Journalist and His Working Environment (Case Study of a Czech Publishing House)

Lucie Macku*

*Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Abstract

The paper focuses on the journalist's perception of his working environment. The research uses a case study of a publishing house Mafra which is one of the largest media companies in the Czech Republic. Mafra started using integrated newsrooms in 2007 — the first of them connected the newspaper MF DNES and its online version iDNES.cz and an integrated newsroom for Lidové Noviny and Lidovky.cz followed. Since 2004, all Mafra's newsrooms and also radio stations are based in one large building; the TV station resides in a separate building. My research is based on 40 interviews with journalists from all media divisions.

Keywords: journalist, newsroom, cooperation, rivalry, publishing house, Czech Republic

Ideology of journalism

Deuze (2002a: 5) mentions the lack of research focused on the topic of journalist ideology. Current media studies take the term ideology as granted and are not trying to find its roots. Esser (1998: 380) believes that a lot of research about the influences on journalists exists but not as much research was done about their working environment, although he considers the newsroom as a key factor in news production.

Tunstall (2001: 2) describes horizontal and vertical pressures in the newsroom. As horizontal pressures she understands cooperation among journalists – they exchange information and help each other (up to a certain point). As vertical pressures she understands market forces – financial rewards, prestige and position in the newsroom etc.

Several studies have been published about media convergence; Avilés and Carvajal (2008: 236) describe Spanish media company La Verdad Multimedia and they define two different types of multimedia convergence: integrated (one newsroom) and cross-media (two or more newsrooms).

Case study of the Czech publishing house Mafra

As I mentioned in the beginning I focus on the publishing house Mafra which owns several different media outlets.

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Media divisions of the publishing house Mafra¹

Title	Description	Circulation/Real users (in 2010)
MF DNES	National daily newspaper with regional supplements	220 000
iDNES.cz	Online news, originally connected to MF DNES	186 000
Lidové noviny	National daily newspaper	41 000
Lidovky.cz	Online news, originally connected to Lidové noviny	66 000
Metro	Free daily newspaper	270 000
Metro.cz	Online portal of Metro newspaper	8 000
Expres	Radio station – pop music	50 000/week
Classic FM	Radio station – classical music	30 000/week
Óčko	Music TV station	1 000 000/month

Methodology

My methodological approach follows the grounded theory invented by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Glaser and Strauss 2009) and later changed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The theory consists of three main elements: concepts, categories and propositions. The focal point of the grounded theory is that the researcher does not state anything a priori but develops the statements during the process of research. "Grounded theory is multivariate. It happens sequentially, subsequently, simultaneously, serendipitously, and scheduled" (Glaser 1998: 15). The most important concepts of grounded theory are open coding and theoretical memoing. "Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analyzing data, and during memoing" (Glaser 1998: 37). In the next step memos are sorted, which is key to formulation of a theory for presentation to others. The last step is the writing up of the sorted memo piles after sorting.

In my research I have found different concepts which I finally summed up into five main categories:

- 1.) Relations in the newsroom and the publishing house
- 2.) Organization of work
- 3.) Outside pressures
- 4.) Meaning of success
- 5.) Identification of the journalist with the newspaper/radio/TV/publishing house

 $^{^{\}rm 1}$ www.unievydavatelu.cz , www.netmonitor.cz

Relations in the newsroom and the publishing house

Most of the journalists were confused about their positions and relations at the newsroom. The journalists from the main national dailies at one point spoke about the others as "one family", but in the next sentence as "the biggest competition". "There is no reason for cooperation with the other newspapers. They are our sisters but at the same time our biggest rivals," (MF DNES).

When asked about the relations in the newsroom, many journalists started to speak about the relations in their own section, as if they lived only in the small micro-world of their own section (culture, sport, business etc.). They perceived the length of their section and its development as the most important thing. The journalists always mentioned that their section is very independent of the others. "I do not understand it, but our newspapers have an obsession to change the layout every other year. So our section moved from 4 to 8 pages, and now we are part of another section. It is a permanent struggle without any logic," (Lidové noviny).

Cooperation with other sections is almost non-existent. The only part of the newspapers which was often mentioned in a positive way was the cooperation with regional newsrooms. "We have all the information immediately. There are 300 journalists across the Czech Republic working for us. It is 6 times bigger than the Czech News Agency," (iDNES.cz). On the other hand, the journalists from TV and radio felt a bit isolated; they said there was no cooperation with any other division, apart from the cross-promotion through the publishing house.

