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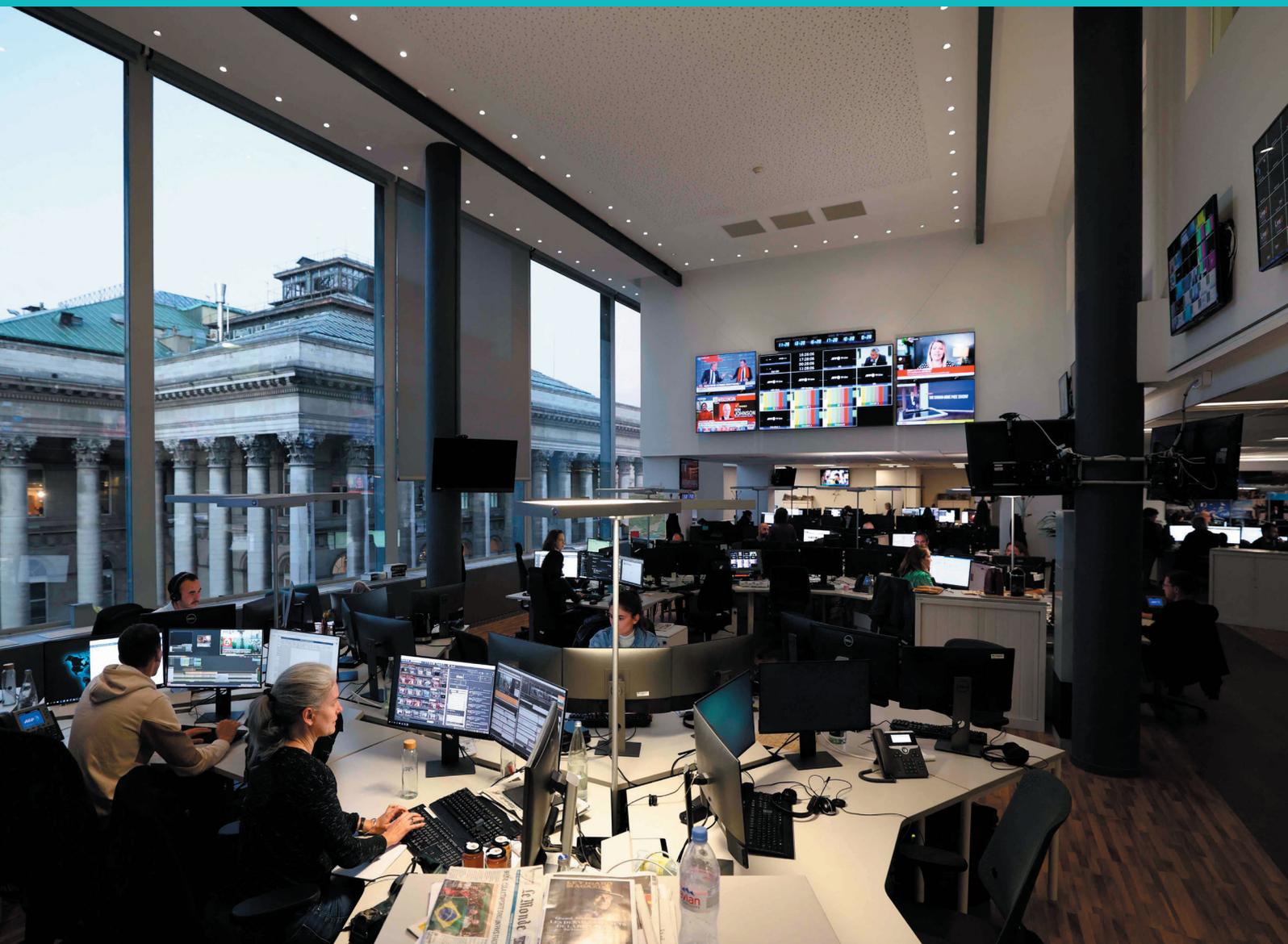
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Changing Newsrooms 2022

Media Leaders Embrace Hybrid Work Despite Challenges

Federica Cherubini

REUTERS INSTITUTE REPORT • NOVEMBER 2022



Changing Newsrooms 2022: Media Leaders Embrace Hybrid Work Despite Challenges

Federica Cherubini



Published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of
Journalism at the University of Oxford.



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About the Author

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Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to **Rasmus Kleis Nielsen**, **Nic Newman** and **Richard Fletcher** for their feedback and input on this report.

Gretel Kahn Sasso conducted some of the in-depth interviews as research assistant.

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic showed us that some of the assumptions we had about work were wrong. Across many industries, work had a dedicated place: the office. But lockdowns and enforced remote working made many realise that another way was possible, accelerating a quest by employees for flexibility and increased autonomy. In 2021, senior news industry leaders told us that they – and their organisations – were on board with the shift to hybrid and flexible working (Cherubini et al. 2021).

One year on, have newsrooms really transformed as a result of the shift initiated during the pandemic? Has the news industry truly embraced flexible and hybrid working? This report, which is based on a survey of 136 senior industry leaders from 39 countries and a series of in-depth interviews, tries to answer these questions and take stock of the status of the newsroom as a workplace and its future.

Beyond organisational structures, we also looked at the impact on the workforce and whether flexible and hybrid work has made it easier for newsrooms to hire and retain talent. Moreover, we asked industry leaders whether they think that flexible working can have a positive impact on their diversity, equity and inclusion strategies, and their ability to have a more diverse and representative workforce.

Among other things, we find that:

- News organisations have embraced the shift, with 61% of the survey respondents saying that their organisation has largely implemented hybrid and flexible working with new rules in place for staff. The majority of leaders who participated in the survey (57%) think their organisations are doing a good job with it. Even so, 20% of survey respondents report that while their organisations are making some changes, they largely want to return to a pre-pandemic working model.
- The most common approach, indicated by 49% of the survey respondents, sees staff required to be in the office for a compulsory minimum number of days a week/month. A further 29% of respondents indicated that their organisations follow a more voluntary approach, in which staff are expected to be in the office a minimum number of days of their choice.
- Having explicit rules, setting clear expectations and communicating them transparently – and, most of all, articulating the purpose of going to the office and making sure that the benefit of doing so is clear – helps when implementing flexible working models. But the jury is still out on whether employees actually want to be back in the office, with 39% of survey respondents reporting that their newsrooms are struggling to get people back, while 38% say they are not struggling.
- The office as a physical space has also changed: 47% of newsroom leaders said their organisations have already redesigned the office space to better accommodate hybrid working, with another 27% saying they are considering doing so. Almost one-third (31%) report that their organisation has already reduced their office premises.

