



Changing Newsrooms 2021

Hybrid Working and Improving Diversity Remain Twin Challenges for Publishers

Federica Cherubini, Nic Newman, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

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Executive Summary

The return to the office is underway but with COVID-19 lingering in a number of countries, progress remains uneven and uncertain. Many will find newsrooms very different places to the ones they left. For some, the office has disappeared completely.

This report, which is based on a survey of 132 senior industry leaders from 42 countries as well as a series of in-depth interviews, makes clear that ‘hybrid working’ will soon be the norm for the vast majority of journalists in many news organisations – with some people in the office and others working remotely – and that the industry is still struggling with attracting talent and addressing lack of diversity. Among other things, we find that:

- Respondents say their companies are now mostly (79%) on board with the shift to hybrid working and even more (89%) say they themselves are committed.
- A third (34%) say their organisations have already decided on major changes and are moving to implement hybrid working, but over half (57%) are still in the process of working out the best way to do this. Around one in ten (9%) say their organisations are looking to return to a working model as similar as possible to before the pandemic.
- Our findings suggest publishers still struggle to attract and retain technology and data skills which are in great demand elsewhere. In contrast, most respondents remain broadly confident (63%) about keeping newsroom staff. Around half of respondents (47%) felt that the pandemic has made recruitment and retention of media staff harder, with less than a fifth (17%) saying that it was easier.
- Most respondents say their news organisation is doing a good job with gender diversity (78%), but fewer say the same about ethnic diversity (38%) and attracting those from less advantaged backgrounds (37%) or with diverse political views (33%). In the light of the Black Lives Matter movement and greater awareness of historic injustices, ethnic diversity remains the biggest priority for media companies – identified by 35% as the single most important priority in terms of improving newsroom diversity, followed by gender diversity (26%) and greater diversity from less advantaged groups (17%).

News organisations are pressing ahead with plans to redesign offices, upgrade technology, reduce desk space/office space and renegotiate contracts with employees to accommodate more flexible working. But many worry that the full implications of the hybrid newsroom have not been fully worked through, with concerns about losses to ‘creativity, communication, and culture’ (3Cs).

More practically, managers worry about issues like ‘proximity bias’, where the voices of those working remotely get ignored whilst those physically in the office and so close to decision makers benefit by being there in person, as well as how to get people physically together and foster team spirit. Managers feel they are bearing the brunt of major changes to operational working with the extra burden of communicating with and motivating staff they rarely see face to face.

As news organisations think about the future, they must balance operational requirements with new expectations from employees around flexibility and personal autonomy, and handle the shift to hybrid work in the context of ongoing challenges around attracting talent and addressing lack of diversity. We find that remote working is often now a specific demand of new hires. Some publishers have struck agreements with unions which prioritise equity – with the same deals for all staff – others have prioritised flexibility and look to place more emphasis on the operational needs of the business or the individual needs of employees.

This tension between equity and flexibility is just one of many that publishers will need to think through at every level, not least in terms of attracting and retaining talent. Should special deals be offered to scarce talent working in technology or data, but not in editorial roles that are deemed to require more office presence? Could a more flexible approach to location make it easier to attract more *diverse* talent? Even as newsrooms have to make decisions around hybrid working, they also continue to struggle with ongoing challenges of diversity and attracting, retaining, and developing the talent they need to succeed.

This report captures thinking around these issues from in-depth interviews with 13 leaders grappling with a ‘once in a lifetime opportunity’ to reshape newsrooms and a survey of a strategic sample of news industry leaders, completed between 1 and 19 September 2021. Respondents include Editor-in-Chief/Executive Editors, CEOs, Managing Editors, as well as other senior positions in editorial, commercial, and product. The sample includes individuals working in a wide range of different companies with a print, magazine, broadcast, and news agency background – as well as digital-born news organisations. The majority of the respondents are from the Global North, and most of them work in mid-size and large organisations, and our results thus do not capture the often very different situation faced by small organisations and those operating in poor and/or authoritarian countries. It is not a representative sample, and it is not a random sample, and it thus does not allow for generalisation to the industry at large. Because of the strategic sample we rely on, direct year-to-year comparisons of specific figures are not possible, though the data do help us identify overall patterns. More details of the methodology and make-up of the sample are provided in the section at the end of the report.

We have been careful to include insights, tips, and learning on how to navigate the shift to hybrid work throughout the report as well as pulling out lessons from a number of companies leading the change. RTL is a German broadcaster which is moving quickly to a new hybrid operating model and new operating principles for staff. Reach is a regional publisher in the UK that has already closed around 75% of its offices and put staff on new contracts. Quartz is a digital-born brand that has announced its intention to become fully distributed.

This report also takes stock of the other key changes affecting newsrooms: talent retention and diversity. Interviewees for this report say that COVID-19 has increased the risk of burnout while some employees have suffered from isolation and mental health issues.

The report gives examples of initiatives that have been implemented in the last year to address these issues from a range of countries – from Australia to Zimbabwe, from Colombia to Malaysia.

1. The Shift from Remote to Hybrid Working

1.1 News Organisations Uncertain But Committed

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered people's lives all over the world. Alongside its dramatic impact on health, aspects of how our societies live and function have been affected – amongst them, the ways we work and the role of the office.

When governments first imposed lockdowns, news organisations had to quickly adapt and move the majority of their staff to remote working. Some broadcast news bulletins and newspapers were produced almost entirely by remote teams, something that was deemed impossible pre-pandemic. Like many others, journalists and news industry workers experienced a further blurring of the lines between professional and domestic life.

Since then, in those places where it has been possible to do it safely, some offices have reopened and many publishers are entering a new phase: the move from fully remote working to a hybrid set-up, with some people working from the newsroom and some working from home.

hybrid working

noun



the practice of alternating between different working environments, such as from home and in an office

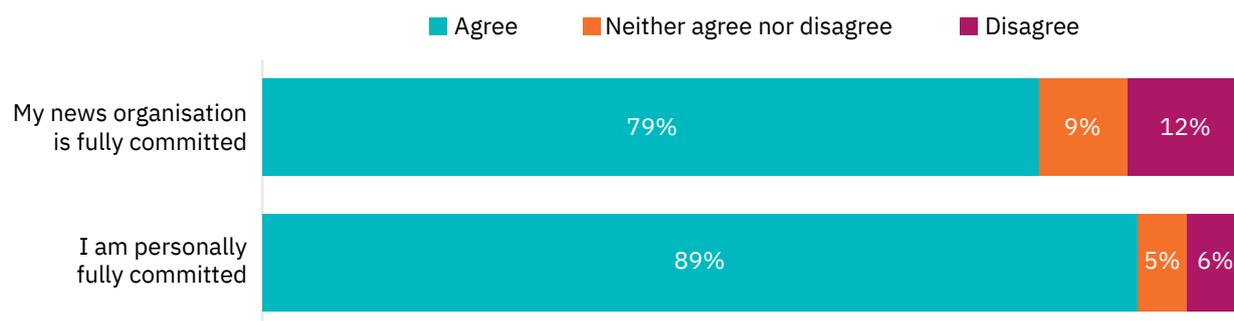
Collins English Dictionary. ©HarperCollins Publishers.

Months of enforced remote working have cemented expectations about greater flexibility: 'The genie is out of the bottle' as one respondent put it. But others see hybrid working as part of a wider change that takes in talent and diversity in a post-COVID world.

Mastering the shift from remote work to hybrid work and adapting all internal processes to this new way of working is one of our top priorities right now. It's key to really listen to the needs of the team, to integrate new and diverse colleagues into our culture, and to put an emphasis on psychological issues of working remotely. I'm convinced that hybrid working is going to stay – the transition might be difficult but it's definitely worthwhile, instead of reverting back to a work model where almost everyone is present in the office most of the time.

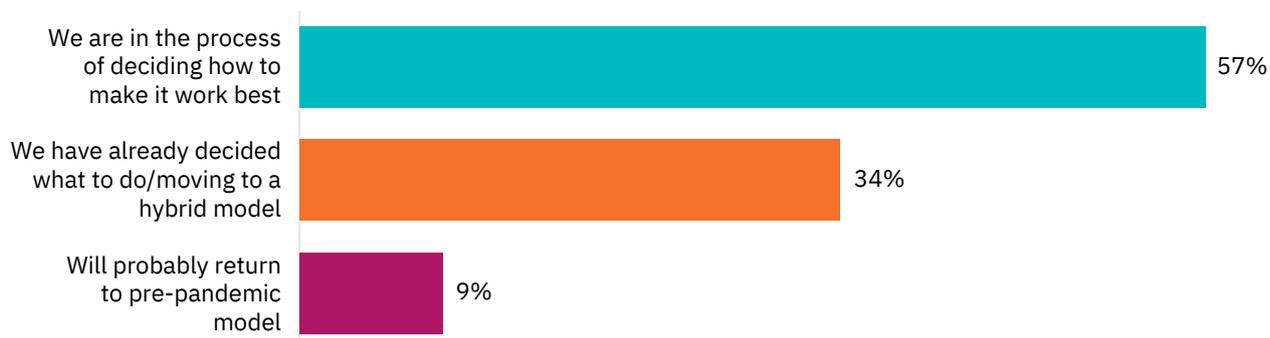
Martin Kotynek, Editor-in-Chief, *Der Standard*, Austria

In our survey, we asked executives and newsroom leaders to what extent they were committed to the move to hybrid and flexible working. The vast majority of senior leaders (89%) say they are fully on board with flexible and hybrid working. A clear majority (79%), but slightly fewer, say their organisations are also fully committed.