The rivalry in the newsrooms is especially obvious when it is time to decide who will be on the front page. There is a strong rivalry between authors and their editors. The journalists in sections like Science or Culture did not feel any rivalry as they thought there was no place for competition in a section as small as theirs. The strongest connection and cooperation was between the print and online version of MF DNES and iDNES.cz. "The paper gives us the comfort of a base. We share photographs, documents, some contacts and some regional reporters," (iDNES.cz.).

The journalists believed that prestige in the newsroom shifted from the print version to the online version. "The flow of the journalists used to be always from online to print. But last year we acquired the best political commentator for the online version. And there will be more of these changes," (iDNES.cz).

Everyone agreed that the online (iDNES) and print version (MF DNES) are now seen as equal. When the online version started in 1998, there were only 4 journalists writing for it at the time, trying to convince the print journalists to give them some scoop. And most of the time they did not succeed. A lot has changed since then, iDNES now employs around 80 reporters and there is a strong cooperation with the print version – on how and when to publish a scoop. In the beginning of the integrated newsroom, the chief

editors created a special guide with some basic rules. And one of the rules was: "Online always first." "The web isn't a supplement to the newspapers, they must cooperate," (MF DNES).

Unlike the biggest newspaper and online site, the other newspapers and their internet versions do not cooperate at all. Lidovky.cz (the online version of Lidové noviny) has just 7 reporters and is mostly considered to be a supplement to the newspaper. The same situation is between the free newspaper Metro and Metro.cz — only one reporter is in charge of the online version.

As the online version of daily Metro is not very popular, journalists are not keen on putting their stories online. The only time they do not mind using the online version is when their interview or story needs to be cut for the print version and they can use the original version for the online edition.

Rivalry among media outlets

The journalists agreed that no one considers the free newspaper Metro as competition. "We are a low-cost newspaper, without any ambition to make the history of Czech journalism," (Metro). The attitude of the news journalist towards the radio stations and the music TV station is similar as their relation to Metro. The only way of so called cooperation is the cross-promotion – when the media outlets advertise each other. There is only one marketing, sales and distribution department in the publishing house.

The most important values in judging the other newsrooms are size and success of the other media outlet. The greatest rivalry is between the two large daily newspapers MF DNES and Lidové noviny. "I am always happy when I find something out sooner than Lidové noviny. We say hi to each other and the next day we have a look who has covered some news better. We are on different floors and do not have access to the other floor," (MF DNES).

The journalists are worried about the future of the two dailies, everyone expects the less successful to be cancelled soon. MF DNES is the most popular non-tabloid paper with around 800 000 readers and a circulation of 220 000 as opposed to Lidové noviny which has around 220 000 readers and a circulation of 41 000.

There is no kind of cooperation between different media outlets. The managers believe it needs time to settle down and then it will start producing more news. "Of course, everyone is afraid of cooperation because of the job loss," (Lidové noviny). Several journalists went across to another media outlet but there are no changes happening on a regular basis. Also, there is not such a strong competition between the online versions of two main daily newspapers. The editor in chief of Lidové noviny is even a member of the Supervisory board of the online news portal iDNES.cz. The journalists do not consider it as a conflict of interests, although they admit that the journalists from these two media outlets cooperate much more since

then. A similar situation also applies vice versa – the director of iDNES.cz used to be in charge of Lidovky.cz at the same time. The only section that these two online portals share, are the computer programmers.

The cooperation between online and print is not as close in the case of magazines and supplements. "The online and print version of ONA DNES (a supplement magazine for women) is completely different. There are two separate newsrooms working on it. We only use the same interviews for both versions," (MF DNES). The only part of the newsroom which is the same for the print and online version is the video team. They work for both divisions and attend meetings of both. The print journalists are proud of their supplement magazine sections which satisfy readers even if there isn't any important news. "Our circulation doesn't drop. We have a lot of supplements," (MF DNES).

Some of journalists mentioned that they were worried that deeper cooperation among the media outlets might possibly irritate the readers. This might suggest that they understand cooperation more as just cross-promotion than other ways collaboration. "When I (a reporter from radio) find some interesting news I always double check if it was published at our news outlets too, so I can cite them as the source," (Classic FM).