- Almost half of survey respondents (49%) think that hybrid and flexible working has made hiring and retaining talent much or somewhat easier, while 65% think that hybrid and flexible working could increase their ability to hire diverse talent and have a positive impact on their diversity, equity and inclusion strategies.
- Looking at diversity, most of our respondents think their organisations are doing a good job with gender diversity (79%), but less so when it comes to ethnic diversity (47%), diversity from less-advantaged backgrounds (30%), and political diversity (27%).
- One-third (33%) of the leaders who participated in the survey indicated that gender diversity has been the single most important priority for their news organisations to change, while another 32% indicated it was ethnic diversity.

Getting hybrid and flexible working right is not just about having clear rules; persuading people back to the office requires more attention and intentional planning from management. It's about articulating what the purpose of the office and working together is. One of the effects of the pandemic and hybrid working on newsroom culture that newsroom leaders worry about is a mounting sense of disconnect among employees, with one-third (36%) of survey respondents believing that hybrid and flexible working has weakened the sense of belonging to the organisation.

Among other things, our respondents say that implementing new working models has also increased the pressure on managers, and particularly middle managers, who are left to be the conduit between leadership priorities and employees' requirements and expectations.

Beyond hybrid and flexible working, investing in talent and improving diversity remain two fundamental aspects the industry needs to focus on. Alongside concentrating on finding the right diverse talent that reflects the audiences they serve, news organisations will also need to make sure they establish a sense of connection and shared purpose with their staff, in order to retain them and build an inclusive workplace culture.

Beyond implementing specific initiatives, often focused on broadening the talent pipeline, the road to transforming newsrooms into a diverse and inclusive place is still long.

This report is based on a survey of a strategic sample of news industry leaders, completed between 27 September and 28 October 2022, and it is complemented by seven in-depth interviews. Respondents include editors-in-chief or executive editors, CEOs, and managing editors, as well as other senior positions in editorial, talent development, and commercial. 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; our results thus do not capture the often very different situations 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, therefore, it 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, although 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.

1 Hybrid and Flexible Working Are Here to Stay

1.1 Newsrooms have embraced the shift to hybrid and flexible working

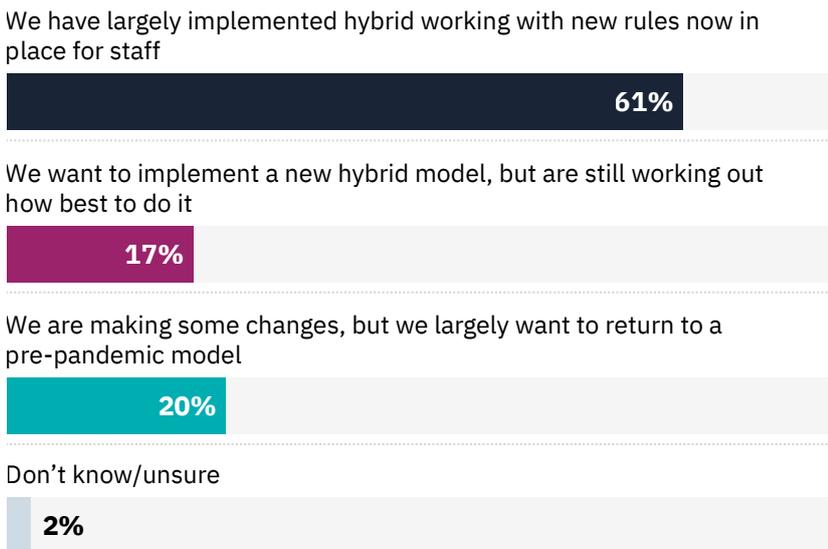
Last year, a newsroom leader who participated in the Changing Newsrooms 2021 survey (Cherubini et al. 2021) described the moment as a ‘once-in-a-lifetime opportunity’ to reshape newsrooms and the ways we work. The COVID-19 pandemic had altered people’s lives, and one of the consequences was that many businesses, including the news industry, were first forced to move many of their staff to remote working, and then instituted a hybrid set-up, with some employees working from home and some from the office. In the 2021 study, which we conducted between September and October 2021, most of the news leaders who participated (79%) had declared their organisations were on board with the shift to hybrid and flexible working, and even more – 89% of the respondents – said they were themselves committed to it.

One year on, have newsrooms really transformed as a result of a shift initiated during the pandemic? And has the news industry truly adopted flexible and hybrid working?

According to this year’s survey, news organisations have embraced the shift to a hybrid and flexible working model. Sixty-one per cent of the survey respondents say that their organisations have largely implemented hybrid and flexible working, with new rules in place for staff.

An additional 17% said their organisations want to implement a new model, but they are still working out how to best do it. However, 20% of newsroom leaders who participated in the survey indicated that, while their organisations are making some changes, they largely want to return to a pre-pandemic working model.

Figure 1. Current news industry thinking on hybrid and flexible working

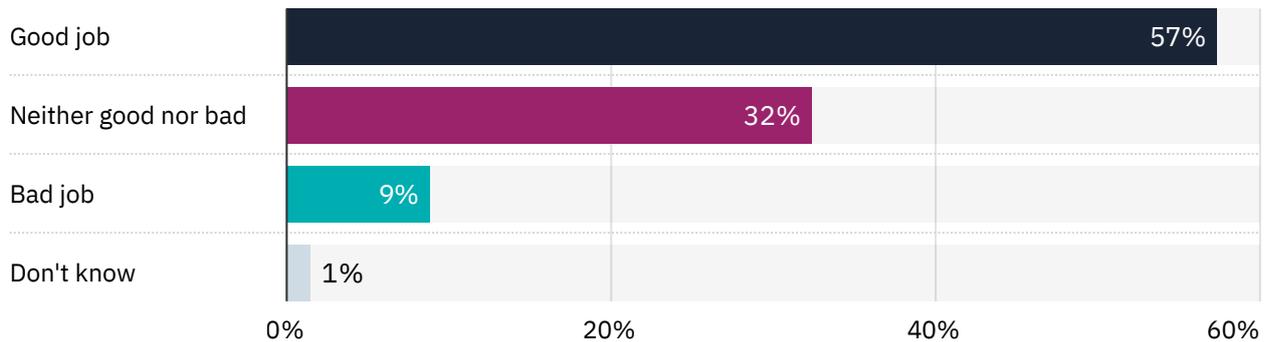


Q4. To the best of your knowledge, where is your news organisation’s thinking in terms of embracing a hybrid and flexible working model? N=136.

In some instances, the back-to-work plans implemented by some organisations have led to disagreements between staff and management, as in the case of Italian national title *Corriere della Sera*, where newsroom staff staged a protest as a result of the organisation’s leadership declaring the end of flexible working.¹ Earlier in September, the new ‘return to the office’ policy was also among the causes of a protest by more than a thousand *New York Times* employees.²

In our survey we asked senior industry leaders whether they thought their organisations were doing a good or a bad job in managing the shift to hybrid and flexible working; the majority (57%) opted for a positive answer and said their organisations were doing a good job. (It is not always clear that rank-and-file staff necessarily agree.)

