Trust and Fear in the Newsroom: How Emotions Drive the Exchange of Innovative Ideas

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Ornella Porcu [a,c], Liesbeth Hermans [a,b] and Marcel Broersma [c]

aMedia Research Center, Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Zwolle, Netherlands; bFaculty of Social Sciences, Communication Science, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands; cCentre for Media and Journalism Studies, University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the social processes that stimulate the exchange of new ideas in newsrooms. New ideas are vital for legacy media news organisations to innovate and fundamentally reinvent themselves, which is crucial for their survival. Ample research in other disciplines has shown that perceptions of "trust" and "fear" are strong drivers for sharing (or not sharing) creative ideas at work. However, what fosters the sharing and developing of new ideas has been strikingly under-researched in journalism studies. To fill this research gap we ask: how do perceptions of trust and fear in the newsroom stimulate (or not) the sharing and developing of new ideas? Data have been gathered in the newsrooms of two Dutch newspapers, using qualitative interviews and non-participant observation. To enable new idea sharing to benefit all, people need to experience both trust in their peers and in their management. Results show that only newsroom elites perceive both types of trust and, hence, feel free to share their new ideas with management. This means that within newsrooms in transformation the innovative potential of the majority of people is not utilised as they fear to share their creative or new ideas upwards in the hierarchy.

Introduction

Innovative capabilities are crucial for legacy news media that seek to survive the competition with global tech players. To do so, they need to innovate on a fundamental level (Paulussen 2016). This is not to be understood as pursuing the latest technological trends, gadgets or other "bright, shiny things" (Posetti 2018, 3). Rather, news organisations need to transform at a more profound cultural level in order to develop the necessary resilience to face the changes in the media landscape, as well as to thrive on them (Porcu 2017). If legacy media want to remain relevant to their audiences, their innovative capabilities to reinvent themselves are vital for their long term survival (Fortunati and

CONTACT Ornella Porcu ✉ o.c.porcu@rug.nl, o.porcu@windesheim.nl

O'Sullivan 2019; Küng 2015; Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020; Westlund and Lewis 2014).

Essential for these innovative capabilities are an organisation's social processes that stimulate people to exchange new ideas (Bergendahl and Magnusson 2015; Van den Ende, Frederiksen, and Prencipe 2015). Creative ideas have an intrinsic knowledge-creating potential that enhances innovative strength (Schenke 2015; Valero-Pastor and Carvajal 2019). They are novel in a certain context, and a path to an appropriate use has yet to be developed (Amabile et al. 1996). If sharing and developing new ideas are at the heart of innovation processes, this raises the question if and how this happens in newsrooms, especially when these are transforming into multi-media organisations. Based on longitudinal ethnographic research in two newsrooms to study the broader culture that stimulates or hinders innovative behaviour (Porcu 2017; Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020), "trust" and "fear" emerged as key conditions for the sharing of creative ideas.

This is in line with research in fields such as creativity studies (Carmeli and Spreitzer 2009), organisational studies (Correia Rodrigues and de Oliveira Marques Veloso 2013), knowledge management studies (Evans, Frissen, and Choo 2019), managerial psychology (Neves and Eisenberger 2014), and applied psychology (Ng, Feldman, and Lam 2010). This research shows that perceptions of trust and fear are strong emotional drivers for people either to share their creative ideas or not. In short, the choice to share new ideas depends on people's willingness to take the risk to make mistakes—which may result in negative career outcomes—and their perception of trust and fear in calculating those risks. When one's perception of trust "outweighs" the one of fear, risk perception is lower and people feel more secure to effectively share their creative or new ideas with others.

Within journalism studies, emotional drivers in the newsroom have received little to no attention (Kotisova 2019). Similarly, creative processes leading to innovation are strikingly under-researched (for exceptions see Malmelin and Virta 2016; 2017a, 2017b; Nylund 2013). Furthermore, studying the broader cultural prerequisites for newsroom innovation has only been a recent endeavour (see Coleman and Colbert 2004; Ekdale et al. 2015a; Gade and Perry 2003; Malmelin and Virta 2016; 2017b; Nylund 2013; Porcu 2017; Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020; Virta and Malmelin 2017). In addition, research often pivots towards a management's view (Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020) and has focussed mainly on the diffusion of technology (Schmitz Weiss and Domingo 2010) while excluding the cultural context that allows for this diffusion (Porcu 2017). We argue that this focus on management or tech, or both, while excluding the cultural context of the newsroom, stands in the way of an in-depth understanding of newsroom innovation and results in a lop-sided perspective.

Newsrooms have been studied foremost as a place where the news is constructed, which has resulted in iconic ethnographies focussing on the news construction process (for overviews see Cottle 2000; Gade and Perry 2003; Hendrickx and Picone 2020; Paulussen 2016; Stonbely 2015; Willig 2012). Studying newsroom innovation implies a small but relevant shift in disciplinary focus towards an organisational perspective and in particular an organisational culture (Paulussen 2016; Reyna 2020) in which social processes take place. We, therefore, use the concept of "innovative learning culture" (ILC), introduced by Porcu (2017). ILC is defined as a perceived culture in an organisation which not only allows for sharing and developing new ideas but also triggers and fosters these processes. The concept fills gaps in the literature as it inherently focusses on social processes in the

newsroom and the cultural context in which social processes and subsequent innovation processes can take place. Moreover, it includes both newsroom staff and management, instead of merely the latter.

