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Crossing Boundaries for Innovation: Content Development for PSM

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In the turbulent environment of media convergence, public service broadcasting [PSB] organisations are expected not only to produce quality content but also to take risks and lead in the pursuit of innovation. This poses a significant challenge in the continuing transition to public service media [PSM], which is largely what convergence means in practice for the public sector. Convergence is about cross-boundaries, blurring them and perhaps even erasing. This is about administrative and production practices, but also importantly about learning new ways of thinking. That is not simple or easy for organisations that are typically big, old and traditional. There is a heritage of doing things differently than the commercial sector, but reluctance to do things differently than the internally developed heritage. This creates enormous challenges for bridging the various elements that must be bridged to secure innovation. This paper is about those challenges. The focus is on crossing boundaries to achieve innovation within and for PSM content development.

The core dimensions follow from this. Firstly, to achieve innovation in output requires content development. This leads to the second interest area: content development work requires creative organisation capabilities and these are different from the divisional structure of PSB heritage and also the traditional emphasis on business efficiency in the commercial sector. A creative organisation in practice requires bridging individual, group and organisational levels as an interdependent dynamic. As creativity and innovation theories suggest, what’s new most often originates from differences that ‘collide’, that encompasses ways of thinking, specialisations, personalities, and platforms. Beyond that, especially today with the growth of outsourcing and commissioning, it goes beyond internal organisations and depends on creative networks.

Thirdly, we investigate how to establish creative organisation capabilities as a systematic practice because that is essential for sustaining innovation. We address, as well, characteristic threats that undermine sustainability. Managing for creativity in a media organisation that is aiming to produce innovative output is a complex task that requires tools, processes and practices particular to that purpose. Thus, problems and complications in managing complexity is a theme we want to develop.

Our empirical case is the programme development initiative at Yleisradio [Yle] in Finland (2001 – 2005). At this remove it’s possible to learn from an early historic experience that worked quite well in achieving the practical results that theory

1 Lowe & Bardoel 2007
2 See e.g. Amabile et al. 2005
suggest one ought to pursue, and yet ultimately without capability to sustain the practice due to problematic internal politics. The case clarifies what is required for creativity to flourish with an applied focus on content development, and the challenges this entails in what is inherently a highly conflict-sensitive relationship between innovation teams and on-going operations. We integrate creative organization and innovation theory in this treatment. Characteristic realities involved with running and managing a dedicated unit in practice are addressed, and some of the tools that were developed are discussed. The paper is especially relevant to the conference theme because many of the practices and tools were developed expressly for successfully crossing boundaries, both internal to the organisation and externally – in order to aiming to nurture creativity that facilitates innovation.

The paper builds on the paper presented in Sydney for RIPE@2012, which described the background for the case. Here, we deepen understanding and provide insight on the crucial issue of creativity for innovation capability, a central success factor for any media organisation. The focus is on how the programme development initiative was operationalized. We have access to all data from the planning and creation phase to the shutting down of operations.

Content development in media

Creativity that leads to product innovation is a fundamental requirement for every media company, hence the reason these are generally referred to as ‘creative industries’. Creativity is therefore a primary strategic resource because success or failure determines the firm’s position in a competitive environment. New and successful content is novel in comparison to what has been done earlier, and is also done at the time. This is essential to achieve competitive advantage, although inherently risky as well. What is novel is by definition unfamiliar, and therefore risky. Moreover, the costs can be high going in because the quality of content produced strongly affects performance. But achieving continuous product development is a requirement of PSM and risks must be taken. Facilitating product development hinges on competence in the management of creativity and for innovation. It is not enough to simply ‘be creative’. For organisational interests it must achieve something innovative.

Creativity in media

Creativity is typically described as a characteristic feature of media production work and media are commonly classified as creative industries. But ‘creativity’ is variously defined and has roots in diverse disciplines. It is especially evident in psychology. Traditional views emphasize the individual and are flavoured with artistic and ‘mystical’ aspects, suggesting that creativity is innate. Some people

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3 Govindarajan & Trimble 2010b
4 See e.g. Mumford 2012
5 Drucker 2007
6 Küng 2008b
7 Bilton 2007; Deuze 2011
8 see e.g. Amabile 1996a; Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Kaufman & Sternberg 2010
have this but others do not. This view emphasizes the individual dimension but it doesn’t really take one very far when thinking about the issue in organizational terms.