Figure 1. Commitment levels to hybrid and remote working

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? N= 132.

The real question now seems to be how to manage the shift from enforced remote working to hybrid work. While a third (34%) of our survey respondents say their organisations have already decided on major changes and are moving to implement a hybrid working model, over half (57%) say they are still in the process of working out the best way to do this. Still, one in ten (9%) say their organisations are looking to return to a working model as similar as possible to before the pandemic. Many of these are radio and TV broadcasters where arguably face-to-face teamwork is at a particular premium, and studios have expensive specialist equipment.

Figure 2. Current industry thinking on hybrid working

Q2. Which of the following options is closest to your news organisation's thinking in terms of hybrid working? N= 132.

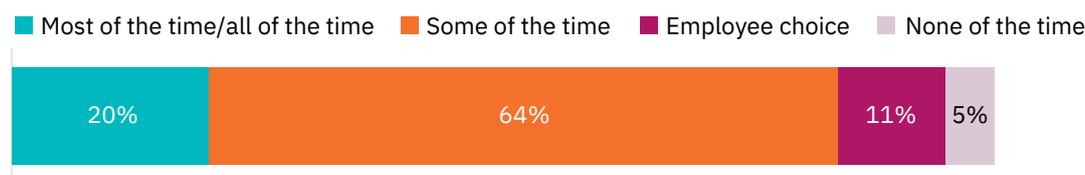
If many newsrooms seem to be committed to adapting to hybrid working, several factors come into play and make plans still uncertain. It's important to remember that the pandemic is far from being under control in many countries and therefore remote working is still a reality and a necessity for many newsrooms. Some have also highlighted how, despite the fact that a shift to remote working has been accelerated by and made a necessity during the pandemic, the quest for more flexible working conditions was a pre-existing issue and its underlying drivers are not linked to the pandemic.

More widely, we find media companies looking to balance operational requirements and staff demands for flexibility when thinking about a new hybrid operating model. In our survey the majority of executives (64%) say they would prefer to see employees back in the office some of the time, with only a minority (11%) saying it should be the individual employee's choice.

‘We don’t expect everyone to work in the office anymore and if they do, they will be only working for a few days and the rest of the week they’ll be working at home’, said Steven Gan, Editor-in-Chief of Malaysiakini.

However, a fifth (20%) of our respondents said they would like employees to be back *all or most* of the time. This data point, together with the above-mentioned 9% of respondents who said their organisations are hoping to return to a pre-pandemic working model, signals that some managers remain reticent or even hostile to these changes, perhaps worried about the possible loss of operational efficiency or control.

Figure 3. Managers would like employees back in the office *some or most* of the time



Q4. Overall, how often would you prefer your employees to be in the office? N= 132.

While a few companies (e.g. Le Groupe Les Echos-Le Parisien in France) have guaranteed a specific number of days for remote working to every employee, this is very much the exception. Most news organisations are still working out their policies or are conducting trials, or further consultations, before they will commit.

Dagens Nyheter in Sweden, for example, ran a survey in the spring. The results were clear: ‘Nine out of ten would like to have the possibility to work remotely in the future. But they also enjoy working together in the newsroom’, says Deputy Manager Editor Matilda E. Hanson. Off the back of the survey results, *Dagens Nyheter*’s management were able to tell staff that remote working would be possible in the future but couldn’t be counted on in all circumstances. Hanson stressed the importance of being able to be open and transparent with staff about what decisions are made and how, while also recognising that plans may need to change, due to the uncertainty over the virus.

Recognising that different teams have different priorities, some organisations have opted for an approach in which managers can decide what’s best for their teams in terms of how much and when to be in the office: ‘We’re putting a lot of trust in our team leaders and managers to design what’s best for their teams because the requirements of teams are so different depending on what they do’, said Katie Lloyd, Development Director at BBC News & Current Affairs.

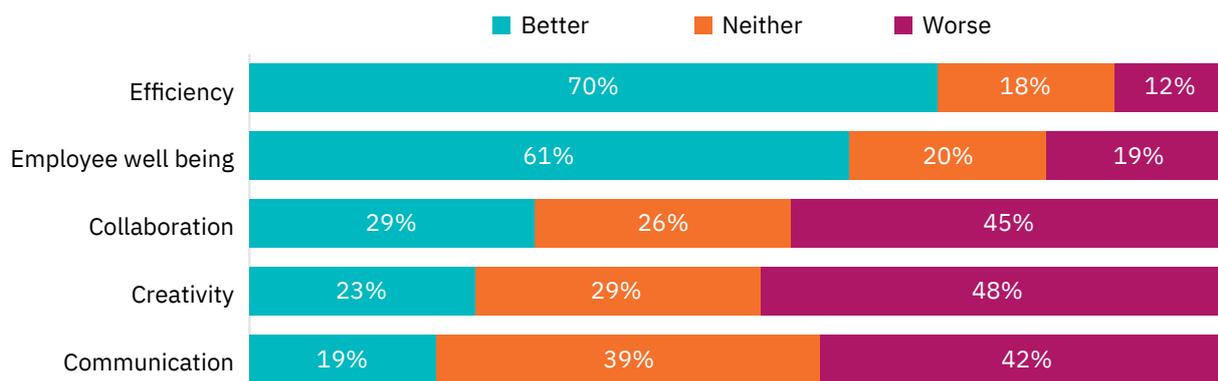
1.2 Opportunities and Challenges

In our survey, the majority of respondents (70%) say that flexible working has made news organisations more efficient. Online meetings held during enforced remote working have often been shorter and more business-like, while reduced commuting time has freed up time for more

productive work. Six in ten (61%) felt it had also, on average, improved the employees' well-being, although many expressed concern about burnout and the mental health of some employees.

Survey respondents also underscored the negative impact they feel remote working has had on softer skills such as creativity, communication and collaboration, both within teams and across the organisation. Almost half (48%) felt creativity had got worse and more than four in ten (43%) felt communication had suffered too.

Figure 4. Summarised: gains and losses from remote and hybrid working



Q3. To what extent do you feel flexible/hybrid working is making the following better or worse? N= 132.

The news business is a team sport; newsrooms are designed as open spaces for a reason. We have done a remarkable job at keeping our programmes and digital news offer[ings] going strong while working remotely, but there's an inevitable impact on creativity, collaboration, social cohesion, and mental health. There's no doubt in my mind we are better when we are together.

Brodie Fenlon, Editor-in-Chief, CBC News, Canada

The results of our survey chime with an argument articulated within Reuters by Jane Barrett, Global Editor for Media News Strategy, about the lack of 'connection' as a result of enforced remote working. She sees Connection as a fourth C which encompasses Collaboration, Creativity, and Communication: 'It is hard to vibe off other people without body language and almost impossible to create energy when everybody is on screen', says Barrett: 'This is particularly true when people from different teams are collaborating. The personal connection makes a difference.'

As people gradually return, Reuters is considering setting up specific days when all members of a team come into the office together to socialise and collaborate face to face. But some managers worry as much about lost connection with *other* teams: 'I think the challenge is going to be actually how we bring people back in at the same time. So you get a greater sense of unity and a sense of common purpose', says Tracey Kirkland, Continuous News Editor, News Channel at ABC in Australia.

While our survey respondents broadly indicated that remote working has had a positive impact on their staff's well-being, many of our interviewees expressed concern about the impact of

isolation that often accompanies working from home: ‘You have staff that are very anxious and are really struggling with their mental health and then there are others that sailed through – it really depends on the person’s personality and the job that they’re being asked to do’, says Tracey Kirkland at ABC. To mitigate and address these concerns the company has created opportunities for staff to feel connected: ‘What we have done is try to be flexible when they are really struggling, give them some days off. I spend a lot of time on communication to make sure that they are up-to-date.’

To encourage community and help counter isolation, UK regional publisher Reach has organised online book and film clubs, and social cook-alongs. Staff also get a free subscription to a mindfulness app (headspace), an online wellness hub, as well as access to psychological counselling if needed. There are monthly non-performance-related chats with managers to check in with how staff are doing. ‘It puts a lot of responsibility on the editors to be really mindful of their staff’, says Alison Gow, Audience and Content Director for the North-West at Reach. All managers have been on a course on ‘leading remote teams’ to help equip them with the right skills to support those working at home.

Others have stressed how the last 18 months have also increased the pressure on newsroom managers and especially mid-level leadership.