Viewing the newsroom more specifically from an organisational innovation perspective can yield more insights when studying newsroom innovation. Ultimately, newsrooms are organisations in a precarious industry where people fear job loss (Ekdale et al. 2015b) and often choose to maintain the status quo instead of taking the risk to engage in new ideas (Deuze 2019), as their work context comprises highly rationalised processes which can "hinder the professionals' creative potential" (Malmelin and Virta 2017a, 14). It is also an organisation where people can leave when social processes erode in such a way that their intrinsic motivations are compromised (Deci and Ryan 2008). As a result, when not hit by a burnout (Reinardy 2011), journalists can leave news organisations, or even the profession, due to a perceived lack of creative challenges or a perceived lack of options for personal growth (Kester and Prenger 2020). This can be detrimental to the future of journalism.

Summarising, this article contributes to journalism studies by addressing perceptions of trust and fear in the newsroom as drivers in key innovation processes. We do this by studying the newsroom from an organisational perspective, using the lens of ILC to capture how social processes within newsroom culture trigger or hinder the exchange and development of new ideas. In the next sections, we delineate the theoretical context of this study, using different disciplinary bodies of literature.

Theoretical Context

Innovative Learning Culture (ILC)

Creative or new ideas are conditional for innovation, as Van den Ende, Frederiksen, and Prencipe (2015) point out:

> Ideas constitute the lifeblood for firms in generating new products or services, new business models, new processes, and bringing about general organizational or strategic change. Ideas are the result of mental activity, and are formulated verbally so that they can be represented, shared, and refined. (Van den Ende, Frederiksen, and Prencipe 2015, 482)

Only when an organisation balances the stimulation of a creative culture on the one hand (*exploring*) with aligning creative or new ideas to organisational goals on the other (*exploiting*), innovative outcomes in idea generation and selection can be obtained (Van den Ende, Frederiksen, and Prencipe 2015). However, organisations often tend to resort to exploitation alone, characterised by a lack of experimenting and fuelled by a preferred focus on rapid results, as March (1991, 71) points out. This focus on exploitation looks appealing in the short term, but can become "self-destructive" in the long run. Without exploration, the organisation does not welcome nor develop creative or new ideas, which can result in no-risk organisations that are "trapped in suboptimal stable equilibria" (1991, 71). Hence, striking the right balance in exploitation and exploration, often referred to as "organisational ambidexterity" (García-Lillo, Úbeda-García, and Marco-Lajara 2017; O'Reilly and Tushman 2013), is the key to the castle of innovation in organisations. It is viewed as "a primary factor in system survival and prosperity" (March 1991, 71).

Media management studies show that even when management is aware of the importance of operating in an ambidextrous fashion, news organisations are predominantly drawn to exploitation (Maijanen and Virta 2017). Exploration in the newsroom is scarce (Fortunati and O'Sullivan 2019; Küng 2015; Westlund and Lewis 2014) which easily results in a state of inertia (Küng 2017). This keeps organisations trapped in routine processes, predictability and cost-reducing efficiency, stopping them from being flexible enough to benefit from opportunities that arise.

This lack of exploration does not come as a surprise, as newsrooms focus on the production of news on a daily basis. Hence, the organisational design for the output of daily products results in a "natural" focus on the exploitative short term. But if left unbalanced by long term oriented exploration, the efficient and exploitative turns of the newsroom hamster wheel typically absorb most of people's creative energies, leaving nothing for explorative innovation (Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020).

In-depth research on how newsroom management and staff perceive explorative innovation is scarce. To address this research gap, we turn to the concept of an innovative learning culture (ILC). ILC is based on the insights from innovation studies and educational sciences, and is defined as:

> a social climate that stimulates people to work and learn together, to grow as an individual and as a group (team, organisation), and that provides people with the autonomy needed to be flexible, to experiment, to be creative, and to investigate radical possibilities in order for the organisation to have better chances for survival in the long run. This is facilitated by serving leadership, open communication, mutual trust, a supporting culture, shared goals, appreciation of individual achievement, and training and development. (Porcu 2017, 1559)

We argue that the existence of an ILC in the newsroom is a prerequisite for the sharing and developing of creative or new ideas. Only then can explorative innovation take place.

Risk Taking in Journalism

Ample research on organisational creativity and innovation has shown that a crucial factor conducive to sharing new ideas is people's willingness to take the risk to make mistakes (Soriano de Alencar 2012). This willingness is strongly influenced by a culture that triggers and fosters innovative behaviour (Naranjo-Valencia, Jiménez-Jiménez, and Sanz-Valle 2011).

In order for creative or new ideas to be developed for the entire organisation, ideas need to reach management, as it has the executive power to implement decisions. Only when management encourages and promotes risk taking, do people feel free to share their new ideas with managers (Soriano de Alencar 2012; Castillo-Vergara and García-Pérez-de-Lema 2020). Employees need reassurance that they will not face negative career consequences when failing (Castillo-Vergara and García-Pérez-de-Lema 2020; Dewett 2006; Neves and Eisenberger 2014). Ample research shows that employees perceive these potential negative consequences, literally, as "punishment". Therefore, default beliefs that management will punish mistakes (Detert and Edmondson 2011) should be countered in order to reduce the levels of perceived risk in people, enabling them to share their creative input (Jung, Bozeman, and Gaughan 2018). Without the trust of employees that their management responds benevolently to possible mistakes,

fear can take over (Neves and Eisenberger 2014). When this happens, this results in "knowing-doing gaps, where individuals have new ideas and solutions but do not put them into practice, because they believe they might be punished for doing so" (2014, 189).