Figure 2. How news leaders think their organisations are handling hybrid and flexible working



Q2. Is your news organisation doing a good job or a bad job in managing the shift to flexible/hybrid working? N=136.
 Note: Numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

For many newsroom leaders it seems clear that hybrid working is here to stay. ‘I don’t think that we will ever come to a time where hybrid is not a way of life,’ said Mpho Raborife, Managing Editor at online publication News24 in South Africa. ‘We embraced the uncertainty – with a very flexible framework that gave teams a lot of room for experimenting. That helped find individual solutions, enabling most colleagues to get a better work–life balance,’ agreed the CEO of a German news publisher.

For some, adopting new ways of working means embracing the best of both worlds, explained Natalia Uval, Editor-in-Chief of *La Diaria* in Uruguay:

I think we are doing a good job because we take good things of virtual working (effectiveness, punctuality, comfort) and good things of face-to-face work (human interaction, discussions, collective construction).

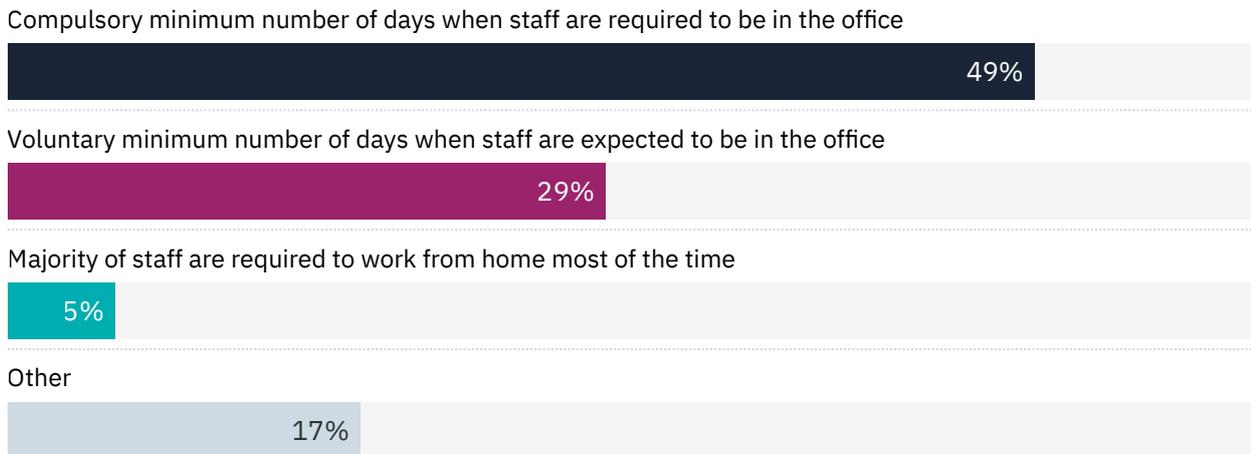
¹ https://www.corriere.it/cronache/22_ottobre_07/comunicato-comitato-redazione-risposta-editore-f4948638-4592-11ed-ae76-796653a6438b.shtml

² <https://nypost.com/2022/09/12/nearly-1300-new-york-times-workers-pledge-not-to-return-to-office/>

1.2 Communicating with clarity matters

When it comes to how news organisations are implementing hybrid and flexible working, the most common approach, indicated by 49% of survey respondents, see staff required to be in the office for a compulsory minimum number of days each week or month. A further 29% of participants indicated that their organisations follow a more voluntary approach, in which staff are expected to be in the office a minimum number of days of their choice. In other cases, employees are encouraged to come to the office on common days, but there is no formal expectation for them to do so. Five per cent of survey respondents indicated that their organisations require the majority of staff to work from home most of the time.

Figure 3. Approaches news organisations are following when implementing hybrid and flexible working



Q5. Which approach comes closest to how your news organisation is tackling the issue of flexible/hybrid working? N=136.

Some organisations are deliberately experimenting with different approaches to determine the best set-up, as in the case of UK publisher DC Thomson, which is adopting different rules across its offices and newsrooms, in order to monitor uptake and staff reactions. ‘We’re trialling two different approaches,’ explained Chief Transformation Officer Tom Miller:

We have newsrooms in two cities in Scotland, so we’re testing a different approach with each. The headquarters where I am right now in Dundee is taking a very flexible approach. Everybody is welcome back, the offices are open, but we’re not mandating any required attendance. [In] the office in Aberdeen, we are trialling two fixed days per week, so they have what we call focus days on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, when all the newsroom attends. And then we have one more flexible but mandated day as well. So, it’s Tuesday and Wednesday plus one other day of their choosing.

Miller said that the company hasn’t decided yet which approach they will choose: ‘I don’t know which way it will go yet. We’re still listening,’ he concluded.

When it comes to identifying the best approach, regardless of which specific approach is chosen, many agree that communicating with clarity helps. ‘There is a very clear framework for working remotely and a good HR tool to plan and keep track of who is working hybrid and who will come in,’ commented Ezra Eeman, Change Director at Mediahuis in Belgium.

‘The rule is clear,’ explained a French newsroom manager, describing a formalised approach with eight or ten days of home working per month and a minimum of two days per week present in the office. ‘It’s very flexible,’ they added, ‘You can decide at the last minute to be working from home according to your duties of the day [or] your personal life.’

Looking more in detail at how flexible working is implemented, the most popular approach seems to be based on a variation of a 3-2 model, with three days in the office and two at home, or the reverse. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are very often mentioned as office-dedicated days.

In some cases, rules on office attendance inside the same organisation vary, with individual managers tasked with deciding what’s best for their teams. Variations can also occur between departments. According to one Spanish manager, flexibility is well established in their organisation’s product and development teams, whereas journalists are expected to be more present in the office. It remains to be seen whether different groups accept such variations as reasonable and legitimate, or whether this will become a source of friction going forward.

The survey highlighted differences also between roles and not just teams:

[It] depends on their role – reporters only have to be in the office once a week, [whereas] editors must be in the newsroom, but can work from home if necessary.

Editor-in-Chief, daily regional newspaper in Germany

Different newsroom cultures and generational differences are other variables to consider. Some reported younger staff being keener on working from the office, while some senior managers prefer to work from home (perhaps in part to avoid commuting and enjoy the comfort of their houses). However, the opposite is also true, with survey participants describing instances in which some senior editors and executives are insisting that staff return to the newsroom full time, due to what’s been described as ‘visibility bias’, where the part of the team that shows up to the office is generally seen as more engaged.

It’s worth mentioning that in some instances where clear rules have been established, their terms have been negotiated with unions or staff representatives. In some cases this is due to the labour laws and regulations that exist in certain countries.