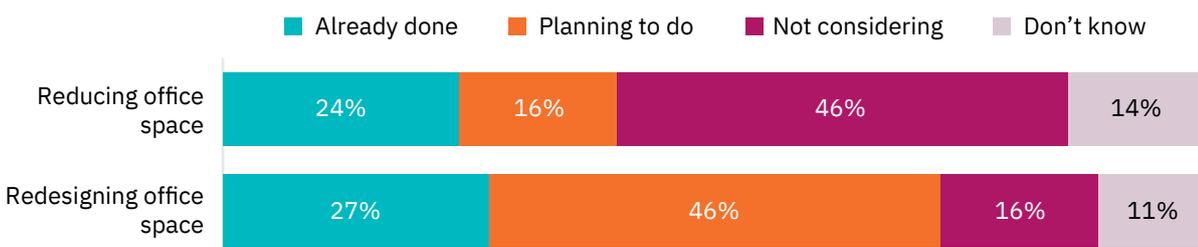
The role of a manager has changed and doing one-on-one with staff takes longer than it used to. Getting your teams together and having constructive and valuable meetings, it all takes longer now. So right now we’re in a period where we’re adding a couple of management positions to help alleviate the stress on managers and to give staff more face time with someone.

Angela Pacienza, Executive Editor, the *Globe and Mail*, Canada

1.3 Redefining What the Office is For

The COVID-19 crisis has prompted radical and accelerated thinking about the purpose of the newsroom. Some see the office increasingly as a focus for collaboration, with frontline work done elsewhere. For others, a physical newsroom still has to embody the spirit of the company even if the configuration needs to change. A quarter (27%) say they have already redesigned office space and 46% are planning to do so. Another quarter (24%) have already cut the amount of office space, with 16% looking to do this in the near future.

Figure 5. Office changes underway



Q6. As part of the move to more flexible/hybrid working, which of the following have you already done/are considering/are not considering? N=128.

In preparing for the return to the office, German broadcaster RTL conducted research including visiting different types of hybrid offices and conducting two surveys with staff. This research, which showed that staff missed the buzz of the office, even as they valued greater flexibility, laid the basis for a radical experiment to redesign the newsroom as a ‘space to meet and get together’. The News department of RTL is currently taking part in a pilot project where desks have been removed and the newsroom opened up with so-called shared hubs that anyone can use.

The hubs are designed to create a kind of coffee bar feeling with different offers like lounge areas, space for workshops, etc, focusing on creative interaction, brainstorming and socialising. But there will also be quiet zones where people can work by themselves or take part in virtual meetings.

Maike Jungjohann, Head of Business Transformation, RTL News

RTL News – New Office Concept



This was developed with an architectural practice in Switzerland but alongside it is a set of practical guidelines that define *how* staff should work.

- Desk-sharing for everyone – individual offices will be a thing of the past.
- All teams will have a home base within which they can organise themselves.
- Joint areas (so-called hubs) are designed as a booster for encounters, flexibility, and creativity.
- Standardised office equipment throughout with a focus on portability.
- Implementation of smart IT technology to support this transformation process (e.g. for the booking of office desks or meetings rooms).

RTL News expects to see staff working based on a mixture of office and mobile office days – always depending on job requirements. The new office space concept is expected to be fully up and running by the start of 2022.

The *Globe and Mail* in Canada is amongst those news organisations that are both redesigning their office and reducing space. ‘We used to have three floors. We’re going to go down to two and then we’ll be fully hybrid’, said Executive Editor Angela Pacienza. She explained that they are going to have an app where staff can book different areas. They have decided on a neighbourhood concept, similar to the hubs implemented by RTL, so different teams can sit together, she said.

In Spain, membership-based news outlet El Diario had already started to revamp the purpose of its offices *before* the pandemic with more space for collaboration, video recordings, and events. Though COVID-19 has delayed their plans, socially distanced member events are already underway, part of an outward-facing vision for the newsroom which involves more interaction between readers and journalists. ‘There’s always things going on, people coming in from the

outside, it's just a different way of thinking about newsrooms. Previously, they were like closed fortresses', says María Ramírez, Deputy Managing Editor, El Diario.

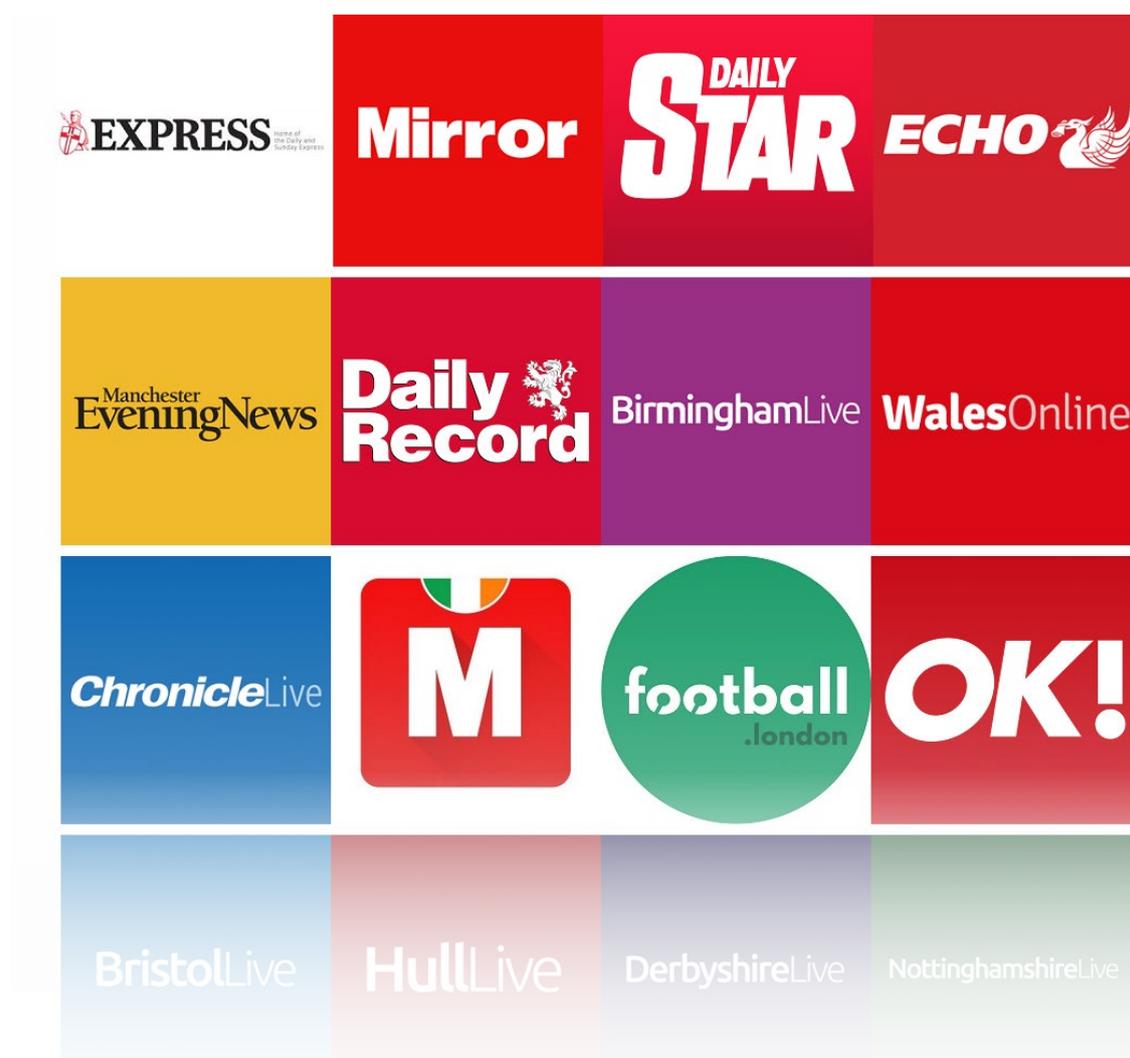


A member event in El Diario's revamped Madrid offices, October 2021. © Elvira Megías

But while many are pressing ahead with office redesigns, others argue that it is still too early. Better, they say, to wait a bit longer – until the realities of hybrid working have become clearer.

1.4 Radical Change: Case Profile

Reach plc is the largest national, regional, and local publisher in the UK. It has over 100 regional news brands and more than 80 online-only news brands. In March 2021 the company announced it would be closing around 75% of its offices, leaving most of its regional titles without any base in the areas they serve. Many journalists will work permanently from home while others will be attached to a hub office, but all staff will work in a hybrid fashion to some extent, attending meetings as needed. Just 15 offices remain in big cities like London, Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, and Newcastle and only one in the South East of England.



New Staff Contracts at Reach

Reach

After consultations with staff and a survey, which showed that the majority (86%) appreciated greater flexibility, all company employees have now been offered one of three new contracts.

- **Home worker:** work from home all the time (or from commercial flexible office space close to where you live).
- **Home worker linked to hub:** work from home but have an office that you are connected to. Go into meetings when required.
- **Hub worker:** Go into office most of the time, work from home as appropriate.