While there is ample research in journalism studies on newsroom change and innovation, and how newsroom management strategically deals with this (Lowrey 2011), there is little research that studies the willingness to take risks in creative and innovative behaviour within the newsroom. What we do know is that journalists need to balance a lot of risks on a daily basis (Gravengaard and Rimestad 2012). Most of the time they find themselves in uncertain situations, making constant evaluative decisions, under severe time constraints, while meeting high quality demands, and competing internally as well as externally for the most relevant stories. This means that journalists work under enormous pressure not to make mistakes. Inaccuracies in the news are considered a professional taboo because they cause reputation damage for the news organisation and the journalist. Professional routines provide stability in this hectic environment. But balancing all these pressures can make working in the newsroom still a stressful and, particularly, a risk averse operation. Media management scholars working on transformational leadership have argued that in news organisations, as in other industries, perceptions of risk could be reduced when management encourages autonomy and rewards innovation (Küng 2017; Valero-Pastor, García-Avilés, and Carvajal 2021). However, how this process of risk reduction works in daily practice and how journalists across the newsroom perceive this is yet uncharted territory.

Fear and Trust in the Newsroom

Research outside journalism studies has shown that fear is an important component of organisational life "with important negative effects" (Jung, Bozeman, and Gaughan 2018, 2). Employees are particularly concerned to receive negative feedback on novel ideas (Lee, Chang, and Choi 2017). New ideas inherently represent disturbances to organisational routines, relationships, power balances and job security (Dewett 2006). As a result, sharing a new idea can easily result in its rejection by others who prefer maintaining the status quo. This rejection can be perceived as "losing face", which is also felt as a "punishment" (Jung, Bozeman, and Gaughan 2018) for "failing" in "upward communication" (Detert and Edmondson 2011, 461). Avoiding situations where one risks losing face is not just essential, Albrecht and Hall (1991) state, it is "the fundamental concern individuals have" (1991, 273).

Fear is observed in media innovations studies as an obstacle for transforming legacy news media as a business and an industry (García-Avilés et al. 2019; Slot 2018). However, within journalism studies fear in the newsroom has hardly been studied (Kotisova 2019). When it has, there seems to be a divide in what is *described* as fear and what is *defined* as "fear". Breed (1955) describes that even if it is against all odds for journalists to be fired (in the author's day and age), they would fear this nonetheless. Breed defines being fired as the ultimate "punishment" (1955, 330) that journalists fear. Ekdale et al. (2015b) describe an abundance of newsroom fear, culminating in journalists' expectations to be fired. They describe and define this as an ultimate "fear" but, contrary to Breed (1955), do not define this as "punishment". Nylund (2013) describes how reporters

cope with their fear of losing face: they only share new ideas with a person they trust and they share only by email "to ensure that the person and the idea will not be rejected in a larger group of colleagues and superiors" (2013, 207). But this is not defined as "fear". Conceptual evasions aside, these fears do not leave much room in people's minds for creative ideas, nor the urge to share these with others. Ekdale et al. (2015b) conclude: "for fearful newsworkers who were already anxious about losing their jobs, the rewards of experimentation did not outweigh the risk of failure" (2015b, 393).

Exchanging new ideas at work only occurs in work relational settings that involve a high level of trust to diminish risk perception (Albrecht and Hall 1991). Such relationships function as safe havens to reduce risks. As high trust is likely to occur with peers at the same hierarchical level, the authors observe, this trust occurs primarily in a "horizontal" fashion, although not every peer inspires the trust necessary to reduce fear levels. Odden and Sias (1997) observe three types of peer relationships that differ in communication topics, levels of trust, and levels of self-disclosure: the *information peer* (talk on work topics only, low levels of trust, and low self-disclosure), the *collegial peer* (talk on both work and personal topics, moderate levels of trust, and moderate self-disclosure) and the *special peer* (talk on a variety of topics, high levels of emotional support, trust and high self-disclosure, friendship). It is predominantly the special peer that inspires the trust needed to safely share one's new ideas.

The trust in one's superiors—"vertical trust"—is even less self-evident. Albrecht and Hall (1991) regard vertical trust to be rare, as they observe that "the decision to bring up new ideas is hindered by obvious power differences, high levels of social distance, and an organizational climate that magnifies the personal risk involved in failed innovation attempts" (1991, 285). This raises the question which social groups can be identified in the newsroom and how these are related to perceptions of trust and fear. On the other hand, if management does succeed in actively reducing their employees' fears, this increases idea sharing and a perceived culture of vertical trust (Carmeli and Spreitzer 2009; Correia Rodrigues and de Oliveira Marques Veloso 2013). Moreover, this perceived trust of employees in their management can function as a compensator for the fear that employees also experience (Castillo-Vergara and García-Pérez-de-Lema 2020; Neves and Eisenberger 2014).

In short, organisational creativity and innovation research shows that if fear levels in organisations are actively reduced, trust can "offset" the perception of risk taking (Castillo-Vergara and García-Pérez-de-Lema 2020; Dewett 2006) and "outweigh" the fear of punishment (Neves and Eisenberger 2014; Ng, Feldman, and Lam 2010). Transposing this to the context of the newsroom, we define "fear" as a feeling of anxiety or unsafety of an individual in relation to his or her colleagues ("horizontal fear") and superiors ("vertical fear"). They are perceived to discourage, deride or reject creative or new ideas and are expected to penalise mistakes. We define "trust" as a feeling of reliance or safety of an individual in relation to his or her peers ("horizontal trust") as well as in relation to his or her superiors ("vertical trust"). They are perceived to encourage and welcome creative or new ideas and are expected to not penalise mistakes.