An interesting fact is that even radio and television stations focused on the same audience do not cooperate at all. Their reporters often mentioned the music magazine Filter which does not exist anymore, but when it was still in print they used to cooperate much more with it – simply because of personal relations. "With Filter, we were friends. There is no friendship anymore," (Expres). A Few journalists from radio and TV stations mentioned that even when they ask the news outlets for some material, they never get what they ask for. "They (people from the news) look at us as if we are something less important, because we produce entertainment, not news," (Óčko).

The main means of communication, according to most of the journalists, are the regular meetings that only involve one specific media outlet. There aren't any meetings at the publishing house that include all the journalists from all the media outlets. As Avilés and Carvajal state (2008), the media convergence brings competition, especially in regard of the exclusiveness of topics. During my research all the questioned journalists often emphasized the independence of their own section whenever I asked about the cooperation with the other sections.

Organization of work

All journalists stressed the need of very efficient and punctual division of work. "We try our best not to double the journalists. Two or three journalists go together to important occasions – one is writing it immediately online, one is interviewing everyone around and another one (usually the print journalist) is focusing on a special topic," (Lidové noviny).

When asked about their work, the journalists often mentioned different activities, to point out that, in the end, everyone is doing everything. "There are six of us in the foreign section – in the beginning we tried to divide all news according to our language skills, but we ended up doing everything," (Lidové noviny).

The daily newspaper MF DNES has different local supplements for every region; their deadlines differ by up to 3 hours. The first deadline is in Jihlava (a city in South Bohemia) at 8.25pm, the latest deadline is in Prague at 11.30pm. "Champions League ends at 10pm, so the readers from Jihlava cannot find any information about the football match, unlike the readers from Prague," (MF DNES).

A completely different division of work is used at daily newspaper Metro. At the morning meeting the topics are divided among the journalists who then follow the stories and write about them. Also, the journalists of the Culture section are in charge of editing all the information which appears on its online version – the weather forecast, advertisements, etc.

Working hours

The working hours of the online news portal iDNES.cz are from 7am until 11pm. In case of an emergency they even work through the night. "The deadline on internet is 24/7. It is a bottomless hole that consumes all news," (iDNES.cz). The journalists are very sensitive about their different working conditions. As the journalists from the foreign section mentioned, they do not have their own editors (unlike the national or business sections), so they have to edit articles of their colleagues by themselves. "It is easier to work for other sections. They finish their stories and go home. At our section someone simply has to stay longer at the office," (Lidové noviny).

I agree with Deuze (2002a) that journalists stay at the office much longer than in earlier times. Especially the online journalists often mentioned that their work is sitting at the computer and "filling the internet". As Esser (1998) divides the newsrooms among the centralized and decentralized, in the case of Mafra the newsrooms are centralized. The editors have an important position in the newsrooms, the journalists are divided into the different sections according to their specialization and there is a bigger control by the management. The final state of the centralized newsrooms was developed from more or less chaotic division of work which was, according to the journalists, typical for the 90's.

Location

In 2004, the publishing house Mafra gathered all its divisions under one roof. But none of the journalists considered the relocation as an important change in their work. The headquarters of Mafra was built according to its requirements – of which the most important were the huge offices for integrated

newsrooms. "There are huge screens showing how much are the articles of iDNES.cz read. If we see that some story is incredibly popular, we start considering putting it on the front page," (iDNES.cz).

The other journalists do not agree with it and say that online and print news have completely different audience. "The rule that "what works for the internet, will work for print" doesn't work," (MF DNES). During the moving several decisions had to be made about the placement of the newsroom of iDNES – if it should be closer to the IT department or to the print version's newsroom. Finally, it was decided to put it closer to the print section. "The reason was simple – the online journalists could better access the information they needed," (MF DNES).

The integrated newsrooms were finished in 2007 (for MF DNES and iDNES.cz) and in 2009 (for Lidové noviny and Lidovky.cz). Since the introduction of integrated newsrooms, the journalists are encouraged to do more multimedia contributions. The supplements are based in different parts of the building and are not part of the big newsrooms. "I (a journalist from the supplement section) don't enter the main newsroom, I would get lost in there. I go there only for the meetings and I don't like that place," (Lidové noviny). Some journalists do not like the integrated newsroom, others do not mind it.

From all the divisions of Mafra, only the TV station Óčko is based in a different building. The rest of the media outlets remain at the main headquarters. The journalists often mentioned this as the reason for not cooperating. Most of the journalists agreed that the managers of Mafra are not interested in their program – what they play, write or screen – the most important for them are the results. "We cannot lose our listeners, only then they (the managers) would start to be interested in our work," (Óčko).