Special arrangements have been made for those with poor Wi-Fi or those whose living arrangements make it hard to work at home. Journalists have been prioritised in their use of the remaining office hubs, with support functions like HR and finance almost entirely virtual.

Some of the remaining company offices are also being remodelled to accommodate more hotdesking and collaboration spaces. While some see these moves as a cynical excuse for further cost cutting and a hollowing out of a once highly profitable regional news sector, the company points out that it could also allow journalists to work more productively in the areas where they live: ‘I think it definitely allows reporters to be more with their communities’, says Alison Gow, Audience and Content Director, North-West, who is herself based in a rural area, ‘There were reporters here who would have to drive 90 minutes to get to the office because of the geography, and they don’t need to. They can work really efficiently from home. They can be in the corner shop because they’ve run out of milk. They can be a local voice and a face.’

Not everyone has embraced these changes. Some staff have left the company rather than accept a home working contract. Others have used the opportunity to rethink their lives and left the industry entirely. On the other hand, the contracts do provide clarity for news staff and help set expectations from the outset.

Quartz is a digital-born business publication founded in 2012. Its headquarters is in New York, but today half of the staff live outside the New York area. Last summer, Quartz announced¹ that they would become a ‘fully distributed company’, allowing anyone to work from anywhere the company could legally employ people. However, with a year left on its lease, in June 2021 Quartz reopened its New York office and embraced hybrid working.

As part of this move, CEO Zach Seward explained, the company has been forced to be very intentional about things: work needs to be done in a way that can be documented and visible to everyone, and there needs to be an active distinction, for those in the office, about what is work and what is social interaction. He added: ‘I feel like that distinction was never needed to be clear in the “before times”.’

Quartz Principles for Return to Work

QUARTZ

- We collaborate virtually by default and don’t assume we’re all in the same place.
- No pressure to use the office until you feel comfortable, which only you can determine.
- Start with empathy: everyone will have different levels of comfort being among other people in the office. Be respectful of others’ choices.
- The New York office is an exception to our otherwise virtual workplace.
- The full guidelines are accessible online (<https://cms.qz.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Copy-of-Guidelines-for-the-reopening-of-Quartzs-New-York-office.pdf>).

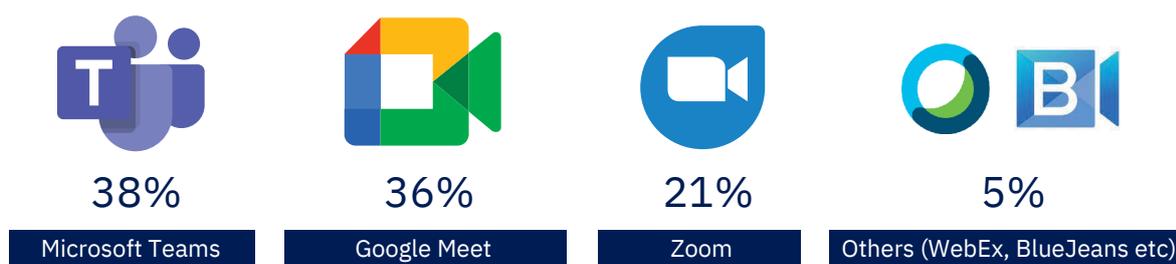
¹ <https://qz.com/work/2028053/11-important-lessons-about-managing-a-hybrid-workplace/>

In order to work as a fully hybrid company, Seward explained, you need to embrace a fully distributed mindset where *hybrid* actually means *remote*: ‘The point is there really is no such thing as “hybrid” work in a company that employs people in multiple locations, let alone one like ours with staff on five continents. And since “remote” implies the office is the node, an even better word to use is “distributed”.’

1.5 Practical Considerations: Meetings, Tools, and Culture

Remote and hybrid working is changing the meeting culture in many news organisations. Physical meetings, where top managers often sat together behind glass walls, frequently created barriers within the newsroom. Online meetings have helped to make that process a bit more inclusive: ‘What we found was that having everybody joining on Teams made it much more meritocratic. Probably about 50% more people dialled in to listen to the editor’s conversation than ever before’, says Reuters’s Jane Barrett. ‘When participants are all the same squares on a digital video platform, those old hierarchies – who sits at the top of the table or next to whom – are suddenly less visible and less imposing.’

Figure 6. Top video communication tools used in newsroom conferences



Q7. What is the main tool that your organisation uses for communication and collaboration for meetings/conferences? N=132.

But as some staff come back to the office, the temptation has been to go back to the old ways. Hybrid meetings that mix staff in the office and those elsewhere are proving unsatisfactory for many.

RTL plans to continue with the online-only news conferences that started during COVID-19: ‘It’s so much easier now because people from Berlin, from Frankfurt, felt left out before’, says Jungjohann. ‘It often felt like the headquarters [Cologne] was more important. Now they can just take part in these meetings and know what’s going on.’

But there is no one-size-fits-all approach to meetings. Others still value face-to-face informal chats that are only possible when everyone is together. Others note the need to improve the sound quality for remote participants and the visual presentation too, with new software solutions now available that zoom in on the person speaking.

Even with the best will in the world though, it is not always possible for all team members to be physically in the same room, so a key imperative is to make meetings with an online element work more effectively. At the BBC, Katie Lloyd, Development Director at BBC News & Current

Affairs, and her team have been working on a best practice guide on how to chair effective and inclusive meetings, regardless of whether they are held in person or online.

BBC News – Making Remote and Hybrid Meetings Work Effectively



A section in the ‘Guide to Chairing More Effective and Inclusive Meetings’ is dedicated specifically to hybrid meetings and includes the following recommendations:

- Take a few minutes at the start of the meeting to make it clear to everyone what they need to do if they want to speak (e.g. raising hands), and how you will be running the meeting.
- If you have a lot of remote participants, you may want to join the Zoom meeting from your own laptop as a non-video participant, so that you can keep the ‘participant list’ visible on your own laptop. Alternatively, you may want to appoint someone in your team to keep an eye on the participants online and let you know when people want to speak, and manage the chat function.
- Ensure you bring in those who are joining remotely at several occasions throughout the meeting and over-index with them compared to those in the room as it can be easy for the remote attendees to feel left out.
- Keep an eye on the time and be ready to move things on when a decision has been made. With your meeting participants split between two places, it’s not always easy for everyone to sense when a consensus has been reached, so you may need to be more explicit when chairing than you would in a meeting where everyone is in the room together.

Creating an inclusive and diverse meeting culture is particularly important, Lloyd stressed, because ‘they are the main way staff experience an organisation and therefore it’s a really, really powerful lever if you are trying to shift the culture of an organisation’.

Many in the industry² are worried about the issue of *proximity bias*, the idea that those employees who spend more time in the newsroom will be perceived as better workers and receive preferential treatment. The issue is far from new, but may have been accentuated by the pandemic.

‘The thing we’re concerned with as a management team is making sure that some people don’t end up becoming favourites because they get more face time with the boss’, says Angela Pacienza at the *Globe and Mail* in Canada. Managers are encouraged to prioritise one-on-one time with their staff and to be really sensitive to the people who aren’t in the room and what

² <https://digiday.com/media/businesses-grapple-with-how-to-avoid-proximity-bias-when-offices-reopen/>

they're missing out on. 'I think it's going to take a different type of training for managers to be able to recognise and be aware of it', Pacienza added.

Some also worry that hybrid working could reinforce existing disparities: 'Women in the team are the ones who are more strict about what days [they are in the office] and the days that they are at home. And men [are] a bit more eager to go more than the two [allocated] days', points out María Ramírez at El Diario. 'It is maybe still too soon to tell if there is really a gap, but I sense there could be a gap.'

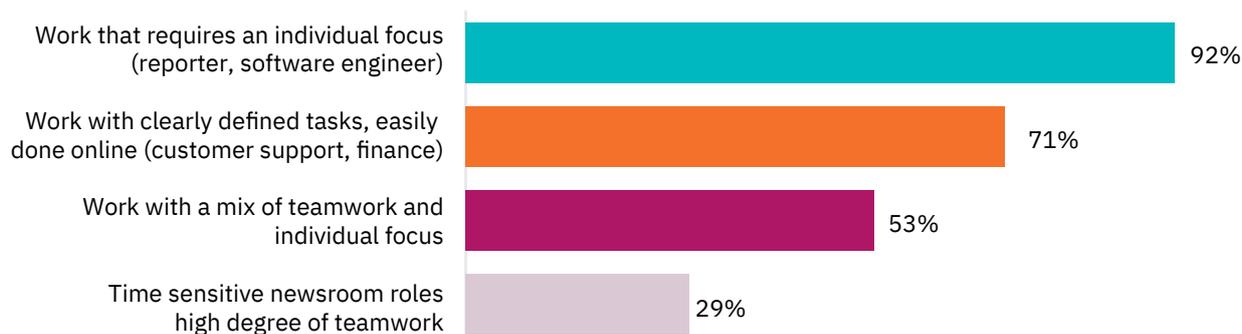
1.6 Balancing Equity and Flexibility

WHICH ROLES WILL WORK BEST FOR REMOTE OR HYBRID NEWSROOMS?