In the following section, we look to answer the following related research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How do different social groups in the newsroom perceive trust and fear?

RQ2: How do perceptions of trust and fear in the newsroom stimulate (or hinder) the sharing and developing of new ideas?

Methodology

We have conducted a qualitative multiple case study to achieve an "in-depth picture" (Creswell 2014, 231) of newsroom innovation processes. Ethnographic data have been collected in two national newspaper newsrooms in the Netherlands: *NRC Media* in 2017 and *Trouw* in 2018.

To enhance generalisation of the underlying mechanisms to comparable cases beyond this study, also defined as "comparative inference" (Silverman 2011, 386), as well as to address the complexity of the subject matter, an optimal variation in perspectives is key (Silverman 2011). "Maximum variation sampling" (Creswell 2014) is adopted as a strategy of purposeful sampling. The selected newsrooms overlap in brand position, national scope, location in the capital, higher educated audiences and in production processes. They differ in ownership, history, culture, audience focus and size (*NRC Media* had 228 persons contracted and 93 as flexible force, while *Trouw* had 124 persons contracted and 47 as flexible force at the time of research).

To enhance internal validity**,** newsrooms have been selected which have strong established positions, as we assume that those are abler, and more likely, to allocate resources for innovation than less established brands. This presupposed attention for innovation contributes to the likelihood of these newsrooms to experience a stronger ILC. The ILC framework suggests that this would increase the probability of sharing and developing new ideas (Porcu 2017; Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020). The selection of these titles, thus, reflects the aim of this study. Other selection motives have been the openness of newsrooms to participate and proximity.

To secure the internal validity of this study, multiple qualitative data-collection methods have been used (Silverman 2011). Data are of an organisational ethnographic nature (Ybema et al. 2015) and comprise field notes of open interviews and of non-participant observation of interaction situations in the newsroom. Both methods focused on understanding what people perceive as stimulating and non-stimulating in sharing and developing new ideas. The data include people from different hierarchical positions, ages, genders, and contractual relations. Both newsrooms have been studied over a 15-week time period in 2017 and in 2018, with an average presence of the first author of approximately 3.5 days per week (see Table 1), resulting in a total of 103 days and 132 interviews.

As we focus on ILC as a prerequisite for fruitfully sharing and developing new ideas, journalists' experiences are studied specifically with respect to the social processes that foster or hinder explorative innovation. Trust (and therefore a lack of its counterpart

Table 1. Research observational days in the field and the number of open interviews held.

Data type	Newsroom		Totals
	NRC Media (2017)	*Trouw* (2018)	
Observation days	52 days	51 days	103 days
Open interviews	70 interviews	62 interviews	132 interviews

fear) is one condition for an ILC in the newsroom. Data collection has been done with an open mind about which conditions for ILC were present, and if these were perceived as stimulating or hindering innovation. Each interview, therefore, started with the open question: Within the context of this newsroom's culture, what do you experience as stimulating, and as non-stimulating, with respect to sharing and developing new ideas?

The interviews were conducted away from the direct hustle and bustle of the newsroom and have lasted between 30 minutes and 100 minutes per interview, with an average length of approximately 60 minutes. Respondents have participated in interviews upon selection of the researcher present, based on their availability, and out of their free will. Prior to the interview respondents were given a confidentiality warrant. Selection of the interviewees is based on "maximum variation sampling" to develop multiple perspectives, and on "snowball sampling" to locate information-rich sources (Creswell 2014). Notes have been taken with a tablet to register interviews and observations on the spot, which then have been edited into written reports afterwards.

The observation and interview data have yielded two datasets: one per newsroom. Both datasets have been analysed in atlas.ti software for relevant themes related to ILC, applying a bottom-up inductive coding process (Braun and Clarke 2006). This has encompassed different rounds of open coding, axial and selective coding, resulting in relevant themes per newsroom. Trust and fear as emotional drivers were found in both newsrooms. Subsequently, the many similarities across both newsrooms have been studied, using the cases to corroborate possible underlying mechanisms while building on maximum variation (Creswell 2014). After analysing these, we have first drawn conclusions per newsroom and have in a next round of analysis integrated those results. Therefore, unless indicated otherwise, the mechanisms presented here apply to both newsrooms.

Findings

Before presenting the different aspects of the perceptions of trust and fear, we first outline their context. It should be noted that perceptions of trust and fear in the newsroom are the result of different perspectives, influenced by people's positions, status and social groups, which colour people's realities. Moreover, as people experience reality from their own newsroom angle, they are not always inclined to see other people's viewpoints as well.

From our observations, we can delineate five distinctive groups in the newsroom which can be defined in social hierarchical terms, which are broader than formal hierarchical ones. Table 2 shows a social stratification which can be largely divided into the *newsroom elites* and the *larger newsroom*. The *newsroom elites* can be subdivided into three groups of, mainly, journalists in writing positions with a fixed contract and a relatively high status: *newsroom establishment*, *usual suspects* and *happy few*. Individuals from these elites can belong to more than one high status group and, sometimes, hold a formal hierarchical position as well. The *larger newsroom* can be subdivided into two groups. There is the *silent majority*, the largest group in the newsroom, consisting mainly of journalists in writing positions or otherwise concerned with text, and news workers involved in image production. We follow Lowrey (2002) defining them as *word people* and *picture* people. Both have a fixed contract and with a more or less neutral status. And there are *flex people*, mainly working in online, *picture* or multimedia jobs, not all of which are always perceived by others within the newsroom as journalism. *Flex people* have flexible contracts, often

Table 2. Social hierarchy in the newsroom: five relevant social groups.