Creative people are presumed to have ‘talent’, a natural ability (debatable, in fact) and that is keyed to a variable and quite individual combinations of creative thinking skills (and working styles) and developed expertise – two of the core components in the seminal model advanced by Teresa Amabile. The third element in her model is intrinsic motivation. She considers talent to be an individual’s ‘natural resource’, and thus difficult to ‘teach’ and probably impossible to implant. In that light, creativity per se appears unmanageable, although managers need to foster environments that stimulate creative thinking.

The perspective is certainly right in arguing that people are creative, not organisations as such. But this isn’t the whole story, or even the most important part in our view. Novel results most often happen when individuals with different skills, talents, perspectives and experiences interact. When differences meet, interact and even collide then new things emerge. The research clearly shows that this happens more often in groups than when an individual works alone.

That is especially relevant to media work because the production tends to be complex and happens in complicated organizational contexts. Social factors exert strong influences on both the capability and capacity for exercising creativity. Media production is usually a collaborative undertaking. Management competence is crucial for both crafting and handling processes that facilitate environments that are conducive to such work, and particularly to fruitfully combining specialist talents and ways of thinking and perceiving. Thus, from an operational perspective, the concept of organizational creativity (not only individual creativity) is especially useful. This has been described as an interactionist or social-constructivist approach and assumes that most people are capable of creativity in variable degrees if given the right tasks and under the right circumstances.

Thus, in organisational creativity the focus is less on innate ability and more on social influences that facilitate or inhibit creative work by individuals in groups. Factors that influence especially include structures, processes, work environments and management practices because these either encourage or constrain the creative work that is instrumental for achieving innovative results. This approach explicitly links creativity and innovation as a contextual feature of a work community, which is pertinent to media industries where creativity is a

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9 Amabile 1998
10 Amabile 1998
11 Amabile 1996b
12 Amabile et al 2005
13 See e.g. Amabile 1996a, Amabile 1998
14 see especially Mumford 2012, Zhou & Shalley 2009, Styhre & Sundgren 2005
15 Küng 2008b
vital strategic resource. Media industries are among a comparative handful that cultivate creativity as the heart of the enterprise, the soul of a company’s identity, and the sinew that binds its characteristic activities. These industries are highly dependent on talent of many kinds that must work together to achieve a successful result. A non-creative media industry, or company, is an oxymoron.

Creative talent must be harnessed and directed to achieve useful results for the organization. By ‘harnessing’ we mean to highlight the need for giving direction, establishing objectives, clarifying concepts, and allocating scarce resources – i.e. management work. Emphasizing results that are ‘useful’ underlines the importance of success as a practical concern for any organization. Creativity is not a product; an innovation certainly is. Treating both as organisational phenomena is obviously crucial for managing media operations. This is challenging for media firms because creative workers tend to emphasize independence and self-directed work.

Media innovations

The concept of innovation is widely used in connection to product development quite generally. There are numerous books for studying the issues. Seminal literature on innovation management is also extensive. Innovation in media, specifically in relation to content, is a less elaborated area of academic study and also less discussed in trade literature. The innovation concept is touted but practice is less developed. It is a highly useful concept for growing one’s understanding of change in media industries, a point generally conceded but not yet sufficiently developed on the basis of empirical research.

We define an innovation in material terms as the successful implementation of creative ideas containing an element of “newness” that is “marketized” to a reasonable degree of success. This understanding highlights an expectation of usefulness or benefit for the targeted user of the end result. The perspective is valuable because it encompasses innovation both as a process of exploration in developing something new and as a practice of exploitation with value-creating consequences.