However, having clear rules or frameworks doesn’t automatically mean that frameworks are followed, or rules enforced. In some cases this is done on purpose to allow flexibility. A manager at a British publication says:

A minimum of two days per week, with days decided by team leaders, has been recommended but not enforced, allowing flexibility in arrangements and a sense that people will try to be together, rather than forcing them to attend the office. Exemptions are still in place for staff with health considerations.

In other cases, the lack of enforcement creates a lack of clarity and a grey area, leading to ‘an increasing gap between a de facto situation and policy framework,’ as one participant described it. ‘The company allows us to work remotely, but it’s not really arranged. There was one email about the time you are required to be in the newsroom, but there is no supervision as far as I can tell,’ added a Dutch editor.

Policy-wise, we have moved to flexible working. But we have not yet convinced the bulk of our staff to return for two days a week.

Executive Editor, global newsroom

Some organisations, even when they have put clear rules in place, continue to re-evaluate the situation, as Francisco Balsemão, CEO of Impresa media group in Portugal, explained:

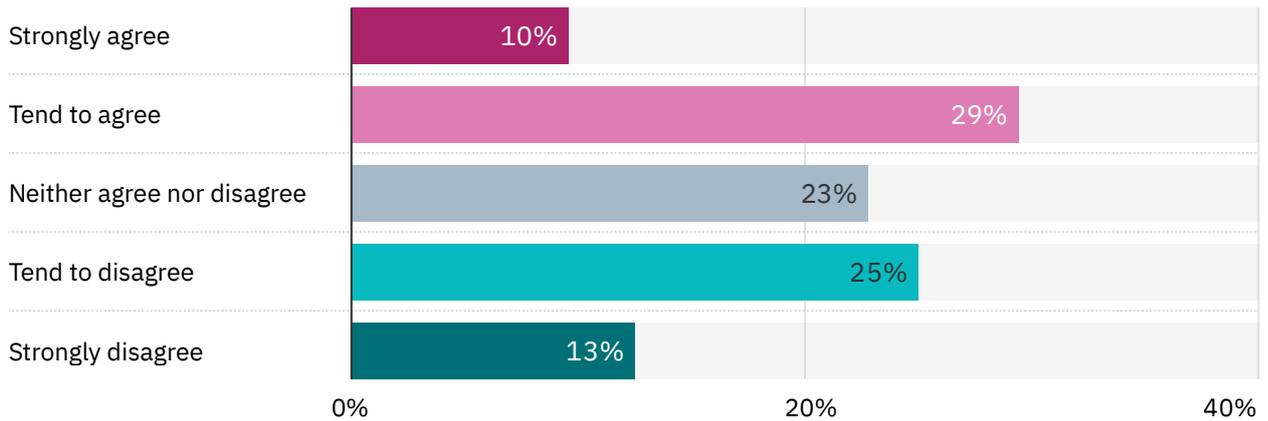
We implemented a model whereby employees can work three days at the office and two at home. However, there are safeguards for the company, i.e. employees don’t have a right to WFH [work from home], it is a benefit that can be revoked on an ad hoc basis if the company needs people to be at the office [for a project, breaking news, etc.]. This provides flexibility for employees but also for the company.

1.3 Do staff want to be back in the office?

Regardless of what rules organisations have put in place in terms of home versus office work, opinions are divided on whether staff are effectively coming back to the office. At the end of summer 2022, there were reports of other industries also battling with their employees to get them back into the workplace.³

In the survey, we asked managers and news executives whether they felt their organisations were struggling to get people back: 39% agreed or strongly agreed that their organisations were having a hard time persuading people to return to the office, while 38% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The media leaders who responded to our survey may have a clear sense of what they think ‘good’ looks like, but aligning vision and reality is as always a challenge.

³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/06/success/return-to-office-hybrid-mandates/index.html>

Figure 4. Some news leaders struggle to get staff back in the office

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My organisation is struggling to get staff back into the office. N=136.

In their annual *Work Trend Index* report, Microsoft found that more than one-third (38%) of employees working a hybrid model say their biggest challenge is knowing when and why to come into the office.⁴ In response to that, one of the report's main takeaways is that leaders need to make the office worth the commute.

When we asked in our survey what approaches news leaders have found to be effective in persuading their staff back into the office, many mentioned organising events and social activities; promoting 'team innovation' days or 'work-from-work' days; ensuring more people are present on the same day to make the office feel alive; and providing free food. 'No one wants to be the only person in the office. So, [we're] focusing our efforts on particular days to create the best environment,' commented the CEO of a UK publication.

Mpho Raborife, Managing Editor of News24 in South Africa, said that the organisation has been very deliberate in its choice of vocabulary when communicating the need to get back to the office to the newsroom. They stress that the goal is not to bring people into the building for the sake of it, but to 're-establish that social fabric between the teams and establishing their creativity, and allowing for the off-the-cuff banter that used to exist before.'

Getting people back to the office also requires more attention and intentional planning from management.

According to the CEO of a German publisher, what helped in their case was making more sense of days in the office, commonly and openly redefining what the purposes of real-life meetings are. 'Getting them to see the benefits of coming back is crucial, meaning it has to make a difference to their workflow, inspiration,' agreed the executive editor of a French online news outlet.

Staff must have good reasons to come back to the office, so we must give them good reasons: useful meetings, useful interactions, a comfortable place to work.

Natalia Uval, Editor-in-Chief, La Diaria, Uruguay

⁴ The 2022 *Work Trend Index* is based on a study of 31,000 people in 31 countries. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/great-expectations-making-hybrid-work-work>

‘The value of the office is in the people, not the place,’ wrote Microsoft’s Chief Marketing Officer Chris Capossela in an article for the *Harvard Business Review* (Capossela, 2022).

Examples of successful flexible working environments rely on clarity of expectations and communication, intentional planning and trust:

Successful flexible working environments are built on trust and have led to more satisfied and more diverse teams when resources are invested in developing that trust.