Social status (from high to low)	Social sub-group	Definition group participants
Newsroom elites	Newsroom establishment	Individuals with a contract in an established position, rooted in experience. Sometimes ex-management, but not always. Hold a writing position. Viewed by others as "untouchable" and independent from management.
	Usual suspects	Individuals with a contract targeted by editors in chief to participate in special projects and receive special attention. Hold a writing position. Viewed by others as privileged by, as well as close to, management.
	Happy few	Individuals with a contract who share creative or new ideas with editors in chief on their own initiative and have their support. Hold, mostly, a writing position. Viewed by others as privileged by, as well as close to, management.
Larger newsroom	Silent majority	Individuals with a contract, part of the majority of the newsroom. Hold a writing, editing (word people) or image (picture people) job. Viewed by others as neutral in privileges and closeness to management.
	Flex people	Individuals with a flexible contract and at the bottom of the hierarchy. Work in shifts in text/image editing, online/multi-media and writing positions. Viewed by others as the non-privileged and as distant from management.

work in shifts and are perceived by others as having the lowest status in the newsroom and, hence, as colleagues who are not to be envied.

These initial findings show that notwithstanding the fact that these newsrooms are transforming from print newsrooms to more multi-media ones, people in writing positions for print have the highest perceived social status as well as almost all secure contracts. Online or multi-media positions are, predominantly, flex jobs with insecure career paths, often performed by young people seeking a job opening in the newsroom. And while media are increasingly dominated by visual culture, a large part of the *picture people* in photography, for instance, has been "flexed away" long ago. It is generally felt as difficult, and sometimes as impossible, for individuals from the group of *flex people* to move on up to groups with a higher status with better contracts, if they are not writing journalists. Even though "online first" has been a mantra for some time, upward mobility in the newsroom is said to occur along the lines of writing, for print.

In the next sections, we focus on how different social groups in the newsroom perceive trust and fear (RQ1) and which aspects of trust and fear are felt to be "stimulating" for the sharing and developing of new ideas, followed by the ones experienced to be "non-stimulating" (RQ2). The findings show that, despite the large variation between the newsrooms at surface level, the underlying mechanisms regarding trust and fear are actually quite similar. *Middle managers* and *news desk editor* are used as synonyms. *Management* and *editors in chief* are used as synonyms as well, and do not refer to one unique person as they encompass deputy-editors in chief. In order to secure confidentiality, all possible references connected to the quotations presented here have been removed.

Fear

Stimulating Aspects

Regarding fear, only a lack of it is perceived to be stimulating for the sharing and developing of new ideas. Not having to fear losing one's autonomy or losing one's job means

not having to fear punishment from management. This is inherently stimulating. People who are not burdened by this fear are privileged *newsroom elites*, as described (see Table 2), and formal groups. This applies to the respected seniors of the *newsroom establishment* who, because of their status, are felt to be able to mobilise opposition in the newsroom, or who can prevent this from happening. As a revolt is perceived to be a management fear, this group is said to be taken seriously. Lacking fear also applies to the *usual suspects* as they enjoy a protected autonomy and receive special attention: they are invited by management to participate in special projects. Nor do the *happy few* fear punishment, as they successfully dare to share their ideas "upwards" and receive support to execute their own projects. It occurs that senior members of the *happy few* are also part of *newsroom establishment*. Middle managers, generally, lack fear as well, as they are appointed by management.

There are also individuals who lack fear, simply because they do not fear management. Often they do something unique in the newsroom, and they enjoy the "game" of "managing up", selling their future-oriented plans. Editors in chief not only treat them as *usual suspects* but tend to incorporate them into formal hierarchy as well, as ambassadors for transformation. One of the *happy few* explains:

> Everything we do [in our department] is ultimately fun, because it is the future! Yes [I'm totally] exploiting my position. I really like to play the ambassador for what we are doing. There is no need to be afraid of the editors in chief.

Non-Stimulating Aspects

Fear mostly occurs across vertical lines. Outside social or formal elites, which can be viewed as more close to or "more horizontal" to management, the *larger newsroom* does perceive a fear of punishment from management, especially in the form of negative treatment. This can occur in the pressure cooker dynamic of the newsroom when people have made a mistake, or when one disagrees with decisions. In concrete terms: newsroom workers fear angry and aggressive top-down communication. Some people have experienced humiliation, scolding and belittling. This is said to lead to "freeze, fight or flight" reactions. It has cramped people's creative autonomy, sometimes even for years when people are introvert. It has also caused more assertive people to slam the door, leave the newsroom and join a competitor.

These incidents do not only affect the individuals concerned. "News" about these incidents spreads fast across the newsroom and is perceived as an alarm bell: to stay away from management when you possibly can, particularly when you are in a less privileged position. When sharing new ideas with management is hindered by fear of management, then ideas from the *larger newsroom* do not reach editors in chief and cannot be considered for development.