A common classification variable hinges on the scope or degree of newness. This helps one distinguish between types and degrees of innovation: 1) incremental (or adaptive), implying gradual improvements of existing products or services, or 2) radical, meaning “breakthrough” innovations that alter the fundamentals of a market or industry. Some add imitation to the list, but it is questionable if that counts as an innovation or as a response to innovation. Certainly imitation is

16 Bilton 2011; Küng 2008а
17 Drucker 2007; Buckingham & Coffman 1999
18 Küng 2008а
19 e.g. Trott 2012; Tidd & Bessant 2009; von Stamm 2008 to name a few.
20 See e.g. Christensen 1997; Christensen & Raynor 2003; Govindarajan & Trimble 2010а; Govindarajan & Trimble 2010b; Hamel 2007; Hamel 2012
21 Dogruel 2013
22 Storsul & Krumsvik 2013; Dogruel 2013
23 Dal Zotto & van Kranenburg 2008, ix-x; Storsul & Krumsvik 2013 based on Schumpeter 1943
common in media production: Reality-TV and game show formats are characteristic examples. With regard to innovation in media, it is comparatively rare to find something entirely new and original in absolute terms, and thus breakthrough innovations are the exception rather than the rule. That does happen, of course, mainly in relation to technology advances. Digitalization is a game-changer and the rapid growth of social media is a second example. Generally speaking, however, there are numerous ways to connect pre-existing ideas, formats, visuals and so forth to produce media products that are innovative. That implies that media innovation is mostly incremental.

Innovation happens in many areas of media practice – in products and services, formats and genres, production practices and processes, as well as media platforms and technology. Often the results are interdependent and the relationship is symbiotic – a change in one aspect depends on changes in other aspects, and facilitates changes in still other aspects. Innovations also happen in many categories, not only in new media content or technology products: markets (customer behaviors and values), processes (changes in product creation process or delivery), positions (changes in how a product is positioned, e.g. branding), paradigmatic changes (in an organization’s mindset, values or business models, e.g. evolving from purely broadcast to multi-platform), structural aspects (e.g. organizational arrangements overall) and social aspects (how media address and satisfy the diverse needs of people as social creatures)\textsuperscript{23}. From these types, we can differentiate between exogenous types of innovation, such as changes in markets or technologies, and endogenous types, including changes in internal processes and paradigmatic shifts in the general character of a company's thinking\textsuperscript{25}.

The innovative capability of a company is determined by three interdependent factors: 1) personal factors in the form of individual dispositions and behaviors, 2) contextual factors that prioritize leadership and organizational culture, and 3) process factors that highlight the importance of idea generation and their development into successful innovations\textsuperscript{26}. Balancing these factors successfully is what the practice of innovation management in media is about, and has a strong bearing on evaluations of excellence in that practice. Innovation is generally the most difficult for established organizations to achieve, and this is no different in media industries. Success in current markets often leads to failure later when markets and expectations change\textsuperscript{27}. The failure to innovate is the most common cause of organizational failure among older companies\textsuperscript{28}. That is certainly pertinent to PSM with long, deep roots in PSB.

Our discussion about media product development takes the view that creativity prioritises a process of imaginative thinking that is about developing novel ideas and this happens both in and between individual and group levels. Innovation is

\textsuperscript{23} Storsul & Krumsvik 2013; Dal Zotto & van Kranenburg 2008 in line with an innovation classic Joseph Schumpeter; Drucker 2007
\textsuperscript{25} Also called ‘dominant logic’: see especially Prahalad & Bettis 1986.
\textsuperscript{26} Dal Zotto & van Kranenburg 2008
\textsuperscript{27} Picard 2011
\textsuperscript{28} Drucker 2007
about concepts and products that embody the results of creative work in some form that generates value because it is useful (in various degrees and different senses) for those for whom it is intended. Further, it is important to differentiate innovation from invention. Inventions are new original creations and typically the result of long-term investment and cumulative scientific research. Pharmaceuticals are one representative industry where invention processes take years and cost fortunes. When they are successful these produce tremendous profits for as long as the patent is valid.

Managing product development in a creative media organisation

Media product development requires moving from ideation to realization. Innovation capability is essential for success in media industries. Creativity is required at every stage of product development – from ideation at the start, through problem-solving in development, to resource-collection and financing, through pre-production and in post-production, and then in scheduling and delivery. Performance in all the bits comprises the value of the whole. As Küng observes, “The successful introduction of new programs, products and services depends on a person or team having a good idea (the creative spark) and then being able to develop that idea further.”

Managers are responsible for bridging ideation and realization, for turning subjective ideas into objective results. That involves competence to enable good ideas and accomplish skilful work that makes great products. Successful products inspire new ideas. Media professionals need encouragement to seek and make new connections, to pursue new experiences and to work at developing fresh understandings about things that are familiar. None of that is easy and it is certain that traditional ‘command and control’ practices of management are not conducive to success. Moreover, workers experience this as threatening because it involves struggling with differences that collide and cause complications.