The staff of the newspapers (MF DNES and Lidové noviny) consists of twice as many people than it did 10 years ago. Mostly it is because of the number of supplements; especially at MF DNES, which has several of them every day. They say it is a benefit for their readers and that otherwise they could lose them.

Outside pressures

As the influence of the internet grows, new challenges for journalists appear. The journalists often mentioned the "dumbing down" of the nation. "Ten years ago we would use different words, now we are aware of the fact that 89% of our readers do not understand many of the words, so we try to write simple articles," (Lidovky.cz).

Journalists from online divisions often mentioned that they feel under bigger stress than their counterparts from the print version, the reason is simple – everyone can immediately see everything they publish on

internet, so they are more worried about critics. "Everyone is watching us, we are under permanent observation," (iDNES.cz).

The journalists often mentioned the case of media partnership (sponsorship of an event) which they described as the "necessary evil". They say they had to deal with it more often in previous times, now they believe it got better and remains a responsibility of their editor-in-chief.

As Ryfe (2009) describes, journalists very often have a negative feeling toward any possible change. The interviewed journalists felt very offended by changes of the lay-out they use or of the length/position of their section. Although Mafra invested a lot of money into integrated newsrooms with the view of deeper cooperation between their media outlets, the journalists did not consider it as a big change, because they believed that for most of them nothing really changed.

Donsbach (2004) says journalists are under permanent pressure, caused either by limited time or by competition from other journalists. For example, the screens in the main newsrooms show the other online news too, so the journalists are under permanent pressure to be the first to bring the news. The journalists often mentioned the changes of the audience and called for more research of the current audience. "*The audience is changing, and we need to change with them,"* (Lidové noviny).

Perception of journalist's prestige

During the interviews, the journalists were asked about the most prestigious position at the Mafra publishing house. As illustrated in Graph 1, 34 journalists said that the most prestigious position is to be a political commentator at MF DNES or iDNES.cz, the second most prestigious position is to work as a news journalist for MF DNES and iDNES.cz (according to 28 journalists) and the third is to work for MF DNES or iDNES.cz. The least prestigious position in the eyes of the journalists is to work for the entertainment outlets – especially the supplements and the TV station.

Political commentator was the only position at Mafra which the journalists connected with the term "buying journalists". An example is the first "purchase" of a political commentator for the online portal iDNES.cz. "The political reporters and commentators are the most important – they have all the contacts, thanks to them we get the news, we know who is going to resign and who is not," (iDNES.cz).

Another sign of the prestige in the newsroom is how the sections follow in the regular meetings. "The national news are always first, then come the business, foreign, sport, and culture sections and then all the supplements," (Lidové noviny). Among the supplement magazines, the most prestigious is the one with the TV guide because it raises the circulation. The circulation of the newspaper is double on the days they have are sold with this supplement (MF DNES on Thursday, Lidové Noviny on Friday, Metro does not have a special supplement magazine.)

The journalists from MF DNES mentioned the division according to the skill of the journalists. "Every newsroom has its own stars and laborers. A star has a natural talent and does not need as much time to write stories. A laborer does not have the talent and must write as many articles as possible. At the national section we have around 25 people, a quarter of them are stars, and the rest are just laborers. This system has a lot of advantages - the stars are a motivation for the laborers, as in the rest of the world," (MF DNES). The impact of "going online" is apparent in all the different divisions of Mafra. Older journalists leave the newsroom and are replaced by new, younger journalists, who are more comfortable using multimedia.

The most prestigious positions at Mafra are in MF DNES and iDNES.cz. When journalists from other media outlets talk about news, they mean these two divisions without directly mentioning them. They never mean the competition – Lidové noviny or Metro. "There is a permanent feeling in the newsroom that the most prestigious position is to be in the news. Nothing is more," (MF DNES). The most prestigious positions in these two divisions are the news sectors – especially the reportages. "We created new journalistic genres such as the online reportage," (iDNES.cz).

As the main pressures upon them, the online journalists mentioned time pressure, the need for exclusiveness, cooperation with the print section, interactivity and popularity of an article. For print journalists the biggest pressure was in exclusiveness, strong story and deep analysis. Internet and print journalists differed in the way they evaluate their own articles. Internet journalists evaluate their articles according to speed, quality of writing and especially the number of page views. On the other hand, print journalists mention these factors for evaluation of articles: the opinion of their colleagues, the position in the paper and their own judgment of the article. Morning meetings are the most important for the print journalists because they evaluate the last issue at the meeting.