People who have undergone such "angry" behaviour attribute this to "temperament" or "personality issues" of management. Managers who have had such outbursts are said to not always talk things over afterwards with their employees. In addition, it is not always clear in advance when and why managers become angry. This is, generally, perceived as unsafe. Unresolved events as well as their unpredictability are seen by the newsroom to enlarge the distance between them and management, reproducing a non-stimulating culture for sharing new ideas. As someone from the *newsroom establishment* analyses:

> It is very unpleasant that [manager] tends to assert [manager's] will. That is putting a brake on new ideas. There are not a thousand flowers blooming here, it is just not that kind of atmosphere. There are people working here. [But] the style of management does not match [with people] … [Manager] can be completely infuriated and you don't see it coming.

The *larger newsroom* can fear management, but management can also fear the newsroom as a whole. The fear is actually mutual and both seem to anticipate each other's protest. When, for instance, management expects that work processes need to be adapted, it is apprehensive about the newsroom's fear of changing the status quo. This apprehensiveness is not unrealistic, as changing ways of working is often felt to be accompanied by additional workloads, which is expected to trigger some kind of resistance from the newsroom. The fear of resistance is related to management's fear of opposition of the entire newsroom, which could ultimately mean losing one's position in a potential conflict. Hence, it is related to the fear of job loss. It is this fear which is said to induce management to take "small steps" in their transformation processes. At the time of research, management perceives it cannot risk "to leave people behind" in their transformation due to a conflict, as they view quality professionals for their newsroom to be scarce. When decisions are to be made, it is felt by the newsroom that editors in chief choose not to take a lot of risks and typically ask someone else to test the waters for them. They do this, for instance, by leaving the implementation of an idea to one or more individuals who are then asked to persuade their peers, one by one, across the newsroom. That way, it is perceived, management likes to operate less in a top-down manner which it expects the newsroom to be allergic to. However, the perception of management leaving risks to others is seen by the newsroom as a lack of leadership, which is strongly frowned upon.

Journalists fear a genuine debate and feedback culture across the newsroom as they find it difficult to criticise each other on each other's work. People are said to fear giving feedback to others because they fear it is perceived as criticising (future) management, for which they will be punished in the future, as "scores" may be settled later. This debate averseness in both newsrooms is said to be "unhealthy" but motivated by sheer self-preservation, for newsroom workers as well as managers. Careers can evolve fast: today someone is your peer, but tomorrow (s)he is your supervisor. Therefore, people consciously withhold their feedback on each other, on their newsroom's journalism and on its future. As someone from the *silent majority* explains the situation in the *NRC* newsroom:

> No. No, it's not up to me to rock the boat, so to speak. I think that people protect their position in the newsroom which is the reason they do not enter into discussion or debates. And that is exactly what I do as well. There is something to protect, I think, as there are less and less jobs around in journalism. Why then start a disagreement with your news desk editor? I understand perfectly well why people don't do that.

In the *Trouw* newsroom, the fear of (future) punishment for criticising others is also experienced, but in a slightly different manner. Debate or feedback culture is strongly perceived to be actively undermined by the editors in chief. The perception is that this is done by either ignoring a debate with the newsroom altogether, even those which the newsroom has explicitly asked for, or taking the sting out of a potential discussion or conflict. The latter occurs, for instance in a morning meeting, when a manager actively lowers the tone, appeasing potentially conflicting parties with generous compliments.

This active attitude to minimalize potential conflict is perceived by the newsroom to be related, again, to management's fear of opposition. At the time of research, people are more than just frustrated with their experience of obstruction of plenary discussions as a newsroom community. News workers are hungry for a meaningful exchange on the newspaper's direction with the editors in chief, but it does not feel safe enough to take the initiative, as someone from the *silent majority* reflects on the situation:

> [There is] totally no culture in which you can express any kind of criticism here […] Now, I know I'll do it anyway. But it does not feel very safe to do so […] I think: why can't this be changed? Why can't they explain to us more [where we are going]?

Management, on the other hand, experiences daily capacity problems and fears discussion might slow production processes down. Viewed from a management perspective, any real internal debate on the future of the newspaper is potential sand in the machine. Avoiding upheaval at all costs is seen as the best strategy to move people in the same direction. People in the newsroom perceive this, however, as conflict avoidance and as a severe lack of leadership, which is, again, strongly frowned upon.

We see fear of discussion playing out differently in these newsrooms. This may be related to newsroom size and the number of management levels. In the larger sized newsroom with a lot of "chiefs" and coordinating positions we observe that the objects of fear of news workers are mostly peers, in particular peers that possibly become future management. In the smaller sized newsroom with less hierarchical levels, we see that the objects of fear of news workers are mostly current newsroom managers. What both newsrooms do have in common is that the *larger newsroom* experiences a profound lack of communication from management, while editors in chief perceive themselves to be quite active in their communication (Hollifield et al. 2016).

Trust

Stimulating Aspects

In addition to "vertical fear", a firm sense of "horizontal trust" is also experienced. This is perceived across the newsroom by people within more or less the same formal or social hierarchical levels, and this is especially the case within people's own news desk or "island". People can thrive in the chaos that their corner of the newsroom can be, with people around them which they find, most of the time, stimulating company. This sense of trust is often, but not per se, extended to their news desk editor (or "chief"). This means that, in general, people feel at ease with their direct peers, which can be very stimulating for the daily sharing of story ideas that have to do with their own news desks and over which they have autonomy.