There are many kinds of conflict in media product development. Conflict over the ownership and direction of an idea, between types of personalities and areas of specialization, different ways of working and talking about work, the often implicit authority of vested interests and the oppositional pressure to disrupt the status quo, etc. In practice, then, managers responsible for organizational creativity are understandably keen on developing arrangements for interaction across diverse contexts, specializations, personalities and cultures. For creativity to happen as a routine practice and environmental condition it isn’t enough to

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29 Following Küng 2008a and Bilton 2007
30 See e.g. Storsul & Krumsvik 2013
31 Drucker 2007, see also e.g. Mumford et al 2012; Friedrich et al 2010; Byrne et al 2009; Amabile & Khaire 2008; Mumford et al 2007
32 Porter 1985
33 2008b, 149
34 Govindarajan & Trimble 2010a
35 Hamel 2007
36 Anthony 2012
‘tolerate’ diversity; the interaction of difference is a requirement. Media managers are therefore responsible for organizing structures, procedures and intersections that make interaction a routine occurrence. That is the surest route to facilitate new ways of thinking, but inherently bolster critical challenges to accepted views. Pursuing innovation is hard work for managers, and makes their work harder in key respects. Managers will often be involved in arbitrating disputes, soothing wounded egos, negotiating reasoned compromises, and bluntly deciding between contending options and the individuals advancing them. A traditional view of management won’t take one very far.

Achieving creativity and realizing innovation depend on organizational alignment. That means crafting an organizational structure and process that coordinates HR management, financial planning, strategic management, and even real estate and facilities management. Here, again, crossing boundaries is crucial. Although typically considered bureaucratic work by content makers, these play crucial roles in enabling or inhibiting the potential for creative talent to emerge, to work productively, and to realize innovation. Thus, a key challenge lies in mastering the competencies necessary to balance capabilities for continuous product and service innovation, i.e. exploration and exploitation – concepts traditionally used in innovation research that aren’t easy to combine or to achieve simultaneously.

The practical and inventive work of developing the management structures and operational tools needed to accomplish the everyday work of product development in media are crucial factors for consistency in transforming ideation into realization. Here ‘tools’ are understood to encompass the widest range of processes, techniques, working methods, principles of development, leadership, organizational structures and evaluation measures. As Jeff Dyer and his colleagues concluded in their research on this topic, “one’s ability to generate innovative ideas is not merely a function of the mind, but also a function of behaviors”.

In media production and content development the work is characteristically project-based and that necessarily means project management is essential. How many media managers have studied or practice project management principles? The project management toolkit is extremely useful for organizing and managing product development processes. Even so, managing individual projects isn’t sufficient for cumulative success. Managing for product innovation in media requires competence to handle portfolios, i.e. collections of diverse projects all handled in some systematic way and on a systemic basis. Handling the package adds considerable challenge to project management because each

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37 Drucker 2011  
38 Dyer et al. 2011, 3  
39 See e.g Baumann, 2013; Reca 2006  
40 There are good sources to start with, especially the PMBOK® Guide and Standards (Project Management Institute 2013 http://www.pmi.org/PMBOK-Guide-and-Standards.aspx); Kerzner 2013; Lewis 2006; on project management and creativity see also e.g. Paletz 2012; Caughron & Mumford 2010  
41 Picard 2005  
42 Lundin & Norbäck, forthcoming
project in the portfolio has a life of its own with different start and stop periods, different levels of resourcing at varied points in the process, and different kinds of talent and areas of specialization.

A further challenge for content development work lies in networked cooperation, which is crucial for product innovation. There are inherently more ideas, knowledge and skills outside an individual organization or team than internal to it. Typically, media content development projects draw together ensembles of creative professionals from in-house and also outside the organization. This necessarily demands much greater flexibility than many traditional PSB organizations have historically accommodated, and a higher dependence on relationship networks than many have been structured to facilitate43.