Although the vast majority of employees worked entirely from home during recent lockdowns, there were some important exceptions, including staff who needed to operate specialist broadcast equipment such as radio and TV studios. Those coordinating time-sensitive news coverage also found it easier to be physically at work as soon as it was safe to do so. By contrast, roles such as subbing or software engineering have transitioned much more seamlessly to remote settings.

Our survey shows a clear consensus about the type of roles that managers feel are best and least well-suited to remote and hybrid working. The vast majority (92%) can see a benefit for staff who mainly work on their own (such as reporters or those that sub copy for print and online), but only a minority (29%) feel that it is well suited to journalists working on fast-moving news events where teamwork is at a premium.

Figure 7. Roles where remote and hybrid working is seen to be best suited



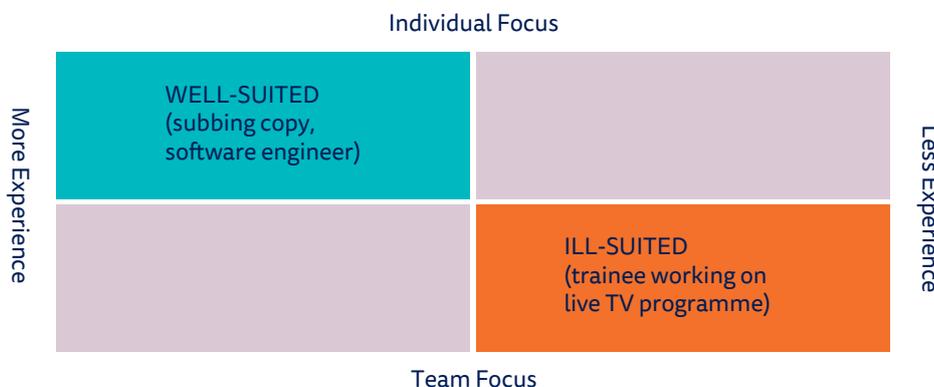
Q8. How well suited or ill-suited would you say remote hybrid working is for the following role types? N= 129.

The news agency AFP has been wrestling with these dilemmas around roles as it thinks about the move to hybrid working: 'News wires are particularly real time', says Global News Director Phil Chetwynd, reflecting on some of the losses from working remotely during the pandemic. 'You're really lacking the complexity of real-time debate that normally comes from smaller groups or that comes from being face-to-face.' On the other hand, Chetwynd notes that photographers rarely need to be in the office. Images can be shot and uploaded from any location.

The last 18 months have shown that other specialist teams such as graphics and video can also work from anywhere using laptops and coordinating activities via messaging apps like Slack. But other factors may need to be taken into account. The agency has been trying to put visual journalism at the heart of its future vision – and that strategic imperative may require those skills to be physically present in the heart of the newsroom. ‘We’ve made a big play on visual storytelling. And being virtual does tend to push you back into silos’, says Chetwynd.

The extent to which staff mainly work in teams or need an individual focus is one criterion that could be used to decide how flexible a business can be. But the level of an employee’s *experience* will also be important (see the criteria matrix). More senior staff will often be deeply rooted in company culture and tend to need less supervision. Junior staff just starting out may need more face-to-face feedback (which may in turn mean at least some senior staff need to be in the newsroom too).

Figure 8. Possible criteria for identifying opportunities for hybrid and remote working



INITIATIVES TO FOSTER A CULTURE OF LEARNING AND MENTORING IN HYBRID SETTINGS

Many of our interviewees say that it is currently proving particularly hard to get older and more experienced journalists back to the office. They often have more comfortable set-ups at home and are reluctant to resume stressful commutes. But this is making it harder to train up and pass on skills to the next generation.

The most important challenge for El Espectador is continuing being a school of journalists in our newsroom. For this, it is necessary to inhabit the physical space to boost the meetings between senior editors with the youngest reporters.

Natalia Piza, Digital Monetization Manager, *El Espectador*, Colombia

Others worry that junior staff can easily get lost or overlooked. A number of our interviewees for this report say that onboarding new recruits has been one of the hardest management tasks of the last 18 months and many worry about what this means for the integration of new joiners.

With fewer opportunities to ‘learn by osmosis’ in the newsroom itself, some companies like Reuters are developing online mentoring programmes and encouraging networking groups for next-generation journalists and other groups. Others are beefing up formal training, including

talks from senior journalists and editors. These alternatives may help fill the gap but for many new recruits they are a poor substitute for picking up skills from experienced colleagues in the cut and thrust of a busy newsroom.

EQUITY VS OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

In implementing permanent hybrid and remote arrangements, we find an increasing tension between operational requirements and a desire to treat all employees equally. Some publications have taken a role-based approach, offering different levels of flexibility for certain job types and building this into new contracts. Others have prioritised equity, allowing *all staff* the same rights to work from home whatever their role.

In France, the company that owns *Les Echos* and its sister publication *Le Parisien*, for example, has done a deal with the unions that gives all employees the right to take up to two days remote working each week (or eight days per month) whether they are editing the website or working in a support area. Individual managers still have some flexibility on how to apply this – for example, in spacing the allowance over a month rather than a week or in ensuring resources can be deployed on a major story – but the full impact on operational efficiency is not yet clear.

Some managers would like all staff to be in the office on a particular day each week to allow for team bonding and communication, but this needs to be balanced with these new employee rights. ‘I am planning to get everyone to come into the office on a Monday’, said Clémence Lemaistre, Deputy Editor Digital News and Transition at *Les Echos*. ‘This is when we have a planning meeting about the stories for the next week, but also when I can communicate other important initiatives.’

Clear, consistent rules may also be required to overcome differences in employees’ motivations to work from home which emerged during the pandemic. At AFP, many of those editing copy, a role that is particularly well-suited to remote working, tend to be older, sometimes living in bigger houses in the suburbs or with comfortable second homes in the country. Some of this group have been resistant to coming back to the office. By contrast, younger journalists often live in cramped, shared Parisian apartments, and have been much keener to return. While there might be an operational case for giving some older and more experienced staff greater flexibility, a role-based approach might not be equitable or beneficial in the long term for company culture. (Similar issues exist in London, New York, and many other big cities where generational inequalities are often particularly pronounced.)

But as new flexible arrangements come into place, the interviewees noted that individual managers can hold radically different opinions about this change. Our own survey finds a minority of senior managers are strongly resistant to an expansion of remote working, while others recognise the inevitability of the shift. All this raises questions about how fairly the new arrangements will be applied: ‘I think we have to change, even if I prefer it when everyone is near’, says Clémence Lemaistre at *Les Echos*: ‘The people you are working with are changing, their expectations are changing. Now when we do recruitment interviews pretty much everyone asks about opportunities for remote working – three years ago no one would have dreamed of asking that question.’

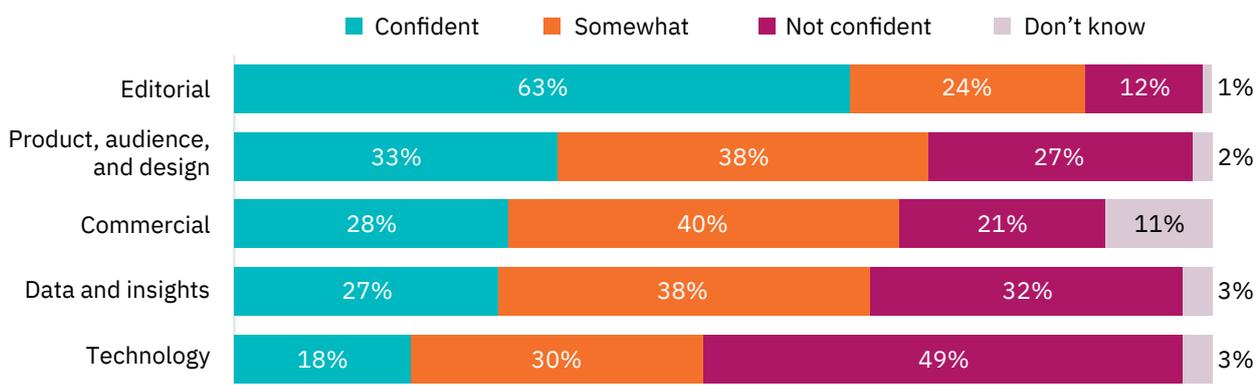
2. Talent Retention in a Post-COVID World

The pandemic has prompted many to rethink some fundamental aspects of how they live their life and what role work has in that. In some industries there have been headlines about ‘the great resignation’³ with employees quitting their jobs in high numbers.

There has been talk of a similar exodus in the news industry,⁴ but our survey shows that this is not yet a reality for many and most respondents are not worried about journalists leaving the profession in droves. However, the majority of survey respondents (47%) believe that the pandemic has made recruiting and retention harder, with only 17% saying it has become easier.