This horizontal trust is reflected in a stimulating atmosphere and comfortable work environment. Some people feel so comfortable that they walk around shoeless, on their socks. Within their own news desk, colleagues may be referred to as "friends" or, sometimes, as "family". A small number of actual family ties have also been observed in the newsroom (sisters, brothers, uncle, niece, spouses) as well as several romantic relationships. The vertical and horizontal trust lines are felt as almost separate worlds, as someone from the *silent majority* rates the differences in trust between the two:

> [I rate] vertical trust with a 6 out of 10. Less trust. Horizontal trust [I give] a 10. Amongst us we are very good, very close, very amicable.

As a result of this horizontal trust, in general people do love their jobs and the creative autonomy that comes with it. They are intellectually challenged in their work. Horizontally, people feel more or less safe, which is stimulating for the sharing of new story ideas related to their own daily work, someone from the *usual suspects* states:

> You work here with a lot of people that have a lot of self-assertiveness and who are very intelligent. And with a lot of crazy people also, but in a positive way. One has a maximum of fun, which is not an exaggeration.

To share new ideas beyond the daily news story, trust in the formal hierarchy or "vertical trust" is needed, which is perceived to be mainly limited to the formal and social groups who are relatively close to management. Closeness makes management for these groups "less vertical" and, actually, more "horizontal" and accessible, and vice versa. The *newsroom elites* can feel very stimulated to share their new ideas with management as they enjoy management's trust and attention and, hence, their encouragement. As a result, they share their ideas more easily with management, which consequently are also more easily adopted and further developed.

In addition to trust and attention, management's appreciation for people's achievements is also seen as a form of encouragement. This often is expressed indirectly via middle management, for instance when people have a unique and revealing story, which media competitors do not have. When people win important journalism awards because of special (research) projects, then appreciation is louder and arrives more directly from management, sometimes accompanied by flowers and cake. It should be noted that awards and prizes are the results of people participating in special projects in which mainly people from the *newsroom elites* participate. Trophies of appreciation from outside the newsroom, such as a book publication, are a way for someone of the *larger newsroom* to be launched into a higher status group. Having a book out as a young journalist can function as a "wakeup call" for management to show some true appreciation, often in the form of a (better) contract. This is fuelled by the (fear) reflex of management that if they don't act, competitors may "run off" with what editors in chief consider to be, quite literally, "their" reporter or flex worker.

When editors in chief communicate with the newsroom, they tend do so with the formal or social elites. And the other way around, if people step into their "open door", which editors in chiefs claim as a widespread narrative, the *newsroom elites* feel quite safe to do so. Consequently, the elites are also the ones who live with the narrative that their newsroom is a "very horizontal and flat organisation". The latter is true for them personally, as they experience this as reality, overlooking that this can feel different for others.

One way of coming up with new ideas is to learn from people in other disciplines by working on a project together. In both newsrooms, it was said that it requires a lot of communication to generate trust between themselves and professional groups from "outside" to be able to understand each other properly, let alone work together. This has been observed at one of the newsrooms where selected journalists (a mix of *usual suspects* and *happy few*) worked with marketeers from outside the newsroom on an entrepreneurial project. As these groups are from different disciplines, they speak different languages

which represent different ideological paradigms. Marketeers easily drop terms like "target audience" or "customer journey", unaware of the impact of these words on journalists. Consequently, a first meeting between the groups lead to shock and outrage amongst the journalists. They felt threatened in their ideological identity as independent journalists. The marketeers were confused and puzzled as to what had caused this reaction. Communication barriers were partly overcome by being more open to the other group's perspective and, hence, generating slightly more mutual trust.

Non-Stimulating Aspects

The downside of horizontal trust in editorial sections is that working within the boundaries of one's own news desk or "island" can be perceived to lead to navel gazing and self-congratulatory behaviour. This can decrease the openness for new ideas coming from outside one's safe haven, which is felt as non-stimulating for the sharing and developing of new ideas. In particular, the organisation of the newsroom into different news desks as the direct reflection of the disciplinary sections in the print newspaper is not felt to be conducive to creating new ideas or new knowledge. As someone from the *silent majority* analyses:

> Themes that transcend the single news desk, are part of different news desks. There is more attention for transcending disciplines, but this does not fit the classically organised newsroom pillars. This compartmentalisation not only stops innovation [in the newsroom], it also refrains us from reporting on innovation [as a subject].

Vertical communication between management and the *larger newsroom* is indirect and usually mediated by middle management where daily story ideas are concerned. Hence, management and the *larger newsroom*, according to the newsroom, do not know each other very well. Appreciation from management is something the *larger newsroom* hardly experiences. On the contrary, it feels it is mainly addressed when mistakes are made. This experience of not knowing each other, combined with only communicating directly when things go wrong, feeds into a lack of vertical trust which prevents the *larger newsroom* from sharing their ideas with management that go beyond story ideas.

Amongst *flex people* horizontal trust does exist and is related to some form of solidarity. Sharing the same precarious labour relations can make people bond and organise themselves. At the same time, people can also be each other's competition in assignments. Hence, people with flexible contract relations do not perceive the same robustness of trust as enjoyed by their contracted colleagues.

Furthermore, there is lot of frustration amongst flex-workers about their precarious positions, excluding them from the "friends" and "family". The situation of the haves and have not's can be viewed as a form of compromised trust which is non-stimulating for sharing new ideas. As someone from the *silent majority* explains how this divides the newsroom:

> The biggest frustration with a lot of people is … A lot of people would really like to be connected to [title] but that doesn't happen. A lot of people feel inferior […] There is a real divide in the newsroom. […] Precisely those positions where [online] innovation is expected […] are all freelance contracts.