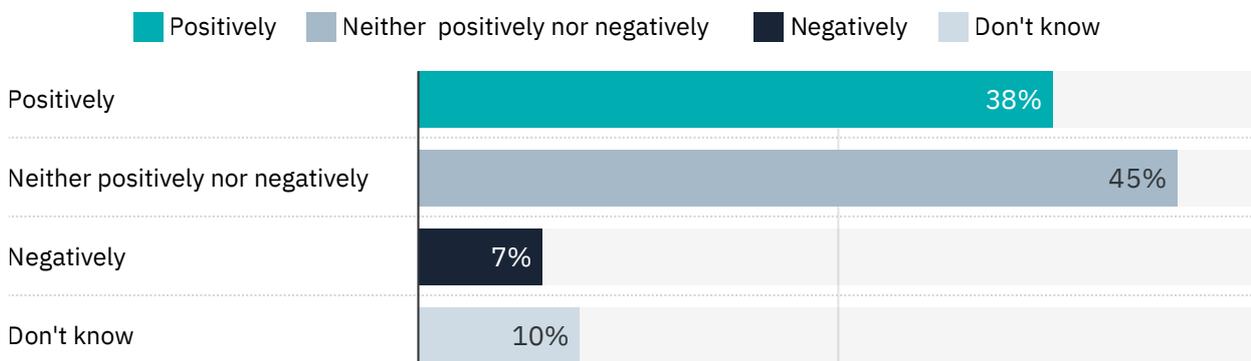
Editor at US online-only publication

1.4 The effects of the pandemic and hybrid working on newsroom culture

A SENSE OF DISCONNECTION

In last year’s report, efficiency and increased productivity were seen as some of the biggest gains of the shift to hybrid and remote working (Cherubini et al. 2021). One year on, while some worry about a loss in productivity, many of our survey respondents don’t see a clear impact of hybrid and flexible working on productivity: 45% says the shift to hybrid and flexible working has neither positively nor negatively impacted productivity, while 38% says it has impacted it positively.

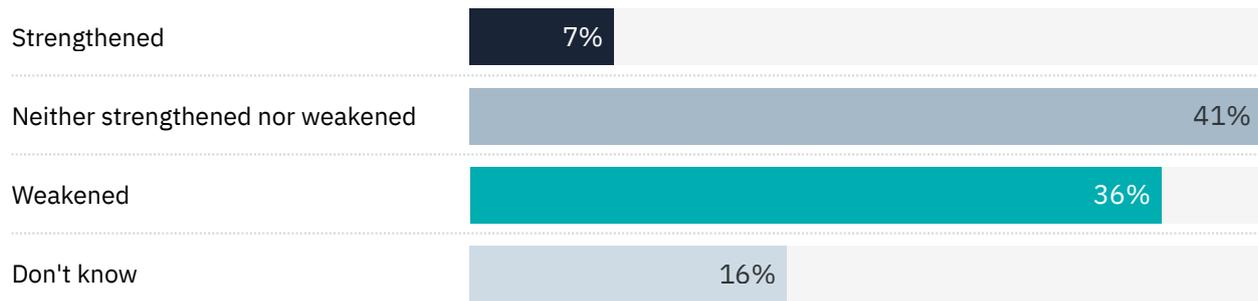
Figure 5. How flexible and hybrid working has impacted productivity



Q10. The shift to hybrid/flexible working has impacted positively or negatively staff’s productivity? N=135.

As several survey participants have remarked, one of the main benefits of coming back to the office revolves around re-establishing human connections and personal relationships.

More than one-third (36%) of survey respondents say that the shift to hybrid and flexible working has weakened the staff’s sense of belonging to the organisation.

Figure 6. How flexible and hybrid working has impacted the staff's sense of belonging to the organisation

Q9. The shift to hybrid/flexible working has strengthened or weakened staff's sense of belonging to the organisation? N=135.

Tom Miller, Chief Transformation Officer at DC Thomson, said that the company is conducting surveys as part of the evaluation process, to establish the best approach to flexible working. One of the issues they are trying to determine, he said, is if people have a stronger sense of connection to the company depending on whether they are working remotely or from the office, and whether they feel that their views are still represented when they are working from home.

Making sure people feel connected and part of the organisation even when working remotely is one of the main challenges study participants have identified. 'Not meeting each other really hurts the sense of community and shared purpose,' explained the director of a Hungarian media company. 'We try to encourage people to come to the office every now and then because there's so much energy, so many ideas that get generated,' agreed Naresh Fernandes, Editor and Founder of digital news site Scroll in India. 'And you need to [be reminded of] the spirit of the organisation and the organisational ethos, which comes only when people are hanging together,' he added.

Part of the answer to this challenge resides in a more intentional approach from management. 'We're learning that flexibility is good, but it must be coupled with intentionality,' commented Keri Mitchell, Executive Director at *Dallas Free Press*, USA.

If the challenge of re-creating or re-asserting the bonds within a team or across different teams in the newsrooms has been mentioned by many, the issue is even more pronounced when onboarding new staff. 'Integrating new hires into our culture, so everyone "feels" what it means to be a *Standard editor*,' is what Martin Kotynek, Editor-in-Chief of *Der Standard* in Austria, has described as the main challenge his newsroom is facing in transitioning to a hybrid set-up. 'In the past this just happened, now it has to be managed. But there's no going back to the past, that's just the way work works now,' he added.

The same challenge is highlighted by a senior executive at a public service media company:

We have hundreds of employees who have joined since the pandemic and really have no connection to the organisation beyond Zoom. Remote work has, in my opinion at least, eroded the organisational culture and created a far more transactional environment. In a mission-driven creative organisation that is arguably problematic.

In last year's study, communication was one of the aspects that were deemed more difficult to get right in a remote setting.⁵ Learning how to have difficult conversations and dealing with conflict or internal disagreement in hybrid and remote environments is proving hard for managers and is increasingly the focus of management training programmes.

A proactive approach to counterbalance the risk of disconnection among staff is not limited to efforts to drive people back together to the workplace; it also lies in intentionally erasing the disparities between at-home staff and in-person staff in how they experience the company's culture. It's been harder, some editors mentioned, to spot staff members who are drifting away.

To maintain the ties among his distributed newsroom, Naresh Fernandes, Editor and Founder of Indian outlet Scroll, mentioned that he's personally been putting in extra effort, talking to everyone in his organisation on a weekly basis. 'I talk to people individually as often as I can. We're trying to build these personal ties, especially for people who might be feeling isolated,' he said.

POSITIVE EFFECTS ON INCLUSIVITY

Alongside the risk of a deepening sense of disconnect among employees, hybrid and remote working also has positive implications. 'Staff working across a very large geographical patch are now more included than ever. With hybrid working so commonplace, people don't feel excluded if they're not in the office,' remarked Emily Hewett, Head of Audience Development at DC Thomson.

According to others, hybrid working also enables employees to redefine their boundaries with the employers, focusing on productivity and measurable output rather than defaulting to presenteeism. 'This can be empowering for team members if they feel confident enough to seize the chance,' a senior editor at a global organisation commented.

THE PRESSURE ON MANAGERS

The added layer of complexity when it comes to making sure that extra planning goes into re-imagining what working together means, driven by intentionally rebuilding relationships and re-aligning on purpose, has put additional pressure on managers.

'The biggest challenges around hybrid newsrooms are managerial,' commented the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of a French regional publication.

According to the latest Future Forum Pulse report (2022), burnout is on the rise in the global workforce, with 43% of middle managers who participated in its survey reporting that they feel burnt out at work.⁶

Managers now are not only responsible for translating their organisation's strategy into day-to-day priorities and tasks for their staff, but also are required to embrace a new style of leadership

⁵In *Changing Newsrooms 2021* (Cherubini et al. 2021), survey respondents highlighted the negative impact they felt remote working was having on softer skills – such as creativity, communication, and collaboration – with more than four in ten (43%) saying communication had suffered.