Creative organisation in practice: Case YLE programme development

The empirical case is from the early 2000s in the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation, Yle. At the time when assessed Yle had a media-centric organization. There was a TV Division, a Radio Division, and a separate Svenska Division (meaning Swedish-language programming with both radio and TV sections). The case was Yle Ohjelmakehitys, translated YLE Programme Development, nicknamed Särmä (Edge44 in English). Planning for a programme development department started in 2001 and continued through 2002. Director General Arne Wessberg was the CEO. He saw the need to create a systematic product development process, something that had not existed before although programme development was always done as part of everyday production work. A proposal was drafted for the unit’s strategy, structure and operational model. The Board of Directors approved the proposal in February 2003 and Yle Särma launched in May 2003 after a necessary preparation period to put in place the structural and operational requirements.

The first author was employed as Projects Portfolio Manager (2002-2005)45, and was involved in the planning phase. She worked as part of a management team with the second author, who was the main designer of the proposal and its Managing Head. The management team was mandated to establish a creative organization and achieve innovation in Yle content. We discuss various approaches for crossing boundaries and some of the practical tools and processes created to achieve that aim. The key challenge was how to translate theoretical knowledge about creative organizations into everyday practices that could be managed and would produce innovative results on a routine basis; i.e. how to stimulate ideation and consistently move from ideation to realization. The observations in the following are divided into organizational, team and individual levels to the theoretical points we have highlighted. Obviously, the

43 Reca 2006
44 Särmä / YLEdge had two meanings: working across boundaries and being the leading edge for developing programme development.
45 The main responsibility of the author’s work was running the day-to-day operation of the varying portfolio of YLE content development projects (approximately 150 in total) as well as to support department personnel and administrative management requirements.
different levels are not separate in practice, but strongly intertwined and inter-dependent.

**Organizational level**

Older and and traditional organizations, i.e. most PSB companies in Western Europe, are internally conflicted, competitive and hierarchical. They have tended to be insular inside the house and with external actors. Structures historically featured silo arrangements where various arenas of production and support were highly independent and not very interactive. In fact support services were typically redundant across the organization, meaning that radio divisions had their HR departments (for example) and TV had theirs. Even the executive management board was fraught with internal politics and competition for resources and influence.

This greatly complicates achieving development objectives, negotiating with various partners and managing creative work in practice. At Yle in the late 1990s, and before, there was considerable organizational resistance to change that was rooted partly in traditional thinking and ways of working, and partly in diverse vested self-interests to maintain the status quo. Thus, the need to create a clear vision that would be compelling to traditional makers, acceptable among contending units and divisions, and acceptable by senior managers was essential. All of that, in turn, required devising a range of concrete tools that would enable crossing boundaries within Yle and, moreover, between the firm and the wider external environment.

For the Särmä creation process, Lowe conducted internal research to identify agreed development needs. The results showed that many of development obstacles were associated with difficulties in working across boundaries, e.g. between media (radio vs. television), genres (news vs. entertainment), levels (strategic management vs. operational practice), perspectives (mass media vs. new media) and between Yle and independent production firms in the Finnish media market. The keenness of concern about this was linked to complications in the early period of Yle’s efforts to build a matrix structure as a way to end the silo heritage. Softening the boundaries to enhance synergy in the new matrix organization was a key task for the new programme development unit.

Figure 1 from the Särmä proposal materials in February 2002 illustrates the thinking about this. The aim was to achieve collaboration, which was assumed to be much harder and more demanding than the weaker alternatives.
What’s the Difference?

Cooperate
Weakest
Easiest
Shorter term
Narrowest
Highly independent

Coordinate

Collaborate
Strongest
Hardest
Longer term
Broadest
Very interdependent

Figure 1: Lowe's model illustrating the challenge of building a collaborative organizational practice.

It is crucial for content development to cross the organizational boundaries. This was an everyday challenge for Särmä managers and workers, and it was fraught with friction and complications. Crossing boundaries between departments and functions required resolving conflicts between program makers from different genres or media, or even within the same team when they did not get along or agree. It required dealing with stubbornly unhelpful policies preferred by HR or the financial department, which had their own systems and ways of doing things. To be fair, colleagues in these and other areas were often tangled with legal requirements and rigid labor structures that made flexibility very difficult.

This also posed great challenges for Särmä’s management team. Obviously it was necessary to be in full compliance with all legal requirements and, also, to be in a position to quickly, accurately report on all activities, allocations and accomplishments. Lowe and Virta were fortunate to have the support of a financial controller (Sirpa Österberg) who offered help and advice that led to the creation of a financial tool to facilitate both project planning and reporting.

