertise, and the level of professional expertise co-varies with the news reporter's creational skills, that is, skills in creative cycling. The deliberate use of the concept skills emphasizes that news proficiency is a learning-by-doing process aimed at concrete, practical results, not only at getting competent insights.

The development of creational skills evolves through ways of innovative exploration (inspirational looping) of the relationship between mastery and chaos (productive processing), and is stimulated by frequent switches (breaks and shifts). The more conducive the framings are to productive processing, the more virtuously creative cycling processes are performed, and the more the individual news reporter's capabilities may be tested out without risking mental or physical burnout. Let us imagine a person balancing on a plank. The further out he walks on the one side, the more urgent the need for balancing on the other side. However, the more he dares on the one side, the more gain there might be on the other – if he takes the risk and can bear the insecurity.

The self-regulated fluency of switches between the practical, theoretical and personal skills included in all dimensions of creative cycling decides individual developmental tracks along a continuum from novicing to expertising (Benner 1984, Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986). At any given time, news professionals will be on their way from one field of learning to another field of learning, and they will normally be more skilled in some areas of news shaping than in others. News professionals frequently switch between roles as novices in one field, conventionalists in another field and possibly proficient improvisers or intuitive experts in a third field.

When novicing or conventionalizing, creative cycling processes are focused on performing basic craftsmanship according to detailed instructions from field authorities. Novicing means that certain sets of objective facts and features are recognized as guidelines for action, but situations are experienced almost context-free. Conventionalizing, by contrast, entails that basic skills are integrated to the extent that the news reporter know what to look for in a variety of situations and is able to see himself as separate from field authorities. He still chooses safe and well-established solutions to tasks and situations. When conventionalizing for prolonged periods of time, repeating the same approaches easily gets monotonous.

Proficient improvising entails the use intuitive understanding, constant evaluating and speedy decision-making in order to come up with exciting, insightful and surprising solutions. For instance, the proficient improviser might intuitively realize that he is on track of a breaking news story. Based on previous experience, he deliberately chooses between reorganizing schedules without notifying anybody until he knows more about the issue, or immediately involving managers and editors to start an investigative process as soon as possible. The illustration exemplifies that even proficient improvisers have to think deliberately about what to do. It is the necessity for such analytical thinking and planning that distinguishes actions of proficient improvising from expertise level.

At expert level, news professionals efficiently generate innovative and qualitative good outcomes to any task or situation within their particular field. The switch from proficient improvising to expertising lies in the integration of reflection and

action into fluent, intuitive performance. Instead of for instance conventionalizing, which entails jumping back and forth between three or four standard solutions to a task, a true expert intuitively comes up with surprising suggestions and results. Expert performance is effortless and virtuous and it comes fluently. If a solution does not work out after all, the expert will immediately come up with alternative ways of doing it. In the newsrooms, expertising is of particular importance when it comes to most kinds of rapid decision-making.

At any given time, an unlimited number of skill level combinations are found among news professionals. Organizational requirements of multitasking, frequent technological changes and hardening competition in the work market are all aspects that call for extensive and continuous skill development. Development and learning take place when the individual cycles between different fields or arenas so that his radius of possible action is broadened and raised to a higher level of proficiency. In general, news professionals who demonstrate high levels of proficiency in one field, jump easily from novicing to proficient improvising or expertising in other fields.

Practical Implications

In practical work life, awareness of creative cycling processes might open up for new ways of organizing news work efficiently and innovatively. It might help individual news reporters and news organizations to ensure and improve the quality of their work, and thereby the quality of the news published. What changes that are needed according to the principles of the theory, is up to the people involved in each case to find out.

At an individual level, a crucial question is: Who is going to set the limits when work is potentially limitless? It emerges that self awareness and self-monitoring constitute a specific challenge to news professionals in the digital age. The requirements of 24/7 accessibility combined with a loosening up of absolute timeframes for publishing calls for extended personal skills in individual time management and self care. News reporters' dilemmas concerned with needs for creative cycling will reoccur, in shifting disguises, until they are resolved. The better the individual knows himself and his creative cycling needs, the easier it is for him to administer his time and projects in fruitful collaboration with

others.

At an organizational level, the theory points out that a crucial challenge lies in loosening up established routines for executive control of subordinate efficiency, and in switching mindset from industrial age to knowledge age. The tendency of measuring news items in quantitative terms tend to stimulate shortcuts that are conducive to creativity. Instead of talking about structural synergies, which presuppose that human ideas are limited in supply and therefore need to be recycled to save costs, the theory advocates the importance of developing human synergy effects.