Identification of the journalist with the newspapers/radio/TV/publishing house

When explaining their work, the journalists often compared their work to other sections, or mentioned their position in Mafra. The journalists often use very expressive words when describing their work. "The work of online journalists is done while sitting at a desk with a computer. Most of the time we never leave the office, it is more the task of print journalists," (Lidovky.cz).

A word used very often by all the journalists was "independence". Almost everyone mentioned that they are very anonymous. When asked about the difference between online and print journalism, all the

journalists answered that the online version must be "now and here," unlike the print which should have deeper analyses.

In the case of MF DNES and iDNES.cz, they use each other in different way. Print journalists serve as a primary source of information; they work outside the newsroom more often, looking for the information. Then they pass it to their online colleagues who write the stories and finally the print use the online articles as sources for deeper analyses, enriched with some new data. "The print uses us as a press agency. We give them facts," (iDNES.cz). As the Graph 2 shows, the cooperation between MF DNES and iDNES.cz works on a very stable basis.

Graph 2 - Most common cooperation between print and online journalists in MF DNES and iDNES.cz



Source: own elaboration

"Sometimes we make fun and say that one day everyone will end online," (MF DNES). On the other hand the journalists often mention that MF DNES is not so serious anymore. According to them there is a lot of infotainment. Even the journalists from MF DNES admit that they are changing to resemble the more popular newspapers. "We want to be the mainstream," (MF DNES).

Very aware of their position on the market were the journalists from Metro. "We are huge; we have access to international databases full of the articles and interviews. We can choose whatever we want from it," (Metro). The journalists from Metro were the only ones who were worried about the distribution channels; no one else mentioned it. "Every morning we deal with the same problem – only retired people and workers take it so early in the morning and then it is gone. We cannot get to other audience," (Metro).

The big difference among journalists was their dealing with routine. Some of them considered it as the "way to hell", while others compared making newspapers to a routine. "It is an everyday routine. Only the topics are changing. The longer you work as the journalist, the more routine it is for you," (Lidové noviny). On the other hand, journalists from radio or TV stations did not feel so much routine in their work as their colleagues from news. Many journalists were remembering their beginnings, when it was all about a group of people who wanted to change something. "We were full of enthusiasm, we wanted to make things. Now it is more about the talking heads," (Expres). On the contrary, the journalists from some supplement magazines were not so excited about their beginnings. "It was the idea of the manager. Supplements for women are always very successful and attract special advertising companies," (MF DNES).

All the journalists were worried about the bigger integration in the newsrooms, which for them means job loss. Another things they were worried was the power of the internet. "The technological revolution is much faster than everyone expected." "Print newspapers needed 100-150 years to get settled to current level. It took us only 10 years," (iDNES.cz).

Conclusion:

Journalists do not consider integrated newsrooms as something that would influence their work. They pay more attention to the length of their section or the position of their section in the newspapers or a TV/radio program.

There is no relation to the publishing house, or to other newsrooms or sections. The only exception is the cooperation among print and online journalists in two divisions – MF DNES and iDNES.cz. Apart from the main rule "online goes first", there are no rules for journalists in integrated newsrooms.

As Russo (1998) and Deuze (2002a) state, the journalists identify themselves with their profession, not with the publishing house. And I would like to add, that they identify not only with the profession but rather with their own position and a specific section. There is no connection between the sections, supplements or different parts of programs. The only thing they regard as cooperation is cross-promotion, which I do not consider as cooperation.

When thinking about the competition, the journalists only considered newsrooms of the same size (they did not want to compare smaller with bigger) and the price of the media outlet (no one considered Metro as a rival since it is free).

The importance of the business section has grown which might be the result of the economic crisis at that time. I found the way the journalists described their work very interesting – almost all of them told me the same story without a happy ending – some group of friends started working together, it was a lot of fun, a great challenge – but then it changed and now it is all about business, circulation or the number of page views.

Author's note:

At the end of 2012 the management of Mafra publishing house announced the merger of certain parts of the editorial teams of MF DNES and Lidové Noviny, creating shared sections for foreign news, sport and photo division. Reporters of both newspapers were dismayed by this measure.

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