Each development project (as any content production in Yle) was assigned a “production code”, which was always anyway required but assigned on a largely random basis. But the code in Särmä had real meaning because each number (by column orientation) described some particular feature. Content development work was defined as an organizational and operational practice that the production number schema was crafted to facilitate detailed analysis on a rapid basis. In short, using Excel or similar analytic software the kinds of work being done, the clients for whom the work was done, the cross-media and cross-
divisional degree of this work, and the internal development investment could all be calculated separately or comprehensively. All these elements were integrated in a schema that answered every financial need for reporting, but at the same facilitated tracking the project portfolio and calculating the comparative proportion of work the content development community was doing for each and all clients, as well as for the firm as a whole.

Achieving collaboration in practice was greatly complicated by Yle’s still deeply embedded silo history. In fact this was never overcome during the period when Särmä was operational, and even had a role in the unit’s demise (as we will come to later). The original idea was to welcome all proposals for product development projects and select the most promising based on their intrinsic potential value for the firm’s competitive situation and its public service mandate. The Board of Directors approved this, too. In practice, however, it became clear that the divisions were jealous to secure proportionate shares of all of Särmä’s resources, meaning comparative equality in the allocation of time, money and effort on projects. This required a revised proposal for the Yle Board that a Development Steering Group with representatives from each of the divisions would be nominated and given the mandate to decide about which projects Särmä could accept. A 20% share was reserved for strategic projects that could benefit Yle as a whole, and another 20% for Särmä internal development. The latter was unusually high, but was accepted because it was essential for the development unit to develop its self. Although this silo structure for selecting projects satisfied the managers interests it created a bottleneck among makers that caused competition and stirred resentment, to varying degrees. Dissatisfaction with this element had a role in justifying decisions taken in 2005 to end the operation.

**Group level**

The main resource was Särmä personnel, a team of 14 employees devoted to content development. The unit’s structure was designed to create an innovative team mandated to support Yle program makers in their efforts make better, more innovative content in line with Yle programming strategies and public service requirements. Thus, Särmä was not about making programs but rather facilitating the creative processes and overcoming problems among those who were making programs. Theories about innovation management and creative organization were the grounds for crafting the operational design of the department.

Figure 2 below presents the conceptual model that Lowe crafted (with the help and support of others, including especially Virta) as a base for the operation. Six central elements of content and programing were identified in the research that Lowe conducted and these were the focus of work. These are specified on the left side, beginning with Technology and tools. In its work, Särmä handled three content development functions. These are specified across the top, beginning with Investigation and Innovation. The third function proved to be a central element and a lion’s share of Särmä work, as innovation theory suggests: most media innovations are incremental and therefore adaptations of something that
already exists. Särmä produced insightful evaluations with useful recommendations for product development.

Two value-added services were included: Networking to secure “fresh blood” and collaboration and Diffusion to share the results of development work for everyone’s benefit at YLE. Both are fundamental to crossing boundaries. Moreover, the concept as a whole is about that, representing a matrix design and recognizing the need to soften boundaries between Divisions where the power structure was based, Skill Centers where production was done, and Channels where commissioning and transmission were located.

This model was used for the next step, which required defining the positions for specialization and, ultimately, for employment. The areas of required competence were identified according to the elements and intersections in the model. The result is represented in Figure 3.
The grey boxes are areas where other units and agencies were working and did not require expertise inside Särma. The idea was to collaborate with them for handling those functions (tool innovation and audience evaluation). The checker boxes made no sense as specific job roles or practical tasks. Analysis and evaluation were considered the core competence for the unit as a whole, and networking and diffusion as the focus competence for development overall. The individual positions were created on the basis of these areas of competence and are pictured in Figure 4.
Figure 3: The organizational design for specialist employment in 2002.