The main pinch points remain around technology, data science, and commercial skills. Only 28% of respondents are confident about attracting and retaining talent in commercial, 27% in data science, and 18% in the technology area.

Figure 9. Confidence in attracting and retaining talent



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

Our respondents are more confident (63%) about keeping editorial talent. Having said that, there was particular concern about the scarcity of journalists from some ethnic minorities (especially in the United States and UK), partly because of competition between publishers trying to create more diverse newsrooms.

As we mentioned earlier, managers are concerned that the enforced remote working and that lost sense of connection with the company could result in employees with a limited sense of belonging and therefore more prone to leave. This has been especially true for new staff: ‘I think it’s really tough, especially for people who are new to the team. It’s kind of difficult to make them part of the team, of the newsroom of the culture without any personal context’, said María Ramírez from El Diario.

To counterbalance the loss of connection, organisations have adopted several talent-related initiatives: some, like BBC and Reuters, have worked to develop and strengthen their internal

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/great-resignation-accelerating/620382/>

⁴ <https://digiday.com/media/quit-your-f-king-job-how-the-pandemic-has-pushed-journalists-to-exit-the-industry/>

network and resource groups. The BBC's Katie Lloyd explained: 'Because people are thinking about their careers more than ever, during the pandemic we launched the Career Development Forum, which is giving people advice, career tips, CV workshops, [advice on] how to deal with career anxiety, which a lot of people are facing at the moment.'

But embracing remote working and allowing for greater flexibility also opens up possibilities when it comes to attracting and retaining talent, especially in technical areas like software development. RTL found that it has proved difficult in the past to get engineers to move to Cologne, where the company is based, but now they have access to talent in tech-friendly cities like Berlin and Munich, making it easier to compete with tech companies and others looking for scarce talent.

More broadly across the industry, flexibility around locations can increase the chances of hiring a broader and more diverse range of talent that might not, for example, be living in expensive cities where most of organisations' headquarters are based.

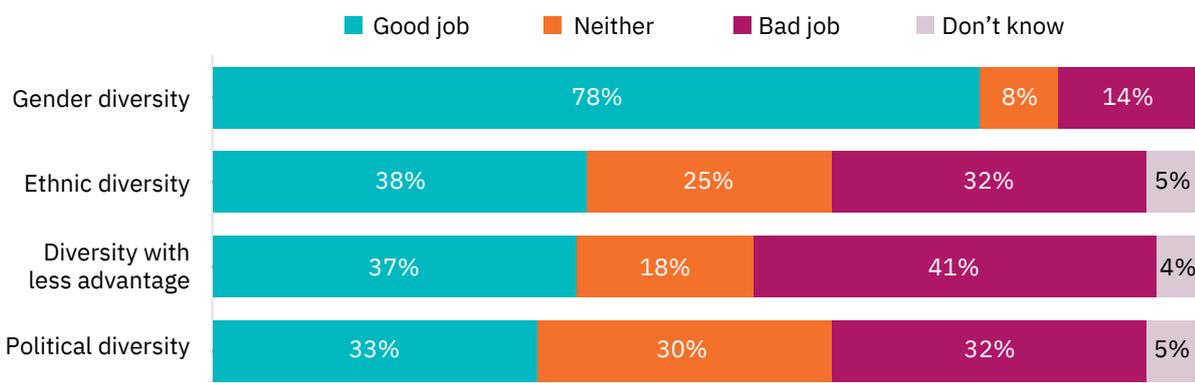
3. Diversity: Substantial Change Still Required

Discussions about diversity and inclusion in journalism have remained an important part of the industry debate in 2021, after reaching greater global public prominence last year (Cherubini et al. 2020). Some progress has been made across the industry: some major news organisations like Associated Press,⁵ the Washington Post,⁶ and Reuters⁷ have seen women rise to the top leadership positions and others have introduced⁸ high-profile roles overseeing diversity and development. However, previous research found that women make up only 22% of top editors in the sample analysed by Robertson et al. (2021a) and overall the percentage of non-white top editors in a strategic sample of 100 news outlets in five different markets across four continents is only 15% (Robertson et al. 2021b).

3.1 Ethnic Diversity as Key Focus for News Media

As in last year’s survey, the majority of our respondents think their organisations do a good job with gender diversity (78%), but the figure drops significantly when it comes to ethnic diversity (38%), diversity from less advantaged backgrounds (37%), and political diversity (33%).

Figure 10. My news organisation is doing a good job with ...



Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? N=126.

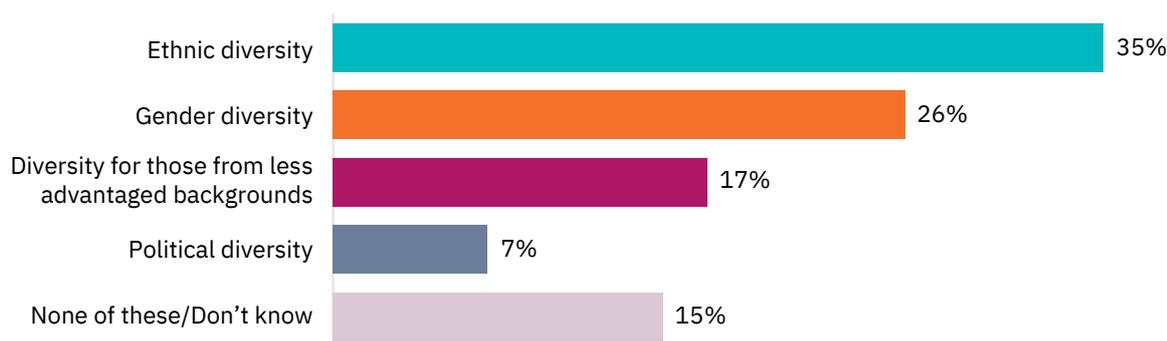
Like last year, ethnic diversity has been indicated by the managers who participated in the survey as the biggest priority area to change (35%). A quarter (26%) said gender diversity is the single most important priority, followed by diversity from less advantaged groups (17%) and political diversity (7%).

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/daisy-veerasingham-ap-ceo-gary-pruitt-2041881239a458bddeb202368ba70d4c>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/11/business/media/washington-post-sally-buzbee-editor.html>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/reuters-name-alessandra-galloni-its-next-editor-in-chief-2021-04-12/>

⁸ <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/guardian-creates-diversity-executive-role-take-representation-newsroom-next-level/>

Figure 11. Ethnic diversity is seen as the number one priority for change

Q11. In terms of improving newsroom diversity, which of the following is the single most important priority for your news organisation this year? N= 125.

News organisations' diversity, in terms of rank and file and leadership, varies from case to case, as do the main forms of structural inequality from country to country. But concerns that newsrooms are falling short, and need to do better on several fronts, are clear from respondents from all over the world.

[We are] very advanced in [gender] parity, now we need to act to improve ethnic and religious diversity. It is urgent if we want to be connected with our society.

Esther Vera, Editor, *Ara*, Spain

In Nigeria, the editor of *The Cable* newspaper, Kolapo Olapoju, said that they are: 'Intentionally looking to recruit females and people of under-represented ethnic groups'. Dapo Olorunyomi, publisher of the *Premium Times* in Nigeria, said that amongst the initiatives pursued they had 'designed a gender and pluralism policy; organised training on inclusion and diversity, [and] encouraged management discussions on diversity and inclusion'.

In Colombia, José Antonio Sánchez, Digital Content Manager at El Tiempo.com, stressed the need to do more not just on gender diversity, but also with the LGBTQ community, minorities, and native groups. Progress needs to be made, he said, on diversity inside the newsroom, but also on how the news is presented.

And a senior Indian executive said they are 'tr[ying to] hire more team members from diverse castes and communities'.

However, even if the attention is focused on these themes, the ability to measure real progress is proving elusive⁹ in some countries. As reported by the Associated Press, in the US, the News Leaders Association, a journalism trade group, has 'extended the deadline for responses to its survey about employment practices at news organizations for two months, after expressing disappointment about how few are willing to reveal the diversity of their staffs'.¹⁰

⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/business-race-and-ethnicity-journalism-arts-and-entertainment-885ce3486382d7c3080519c50407aa18>

¹⁰ Ibid.

3.2 Initiatives to Broaden the Pipeline

Journalism is often seen as a career that is not appealing or indeed feasible for young professionals coming from less advantaged backgrounds and some newsrooms are looking at closing that gap by investing in broadening the pipeline.

We are trying to organise a series of online talks and Q&As for secondary-level students from schools in disadvantaged communities to outline the fundamentals of how news is made, how one can participate etc. Our hope is to also gather feedback from interested students on the gaps they see in their ability to make it into the journalism field and use that as the basis to decide on future pipeline development for emerging talent interning or gaining paid experience in our newsroom.

Editor at a European online publication

Similarly, other newsrooms are working on developing their relationships with ethnic minorities who are traditionally not represented in mainstream media. The CEO of a local Scandinavian broadcaster said that they have launched a new hyper-local media outlet with the focus on providing news to younger ethnic minorities in their region. ‘Part of the purpose of the project is investing time and resources in talents with no journalism skills and training them to gain their interest in media production ... We wish to build trust, insights, and interest among ethnic minorities in media production’, the CEO added.