Discussion and Conclusion

We conclude that, in the context of innovative learning culture (ILC), when perceptions of trust "outweigh" those of fear, this stimulates the sharing and developing of new ideas, and vice versa. Answering our first research question, how different social groups in the newsroom perceive trust and fear, we find that the *newsroom elites*, which are closer to the *editors in chief*, mainly perceive vertical trust. In contrast, the *larger newsroom* is more distant to the *editors in chief* and mainly perceive vertical fear. In terms of "horizontality" our study confirms earlier findings (Albrecht and Hall 1991; Odden and Sias 1997) that the closer a relationship on the work floor is perceived to be, the more likely it is that the high trust needed to share new ideas is experienced. Paradoxically, we find that vertical trust occurs only if staff and management are close and "horizontal".

Our second research question asked how perceptions of trust and fear stimulate or hinder the sharing and developing of new ideas. Based on ethnographic research, we conclude that in order for new ideas to successfully reach the executive table, journalists need to experience both horizontal and vertical trust. We find that only the *newsroom elites* perceive both types of trust and feel free to share their ideas with management. The *larger newsroom* perceives only horizontal trust, which mainly enables sharing new story ideas. This will do for efficient daily operations. But for new ideas that potentially benefit the entire newsroom vertical trust is needed. This process is frustrated as vertical fear (of losing face, of punishment, of losing one's job) blocks the upward sharing of new ideas. This means that the creative potential of the majority of people is not utilised. We find that fear plays as big a role in newsroom innovation as it does in innovation in other sectors (Jung, Bozeman, and Gaughan 2018; Lee, Chang, and Choi 2017).

To foster an ILC wherein social processes stimulate the sharing of creative ideas, trust is vital. Management or staff who would like to promote explorative innovation, should keep in mind that feelings of fear are clearly present in the newsroom, also when this remains out of their direct sight. Diminishing fear and promoting trust is, however, not a "one size fits all" operation. This study shows that there is a range of social positions to take into account, each with a different perspective. To build a better ILC one should stimulate trust in these social groups in ways targeted to these groups.

One way to overcome vertical fear is for management to "bridge" distances by organising time to connect to the *larger newsroom*. This is not a simple task. Managing a newsroom is a challenging job, and editors in chief walk a tight rope to keep their balance guiding the newsroom without risking conflicts which may threaten their position. It is, therefore, crucial for them to understand the importance of creating a safe feedback culture for all the staff. Not only for people's mental and physical wellbeing, but also for a long term innovation strategy. Aiming at the short term by preventing discussion can come back like a boomerang. The perceived taboo on criticism can reinforce a cycle of fear which, when people become very frustrated, can lead to the very upheaval one has been trying to avoid. More research is needed to learn if there are newsroom managers that have been successful in curbing fear, creating resilience and building a better ILC.

One of the main conclusions of this study is that newsroom culture is not to a homogenous entity. We find that there is not an objective culture "out there" in the newsroom which journalists perceive in the same way, an image which often rises from studies with a

management or tech focus (Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020; Schmitz Weiss and Domingo 2010). Our study shows that staff and management perceive their culture and reality subjectively, related to their social hierarchical position.

Another important finding of this study is that it stresses the impact of emotions in the newsroom. Although there is a growing attention for emotions of journalists, this is mainly focused on journalists working in conflict areas (Kotisova 2019). There is hardly any research on emotions of journalists inside the newsroom. We conclude that social stratification determines not only whether trust and fear are perceived, but also how they impact the key innovation process of exchanging new ideas.

These insights would not have been laid bare without the lens of ILC, accompanied by an organisational perspective on the newsroom. ILC has been used holistically to research the whole newsroom, not just one specific group. This has proven its value: the newsroom is full of different realities and strongly felt emotions, which can drive innovation processes and, hence, the survival of the newsroom in the long run. The fact that only the *newsroom elites* experience an ILC, means newspaper newsrooms in transformation deny themselves the majority of their creative and innovative potential. Previous research on ILC (Porcu 2017; Porcu, Hermans, and Broersma 2020) presupposes that all its different aspects are equal in weight. This qualitative study shows that, with respect to the sharing and developing of new ideas, the emotional drivers trust and fear may carry more weight than other aspects of ILC. This means that at the core of innovation processes in the newsroom emotions can be indeed crucial driving forces for newsroom innovation.

Although we aimed for detecting structural mechanisms underlying explorative innovation, our study only considered Dutch national newspaper newsrooms, which may reflect a specific professional culture. To overcome this limitation, it would be worthwhile to apply ILC as a concept in other news organisations and in other countries as well. More research is also needed to understand how the perceptions of trust and fear of "flex people" and their sense of safety from a job security perspective (Ekdale et al. 2015b) affect their innovative behaviour. Newsrooms often exclude them from more permanent contracts. This seems counterintuitive because they could be vital for bringing in new ideas, as they often work in online jobs and have relevant networks beyond the newsroom. Our study shows that in major parts of the newsroom a large potential for innovation remains unused.

Disclosure Statement

ORCID

Ornella Porcu 🄳 http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6384-6095
Liesbeth Hermans 🄳 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4986-9156
Marcel Broersma 🄳 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7342-3472

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