This was a very new approach to establishing positions for personnel and developing job descriptions in the company. In fact it was resisted and this required a lot of negotiation with Yle Human Resources. They were reluctant to create positions that were not already part of agreed posts. In the end, it required support from the Board of Directors to create the positions in practice, and some compromises were necessary. The idea of a managing ‘chair’, borrowed from the academic world, was dumped and the boss (Lowe) became the typical Head of the unit. Project Producer was later redefined as Projects Portfolio Producer (Virta). Two particular positions were prescribed that were linked especially with challenges facing the company in those days, the need for New Media expertise and the historic and continuing emphasis on Journalistic Specialization, Evaluation and Development. Finally, note the proposal of two fellowships, one from within Yle to ensure rotation of fresh people and to build up both networking and diffusion, and the second being an external fellow brought in for several months to help with particular projects and contribute to the learning and development of the personnel. Both were financed from Särma’s annual budget. The structure and positions evolved based on practical results and according to creative organization principles. The 2005 organization at the time Särma was ended is pictured in Figure 5 (including the first names of the employees). By that point it had become clear that the essential work was in piloting new potential productions and this was keyed to commissioning, which had become a paramount practice for Yle overall.
Särmä 2005 Organisational Structure

The middle grid is piloting. That is the heart of the operation & everyone is involved.

Figure 4: The organizational design of specialist employment in 2005.

Särmä work was organised according to project management principles, which are increasingly important in media operations today\(^{46}\) but were not typical in 2002 – at least not in European PSM firms. The governing principle for all project work was: Uniformity in procedure, Consistency in practice, Diversity in personnel. This was meant to reflect the important balance between collective and individual needs in the organizational context. Employees were expected to exercise individuality in project work and leadership, but to do the project work in line with standardized procedures. Lessons-learned reviews were a required aspect at the end of each project, and these were conducted in community retreats where everyone had the opportunity to contribute to and learn from all the projects completed (and on-going) in the review period.

Best practices were constantly in development via concrete tools that were focused on constantly cultivating the creative capabilities and sharing results. These included “Oppi” sessions (monthly events to learn new things), “Siperia Akatemia” (the lessons-learned reviews, meaning “Siberia Academy” – a joke among Finns from the Cold War era), and weekly content meetings that concentrated only on development projects, not on administrative issues. Creative successes were celebrated and those responsible were rewarded, e.g. with time off. The aim was to support organisational creativity in all of its elements, which was enjoyable work but also frequently difficult and stressful.

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\(^{46}\) Lundin & Norbäck forthcoming
Individual level

Managing development work and creative professionals are both challenging tasks, even more so when combined. Särmä was a collective of individuals with different backgrounds, personalities, skills and interests. Such a group needs to become a community with a shared mission that is concrete and understandable, and where collaboration is constant. Both leadership (showing the way and inspiring) and management (handling administrative tasks) are essential. At Särmä the community participated in defining the mission: To help program makers make better programs. It was clear, simple and straight to the point. It specified the role of the personnel – not to own, control or command, but to facilitate the success of others. Because everyone participated, and because the result was concrete and unambiguous, the mission was strongly supported.

In the beginning, most employees felt overwhelmed and a common description was that they were “walking in boots that are too big”. The work was not entirely new because most personnel had worked for internal training earlier, but the role and degree of responsibilities were new and this created anxiety. Of course such feelings are typical for creative work and to some degree also useful. A case of the nerves can focus the mind, after all. But managers need ways to enable creative workers to tolerate and overcome such emotions if they are too strong or persist too long. Most can tolerate high stress for a brief period but long-term stress is harmful and to demand that is arguably immoral. Encouragement is crucial and support in the day-to-day work is essential. There is a fine balance between positive challenge and overwhelming demands. Continually resolving this dilemma is a characteristic requirement for managers of a creative organization. Clarity is a crucial aid. Workers must know what the work is, what the job requires, how the procedures and rules are defined, and what to do about various kinds of problems. These determine the working conditions of a creative organization and support a worker's intrinsic motivation to be creative and achieve innovation success.

Each Särmä employee had an individual job description derived from the organizational model (Figure 4 or 5). Everyone was assigned a primary responsibility and a secondary developmental area. The personnel participated intensively in the development of all this as well as the ways of working and evaluation. They ‘owned’ the work, the community, the projects and both failures and successes. They were given the possibility to exercise creativity and achieve innovation in the work of self-determination, and that laid a foundation for doing the same in the daily work as well. But everyone was not equally capable in tolerating the pressures, conflicts and uncertainties that are inescapable in creative work. Two colleagues who were involved in the development phase decided they could not contribute to the actual work. Both were older Yle employees and decided to retire.