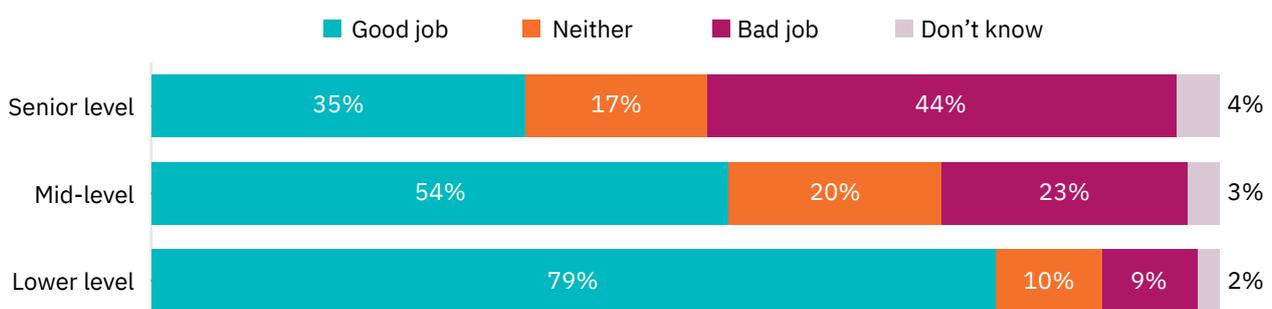
In Zimbabwe, CEO Divine Dube noted that *The Citizen Bulletin* has ‘introduced an annual essay writing competition for high school students, often left out in news-making, and we deliberately targeted those living in small towns and rural areas’.

3.3 Least Progress at the Senior Levels

If focusing on strengthening the talent pipeline for diverse recruitment is deemed important, a more diverse representation still struggles to reach the top of the organisation.

Our survey shows that a clear majority of respondents think their organisation is doing a good job in terms of diversity at the lower level (79%), but that decreases for the mid-level tier (54%) and only 35% think their organisation is doing a good job at the senior level.

Figure 12. My news organisation is doing a good job with diversity at the following level ...

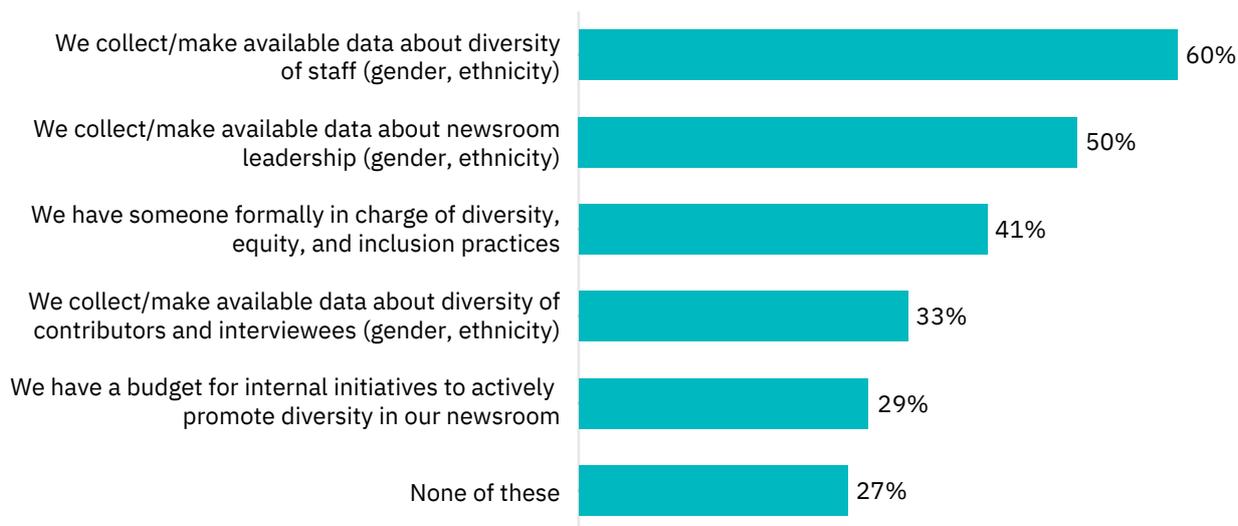


Q12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? N=126.

The majority of the newsroom leaders who participated in the survey say their organisations are collecting and making available diversity data about their staff (60%) and their leadership team (50%). Of the survey respondents, 41% say their organisations have someone in charge of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies.

However, just 33% of respondents say their organisation tracks data when it comes to diversity of contributors and interviewees. Some try to widen the diversity of perspectives in the stories covered. Others have created dedicated working groups, organised training, or designed specific policies to improve diversity and inclusion practices.

Figure 13. What organisations are doing in terms of initiatives



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

Some newsrooms have looked at improving their hiring practices: ‘We are longlisting “blind” for all job applications, reading only the assessments before “unlocking” CVs and cover letters. All shortlists for interviews must contain more than one gender and ethnic background’, said a head of department at a UK company.

In the last year, the need to face ethnic, cultural, and social injustices has been at the centre of the public debate in many countries around the world and has sparked a phase of serious soul-searching in many companies.

For public service media companies, whose mandate is to serve and represent everyone in their country, this profound self-reflection has been even more important, as Brodie Fenlon, Editor-in-Chief of CBC News in Canada, publicly wrote¹¹ earlier this year.

But hybrid working may be offering new opportunities to increase diversity. At Quartz, the shift to a fully distributed company has already had a big impact: ‘Opening all our positions to applications from anywhere we can legally employ people dramatically improved both the quality and diversity of our applicant pools’, says CEO Zach Seward. This, together with a

¹¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/editorsblog/editors-note-diversity-update-1.6150424>

number of new diversity policies, like revamping the process for evaluating candidates with an eye towards eliminating bias and blind reading of memos, resulted in some progress, Seward said.

In a year Quartz went from a proportion of 31% to 42% of employees who were people of colour and today 50% of the newsroom are people of colour, according to Seward. The company has also made improvements in the diversity of its leadership ranks, including at the executive level, with the hire of the first Latino executive.

Significantly, only 29% of our survey respondents report that their organisation has a budget for actively promoting diversity, and a full 27% of survey respondents say their organisation has none of the initiatives listed – collecting data on diversity, having someone in charge of DEI practices, or having a dedicated budget for promoting diversity.

Conclusions

One legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be a fundamental change to how and where journalists do their work – as well as a renewed focus on recruitment, retention, and diversity. It may not happen overnight but news organisations are rethinking what the office is for and what kind of opportunities that throws up.

Our survey confirms that remote working has made newsrooms more efficient and that many employees also value greater flexibility, but it is also clear that people miss the creativity, collaboration, and communication (3Cs) that is the lifeblood of any newsroom. The key question is how to strike the right balance that takes account of what we've learnt in the last 18 months.

As many of our interviewees have noted, the hybrid future is about much more than just enabling greater employee rights to remote working. In an ideal world, it describes a new operating model where work is done without reference to location, where talent is used more effectively, where hierarchies are less formal, and where diverse groups are included in conversations. It's also likely to involve a greater amount of face-to-face contact with colleagues, whether that is just to socialise, reinforce company culture, or collaborate on creative projects.

It remains to be seen how close news organisations can get to this ideal. There is still much to think through. Amid continuing health fears, many are still trying to persuade remote workers that it is worth coming back at all – let alone talk about a new model. Many managers themselves are still ambivalent and would like some or most of their staff back in the office most of the time. They also worry about the extra workload of managing teams in the office and at home at the same time.

Effective hybrid working will also require much clearer rules around meetings and perhaps new training for managers in ensuring all voices are equally heard. The quality of online tools including video and audio conferencing is likely to improve over time but even so regular check-ins will be needed for those that are prone to isolation, to fragile mental health, and for less experienced colleagues starting out.

It is also clear that hybrid working will require processes and communication to be better documented and more structured than they have been in the past. Companies like Quartz are pioneering new processes in this area, recognising as they do that key information can fall through the gaps when people are not always in the office at the same time.

There are also big questions about how much flexibility to allow and whether this should be based around specific roles or applied equally to all staff. As we've shown in this report, there are fears that hybrid working could reverse advances in gender equality that we've seen in many countries, with women potentially losing out from less visibility in the office. On the other hand, the extension of remote working could also make it easier to recruit and retain certain diverse talent. The issues of talent retention and diversity in newsrooms are closely linked to issues of flexibility and fairness that are at the core of discussions around the hybrid newsroom.

While the last year has seen much discussion, and some individual organisations have taken substantial action, our findings suggest there has been no overall progress in addressing lack of diversity in the news industry as a whole, and more than a quarter of our respondents work in news organisations that are currently not taking any concrete steps to address these issues.