⁶The October 2022 Future Forum Pulse report is based on a survey of 10,766 workers across the US, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, and the UK, conducted 3–21 August 2022.

that includes the ability to take care of their people and articulate the purpose of the work. Hybrid newsroom work requires a ‘new kind of management and planning,’ according to the chief digital officer at a Finnish media company.

Earlier this year, the *Harvard Business Review* described the problem as a ‘performance-compassion dilemma’, in which managers – especially middle managers – are trapped, torn between performance demands from their managers above and calls for compassion from their team and direct reports (Gardner and Mortensen 2022). Middle managers are on the front line of office life, wrote Emma Jacobs in the *Financial Times* in September 2022, ‘from motivating staff to maintaining company culture, demands on team leaders intensify as they juggle the expectations of employees and senior leaders’ (Jacobs 2022). Phil Chetwynd, Global News Director at Agence France-Presse (AFP), commented:

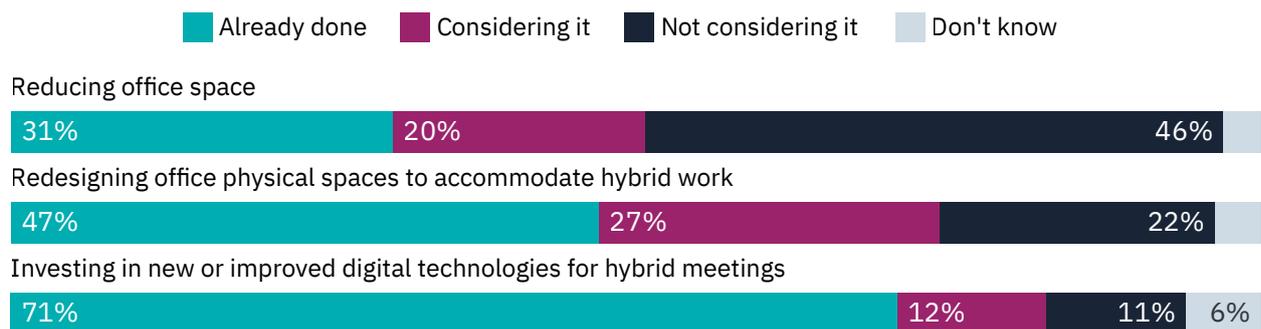
The biggest challenge is the extra pressure and stress on managers keeping track of team members in different locations and ensuring smooth communication. The challenge of staff using multiple communication platforms is also considerable and adds to the management challenge.

1.5 Redesigning the office space and improving the tools

The pandemic and flexible and hybrid working also had some impact on office space. Our survey shows that 47% of newsroom leaders said their organisations have already redesigned the physical office space to better accommodate hybrid working, with another 27% saying they are considering doing so. Almost one-third (31%) report that their organisation has already reduced their physical space.

The vast majority (71%) report having already invested in new or improved technologies to ensure good performance of hybrid meetings.

Figure 7. How newsrooms have changed office space and technology tools



Q8. To your knowledge, as part of the move to more flexible/hybrid working, which of the following has your organisation done/is considering/is not considering? N=136.

In the UK, DC Thomson has invested significantly in upgrading their audio-visual technology, Tom Miller said, stressing that one of the reasons was to counterbalance presenteeism and make sure that people joining meetings remotely are not at a disadvantage.

2 The Impact of Flexible Working on the Workforce

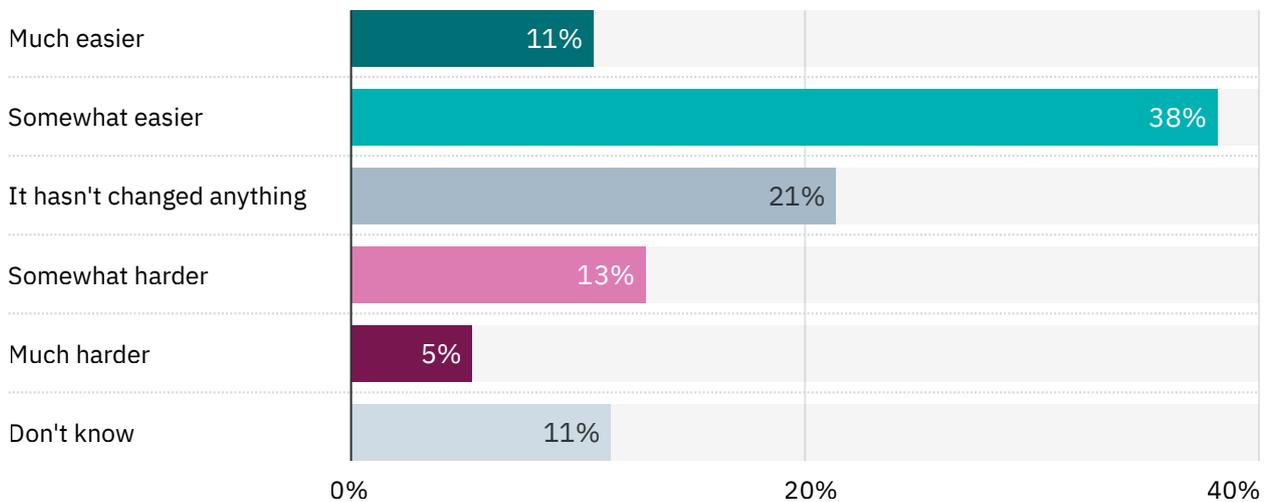
2.1 Flexible working is a plus for recruitment but has its challenges

During the COVID-19 pandemic many people, finding themselves confined to enforced remote working and seeing the lines between their personal and professional lives blurring, were prompted to rethink some aspects of their lives, including the role work plays. We read about the Great Resignation, with some employees quitting their jobs in high numbers and making changes to their lives ⁷ For some, remote and flexible working has been one of the potential answers to this issue.

In our survey we wanted to look at the extent to which flexible and hybrid working has had an impact on the workforce, and if it really was providing an opportunity for news organisations to hire more distributed teams.

The results seem to be pointing in this direction: almost half of survey respondents (49%) think that hybrid and flexible working has made hiring and retaining talent much easier or somewhat easier. Twenty-one per cent think that it hasn't substantially changed anything, and 18% think it made it much harder or somewhat harder to acquire and retain talent.