Conclusions and further development of the research

This paper explores creativity and innovation in media work from a theoretical perspective and then applied that to a particular case. The unit we’ve described
was experimental, if not as initially conceived then at least in practice. It proved impossible to advance to a next and hoped for developmental stage because the Director General who took over after Wessberg, Mikael Jungner, decided to end the operation. This was not done for any malicious reason but rather due to a tightening financial situation combined with what appears to have been a vacuum of leadership willing to take on the unit and its functions. The new idea, as formulated by the then newly appointed Director of Strategy, Ismo Silvo, was to instead practice content development as “a distributed function”. That was not, to our knowledge, defined in a detailed way. In practice it meant returning to the status quo in the sense that how product development work was done, and not done, was as this had been handled for decades before the experiment was undertaken.

One lesson to be learned is that it’s one thing to say that a media firm should be a “creative organization” and quite another to devise the structures, organizational arrangements and tools that are necessary to make that happen in material practice. Content development work is stressful, ridden with conflict, complicated and complex. A lot is pre-requisite to consistently transform ideation into realization.

A second lesson is in noting the degree of challenge in maintaining development in the face of organizational resistance and internal politics. This was the biggest and most constant headache at Särmä, and ultimately the cause of both the compromises that weakened it and the decisions to end it. The managers of Yle Särmä needed to navigate between organizational and operational imperatives, between strategic and practical requirements and between management and production – to cross boundaries between these and other elements that had decisive impact on both its successes and its failures.

Perhaps, then, a third and vital lesson is that this kind of work must be managed. We are highly doubtful about the ‘distributed function’ approach to creative work for innovation because in practice it tends to mean that such work is only done if there is time beyond the already high demands on workers engaged with daily practice, and because this kind of work and its management evidently depends on specialized skills and facilitation. Of course content development work happens without a specialist unit. That’s understood. But it should also be understood that it can’t happen as constantly, as professionally or as comprehensively, and that what is achieved in one project or a particular unit is not as likely to be shared to benefit other units and projects.

One of the central challenges of Särmä was to support collaboration across boundaries, especially internally but also with external partners. This required alignment of routines, procedures, tools, processes and systems to successfully realize the mission and fulfil the mandate. Särmä worked in partnership with program makers. This highlights two operational principles that were the meat of the matter. 1) Särmä could not force development to happen. It is for makers to achieve development. The task for developers is to support, challenge, encourage and facilitate that achievement. 2) Särmä did not own the
development projects or the programs, but helped their owners to make them better as a collaborative practice.

There were problems in Särma work. The diffusion of results was never realized in a mature and full way. The bureaucratic obstacles proved a serious hindrance that became increasingly resented by Yle makers overall. Mistakes fuelled the internal designs of some middle managers that felt threatened, and perhaps actually were, as a result of the community’s work. There were accusations that too much resource was devoted to internal development, which was probably true but on the other hand perhaps unavoidable during the period when it was a new practice and there weren’t good models to follow. It’s never easy blazing a new trail and perhaps the best that can be said is a remark from Winston Churchill: “You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.”

In fact the collaboration was fruitful. Some programs developed during the period are still running and have been successful. And one can take real satisfaction in noting that all of the employees went on to achieve good things in their professional lives, and mainly in development work. Quite a few later expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to develop and learn practices and processes for handling product development as a profession and in a professional way. Särma pioneered new initiatives that supported crossing boundaries and have benefited Yleisradio to this day.

Media innovation is complex in both theory and practice. It is not only a requirement for new or improved content, but for ongoing development of all products and for media organizations in parts and as a whole. A focus on content development alone is insufficient today because that can’t happen efficiently or consistently without organizational development and innovation in management. Further, crossing boundaries for enhanced value-creation in networks – both internally and externally – is a central challenge for PSM organizations if they are to not merely survive but actually to thrive in the current turbulent environment.

As noted at the start – organizations are not creative; the people within them are. Or, at least, they can be to the extent that creative work is facilitated rather than inhibited by their managers.

**End note**

Some of the content and ideas in the paper are based on earlier work. The theory section utilises a chapter by the authors in the first Finnish language media management book being published. The analysis section benefits from a conference paper by Lowe on the development, performance and ending of Särma.

47 Lowe & Virta, forthcoming
48 Lowe 2005
References