Moreover, the theory indicates that the age myth in the journalistic profession might block rather than stimulate innovative actions in the newsrooms. Contrary to manual work, where productivity is expected to decrease with increasing age, knowledge work such as journalism is dependent upon experienced expertising. The more inexperienced the news reporters and the less time disposable, the more shortcuts and the greater the risk for fatigue and burnout.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the theory of creative cycling's contribution to the field of news production studies can be summarized in issues concerned with conceptualizing, rehumanizing, synthesizing, bridging and reframing central aspects of news production. I will elaborate on these issues one after the other.

First conceptualizing: Whereas most approaches to media studies have been either quantitative or qualitative, the theory of creative cycling emerged out of a conceptual approach. As a grounded theory it contributes with an integrated set of new concepts to the research field. The new concepts, which are centered around creative cycling as a latent pattern of human behaviour, provide a deepened understanding of the in-process character of journalistic work.

Second synthesizing: The theory of creative cycling emerged from systematically comparing data from a variety of newsrooms to written data particularly from the fields of psychology, learning, organizational theory and media sociology. The synthesizing approach contributes to widening the field of news

production studies instead of boxing it in.

Third rehumanizing (Holton 2006): There are many dehumanizing tendencies to be observed in contemporary media business. One is the corporate adoption and application of industrial terms such as delivery, production, platforms, productivity and efficiency. Another is the tendency to expectations of 24 hour accessibility, a third is staff reductions combined with expectations of higher levels of productivity and efficiency from the ones who are left. These are aspects of modern work life that so far are only scarcely dealt with by news production researchers. In spite of more than sixty years of media research, it remains paradoxical that the majority of studies, including research on new media, tend to omit the key participant in news processing, namely the journalist (Gynnild 2006). Consequently, central aspects of journalistic craftsmanship and identity – values, attitudes and work habits – are still primarily accessible through practical experience in newsrooms. The theory of creative cycling suggests the importance of mind over machine and advocates a re-humanization of news production studies.

Fourth reframing: By exploring journalists' strategies to speed up their productive processing, the theory of creative cycling turns several aspects of news production upside-down. First of all, journalists' creative skills have been taken for granted both by researchers and laymen. Second, journalist motivation for work, no matter the circumstances, has been taken for granted. Third, the effects of more stationary news work in the digital age have so far been paid little attention by researchers, in spite of increasing rates of sick leave particularly among young reporters. Moreover, derogatory myths abound and particularly those concerning age and competence conspire to undermine journalists. The gender myth for example has now been replaced by the age myth. The theory of creative cycling therefore calls for a reframing of established 'truths' about news professionals to encourage a more constructive and positive working environment.

Fifth bridging: The theory suggests a bridging of research and practice. A dilemma with many news production studies is that they are aimed primarily towards an academic audience. Much news production research is hence experienced to be of

little relevancy and interest for news professionals as practitioners. Consequently, much research is excluded from influencing the news field and researchers are reduced to the role of observer. The theory of creative cycling offers new understanding both to practitioners and researchers where its fit, relevance and workability can only be fully tested by practitioners. A further aspect of bridging, raised by the theory, is the need for reconnecting news professionals and the audience.

Conclusion

To sum up, creative cycling theory works counter to established assumptions about productive efficiency in digitalized newsrooms. It suggests a redefining of framings that stimulate innovative news shaping. The theory highlights that to ensure optimal journalistic contribution, breaks and shifts are just as important as periods of intensive work. Independent of technological or other structural changes, recognition, trust and individual action space are crucial for the outcome of creative cycling processes. Awareness of personal needs and wishes stimulates and supports innovative exploration. As shapers of new knowledge in the multimedia age, news reporters are in the profession not only to make a living but because they want to contribute to society. Finally, I would like to point out that raising the theory of creative cycling to a formal level (Glaser 1978, 2006), might contribute with more general insights into the very multifaceted, fragile and yet robust processes of shaping new knowledge in society.

Endnotes

1. For more about creative processes, see for instance Robert Sternberg (ed.) 2000, Michael Michalko 2001, and Donald MacKinnon 1978.
2. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (1984) is probably the most widespread approach to the interdependent relationship between human actions and social structures. According to Giddens' theory, social structures are rules and resources that are produced and reproduced by human actors. Other holistic perspectives on how individual actions relate to outer framings are found in gestalt theory, for instance Hanne Hostrup (1999).
3. Tuchman 1978. Her discussion of news as a frame through

which reality is approached was inspired by Erving Goffman's frame analyses, see Goffman 1974.

4. A concept generated by Barney Glaser.

5. The concept real encounter was introduced by Rollo May (1975), who emphasized that creative discovery is inspired and stimulated by real encounters.

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