Figure 8. Most media leaders think flexible working has made talent acquisition and retention easier



Q12. To what extent the experience of hybrid and flexible working has made recruitment and retention easier or harder to address? N=131. Note: Numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

A general consensus in our study points to hybrid and flexible working as an expected subject of conversation with new hires, with some news leaders stressing that the first thing most job candidates want to know is whether the organisation allows some remote working and how many days they will have to be in the office. Many won't consider a non-remote-friendly or non-flexible job, some editors said.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Resignation

Being able to offer flexible working arrangements is seen by many industry leaders as a competitive advantage, but they also recognise that it brings some challenges:

Hybrid working has opened up opportunities for recruitment across several borders. But this has also made competition for talent fiercer and made recruitment and retention somewhat harder.

Adesola Afolabi, Deputy Editor, Stears, Nigeria

There is also awareness that this stops being a competitive advantage the moment that other companies embrace the same flexible policies. The CEO of a German publisher commented:

That also works the other way around – competitors from other cities could make our colleagues better offers without them having to move. Competition will surely become stronger.

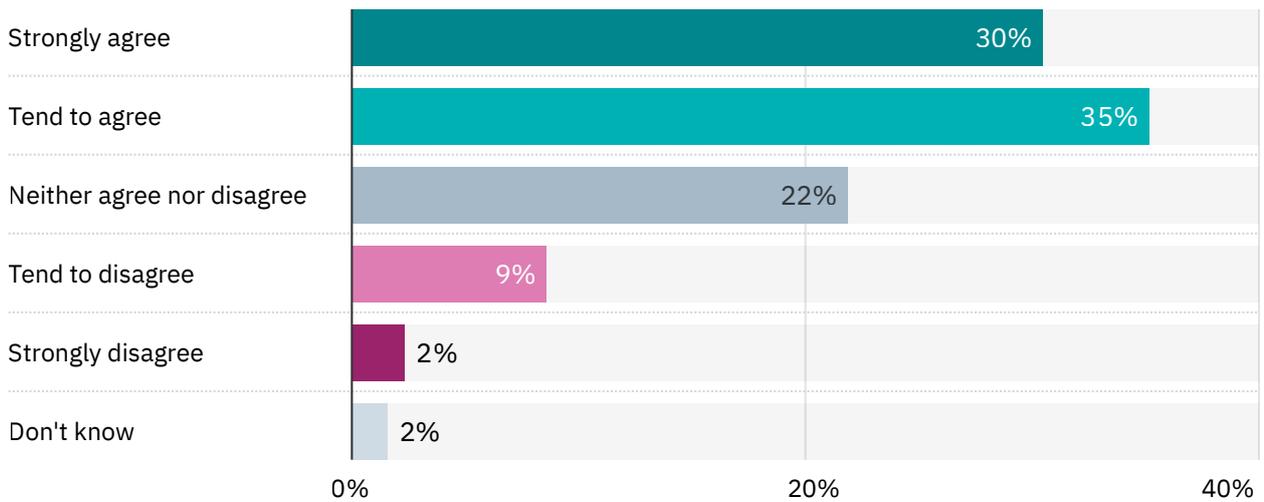
Several news leaders underlined the advantage of having access to a wider pool of talent, without the constraints of geography and having to hire staff in the vicinity of newsroom offices or headquarters. This seems a particularly appealing point when trying to hire talent whose skillsets are in high demand and for which competition from other industries (that often can pay higher salaries) is fiercer, as in the case of engineering and product talent.⁸

At the same time, several survey participants highlighted how much harder it is to establish relationships with the new hires and develop a strong sense of belonging to the organisation, with many fearing the effect this will have on retention. ‘Hybrid work allows us to recruit top talents, but those who join from home have some difficulties integrating with the team,’ commented Francesca Milano from Italian news podcast company Chora Media. Members of staff can feel isolated and lose the sense of purpose that brought them to journalism in the first place, commented one French editor. ‘It’s made recruiting remote talent easier, but I think it’s made retention harder,’ said the Editor-in-Chief of a global newsroom. ‘It’s difficult to gauge on video calls how someone is feeling about work or if they might be thinking of leaving and try to mitigate those situations,’ they added.

In the survey we asked newsroom leaders whether they thought that hybrid and flexible working could increase their ability to hire diverse talent and have a positive impact on their diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. Sixty-five per cent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, but beyond seeing it as a possibility from survey comments and interviews it still seems too early to establish a direct link between the two.

⁸ Only 28% of the Changing Newsrooms 2021 survey respondents said they were confident about attracting and retaining talent in commercial, 27% in data science, and 18% in the technology area (Cherubini et al. 2021).

Figure 9. Most media leaders think hybrid and flexible working could help with improving diversity in newsrooms

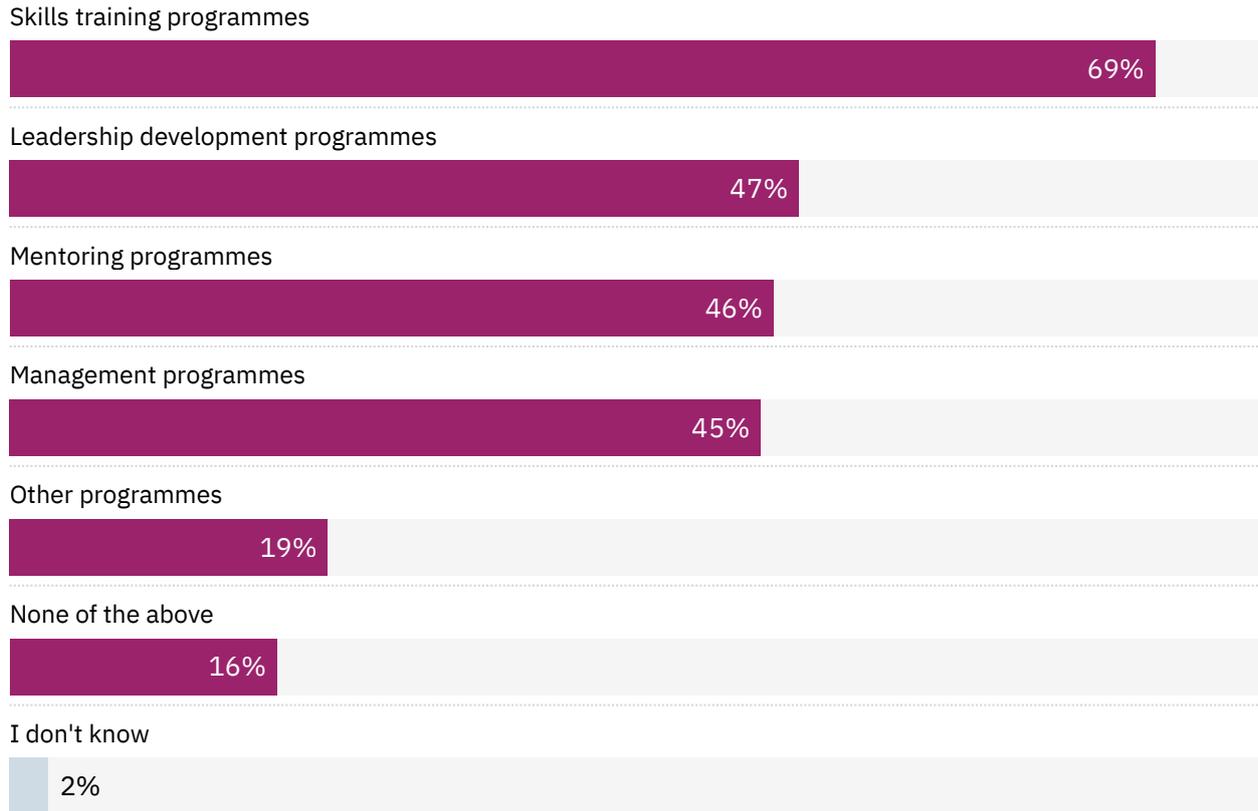


Q20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Hybrid and flexible working can increase our ability to hire diverse talent and have a positive impact on our diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. N=128.