Some news organisations are just starting out on these journeys, others are already some way down the line. But even these companies recognise that there are no easy answers. It will be important to learn from early experiments, to keep a constructive dialogue with staff, and to change course as needed. We'll continue to track these debates in our *Changing Newsrooms* report next year.

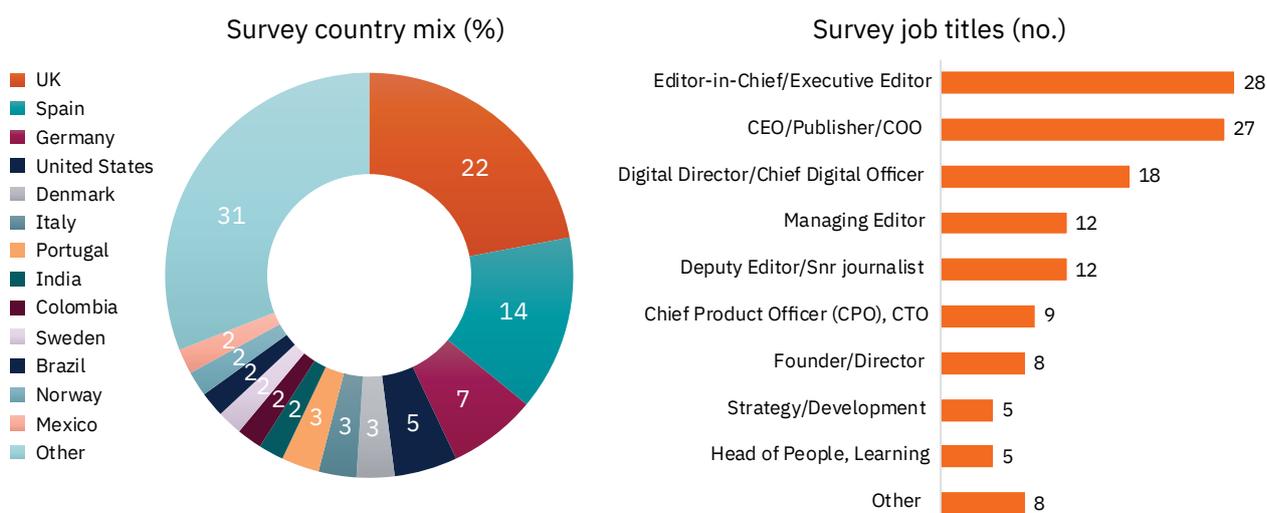
Survey Methodology

This report is based on a survey of a strategic sample of newsroom leaders from around the world. The questionnaire was sent directly to individual potential respondents by one of the three authors. It included both a set of closed questions and open-ended field for respondents to share their experiences.

Target participants were selected because they hold senior positions in a wide range of different traditional or digital-born publishing companies operating in different countries. The results reflect this strategic sample of select news industry leaders, not a representative sample. Because of the size and nature of the sample we report only top-line findings here, and no breakdowns or comparisons.

The survey was completed by 132 individuals from 42 countries between 1 and 24 September 2021. Participants hold senior positions in editorial, commercial, and product. Typical job titles included Editor-in-Chief/Executive Editor, CEO, Digital Director, Managing Editor, Chief Product Officer, and Chief Technology Officer.

Figure 14. Participants and countries surveyed



Base = 132 newsroom leaders surveyed, 42 countries, between 1 September 2021 and 19 September 2021.

Of these participants, 64 were from organisations with a print background (48%), 33 came from digital-born media (25%), 28 came from commercial or public service broadcasters (21%), and a further eight from news agencies or fact-checking organisations. While the survey was sent to news industry leaders in many different countries, the majority of the respondents are from the Global North, and most of them work in mid-size and large organisations. Our results thus do not fully capture the often very different situation faced by small organisations and those operating in poor and/or authoritarian countries.

Women accounted for around a third (32%) of respondents, men 68%. This in part reflects the relative lack of diversity in more senior positions in the industry, highlighted by our

respondents themselves, and documented in our own previous research (e.g. our finding that women make up only 22% of top editors in the sample analysed by Robertson et al. 2021a). Participants filled out an online survey with specific questions around remote working, diversity, and talent in 2021. Around 90% answered all questions, although response rates vary. The majority contributed comments and ideas in open questions and some of these are quoted with permission in this report.

List of Interviewees

Positions held at the time of the interviews

Jane Barrett	Global Editor for Media News Strategy, Reuters, UK
Phil Chetwynd	Global News Director, AFP, France
Steven Gan	Editor-in-Chief, Malaysiakini, Malaysia
Alison Gow	Audience and Content Director, North-West, Reach, UK
Matilda E. Hanson	Deputy Managing Editor, <i>Dagens Nyheter</i> , Sweden
Maike Jungjohann	Head of Business Transformation, RTL News, Germany
Tracey Kirkland	Continuous News Editor, News Channel, ABC, Australia
Clémence Lemaistre	Deputy Editor Digital News and Transition, <i>Les Echos</i> , France
Katie Lloyd	Development Director, BBC News & Current Affairs, UK
Angela Pacienza	Executive Editor, <i>The Globe and Mail</i> , Canada
María Ramírez	Deputy Managing Editor, <i>El Diario</i> , Spain
José Antonio Sánchez	Digital Content Manager, <i>El Tiempo.com</i> , Colombia
Zach Seward	Co-founder and CEO, Quartz, USA

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Robertson, C. T., Selva, M., Nielsen, R. K. 2021a. *Women and Leadership in the News Media 2021: Evidence from 12 Markets*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Robertson, C. T., Selva, M., Nielsen, R. K. 2021b. *Race and Leadership in the News Media 2021: Evidence from Five Markets*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

RISJ PUBLICATIONS

SELECTED BOOKS

Hearts and Minds: Harnessing Leadership, Culture, and Talent to Really Go Digital
Lucy Kueng

Worlds of Journalism: Journalistic Cultures Around the Globe
Thomas Hanitzsch, Folker Hanusch, Jyotika Ramaprasad, and Arnold S. de Beer (eds)
(published with Columbia University Press)

NGOs as Newsmakers: The Changing Landscape of International News
Matthew Powers (published with Columbia University Press)

Global Teamwork: The Rise of Collaboration in Investigative Journalism
Richard Sambrook (ed)

Journalism and the NSA Revelations: Privacy, Security and the Press
Risto Kunelius, Heikki Heikkilä, Adrienne Russell and Dmitry Yagodin (eds) (published with I.B.Tauris)

Something Old, Something New: Digital Media and the Coverage of Climate Change
James Painter et al.

Journalism in an Age of Terror
John Lloyd (published with I.B.Tauris)

The Right to Be Forgotten: Privacy and the Media in the Digital Age
George Brock (published with I.B.Tauris)

The Kidnapping of Journalists: Reporting from High-Risk Conflict Zones
Robert G. Picard and Hannah Storm (published with I.B.Tauris)

Innovators in Digital News
Lucy Kueng (published with I.B.Tauris)

Local Journalism: The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media
Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (ed) (published with I.B.Tauris)

Journalism and PR: News Media and Public Relations in the Digital Age
John Lloyd and Laura Toogood (published with I.B.Tauris)

Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions
John Lloyd and Cristina Marconi (published with I.B.Tauris)

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Overcoming Indifference: What Attitudes Towards News Across the Global North and South Tell Us About Building Trust
Benjamin Toff, Sumitra Badrinathan, Camila Mont'Alverne, Amy Ross Arguedas, Richard Fletcher, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Digital News Report 2021
Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Anne Schulz, Simge Andi, Craig T. Robertson, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

An Ongoing Infodemic: How People in Eight Countries Access and Rate News and Information About Coronavirus a Year into the Pandemic
Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Anne Schulz, and Richard Fletcher

Listening to What Trust in News Means to Users: Qualitative Evidence from Four Countries
Benjamin Toff, Sumitra Badrinathan, Camila Mont'Alverne, Amy Ross Arguedas, Richard Fletcher, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Race and Leadership in the News Media 2021: Evidence from Five Markets
Craig T. Robertson, Meera Selva, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

Women and Leadership in the News Media 2021: Evidence from Twelve Markets
Craig T. Robertson, Meera Selva, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions 2021

Nic Newman

Women and News: An Overview of Audience Behaviour in 11 Countries

Meera Selva and Simge Andi

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Benjamin Toff, Sumitra Badrinathan, Camila Mont'Alverne, Amy Ross Arguedas, Richard Fletcher, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Daily News Podcasts: Building New Habits in the Shadow of Coronavirus

Nic Newman and Nathan Gallo

Few Winners, Many Losers: The COVID-19 Pandemic's Dramatic and Unequal Impact on Independent News Media

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Federica Cherubini, and Simge Andi

Changing Newsrooms 2020: Addressing Diversity and Nurturing Talent at a Time of Unprecedented Change

Federica Cherubini, Nic Newman, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

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J. Scott Brennan, Anne Schulz, Philip N. Howard, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

Old, Educated, and Politically Diverse: The Audience of Public Service News

Anne Schulz, David A. L. Levy, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

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