2.2 Investing in learning opportunities

Another aspect that was often raised, both in last year’s and this year’s study, is how the absence of staff in the newsroom was endangering the ‘learnings by osmosis’ process, where more inexperienced staff learn, in part, by being able to observe how colleagues behave and engaging in casual conversations in the newsroom.

We asked newsroom leaders what their organisations are doing to promote a culture of continuous learning. Sixty-nine per cent of survey respondents indicated their organisations run skills training programmes, 47% indicated leadership development programmes, 46% mentoring programmes and 45% management programmes. Other programmes mentioned include recurrent talks, workshops and ‘lunch-and-learn’ sessions.

Figure 10. What news organisations are doing to promote a culture of continuous learning

Q14. According to some, hybrid and home working has highlighted the challenge of relying solely on a 'learning by osmosis' culture - what is your newsroom doing to promote a culture of continuous learning? Select all that apply. N=131.

Last year the *New York Times* launched a Newsroom Culture and Careers Department, with the specific intent of investing in the development of their workplace culture and creating an enriching environment for their staff.⁹ Transforming the organisation's culture was identified as the cornerstone of the strategy to build a more diverse, equitable and inclusive *New York Times*, as detailed in a diversity report (*New York Times* 2021; Robertson 2021).

In February 2022, Associated Press also announced the appointment of two new roles focused on developing newsroom talent: a director of news talent for development, tasked with leading internal training, growth and mentorship opportunities, and a director of news talent for recruitment, whose job is aimed at bringing new, diverse journalists into the organisation.¹⁰

⁹ <https://www.nytco.com/press/introducing-our-newsroom-culture-and-careers-department/>

¹⁰ <https://blog.ap.org/announcements/ap-names-2-directors-for-newsroom-talent>

3 Progress on Diversity: A Long Road Ahead

As in past years, there was no shortage of conversations in the journalism industry about the need to continue to diversify newsrooms and make them more representative and more inclusive.¹¹ However, previous research has shown that progress in these areas is slow. Taking a sample of ten top online news outlets and ten top offline news outlets in 12 markets, Eddy et al. (2022a) found that only 21% of the editors in the sample analysed were women, even though, on average, 40% of journalists in those 12 markets are women. The top-line figure was 22% across the same markets in the previous year. Looking at race, the overall percentage of non-white top editors in a strategic sample of 100 major online and offline news outlets in five different markets across four continents was 21%, despite the fact that, on average, 43% of the general population across all five countries is non-white (Eddy et al. 2022b). While some steps are being taken in some organisations, despite all the talk it is not at all clear that substantial progress is being made by the industry overall.

The conversation about diversity is a nuanced one, as much of the context varies country by country and is the result of different historical, cultural and societal backgrounds. For global organisations, for example, the challenge is to truly reflect that global nature: ‘We are finding diversity and inclusion are complex concepts. We need to be careful not to impose an Anglo-American view on this hot topic. We have a very global newsroom, and the issue is viewed very differently from Kinshasa to Paris to New York,’ explained Phil Chetwynd from AFP. Based on the recommendations of a diversity committee that was set up in May 2021, AFP has implemented some changes in the last year, including hiring a diversity editor, giving priority to scholarship holders for work-study contracts, and launching two new scholarships aimed at identifying new talent: one for Arabic-speaking journalists in the Middle East and North Africa, and the other for Spanish-speaking journalists in Latin America.^{12,13}

Rules across different countries also vary in terms of what information the law allows organisations to track. An executive editor at a French outlet explained how matters are complicated by the fact that in France organisations are not allowed to collect data about diversity. ‘We tend to hire more people [with a focus on] diversity, but we lack [the] tools because there’s no real organisation or institution which is dealing with the issue in French journalism,’ they commented.

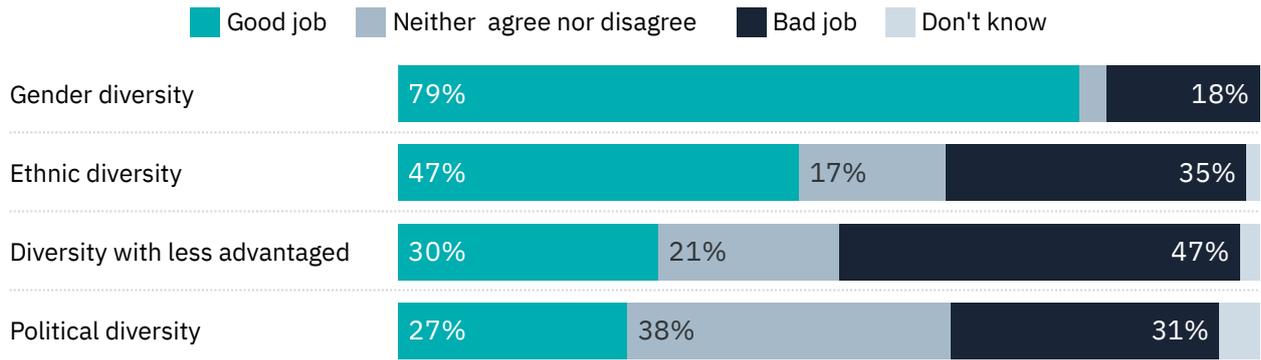
As in previous Changing Newsrooms surveys, we wanted to get a sense from senior industry leaders of their assessment of their organisations’ results when it comes to diversity. The majority of our respondents think their organisations are doing a good job with gender diversity (79%), but less so when it comes to ethnic diversity (47%), diversity from less-advantaged backgrounds (30%), and political diversity (27%).

¹¹ <https://wan-ifra.org/2022/02/what-are-the-qualities-of-an-inclusive-editor-and-why-it-matters/>

¹² <https://www.afp.com/en/agency/press-releases-newsletter/afp-appoints-first-diversity-editor>

¹³ <https://www.afp.com/en/agency/press-releases-newsletter/afp-appoint-diversity-editor>

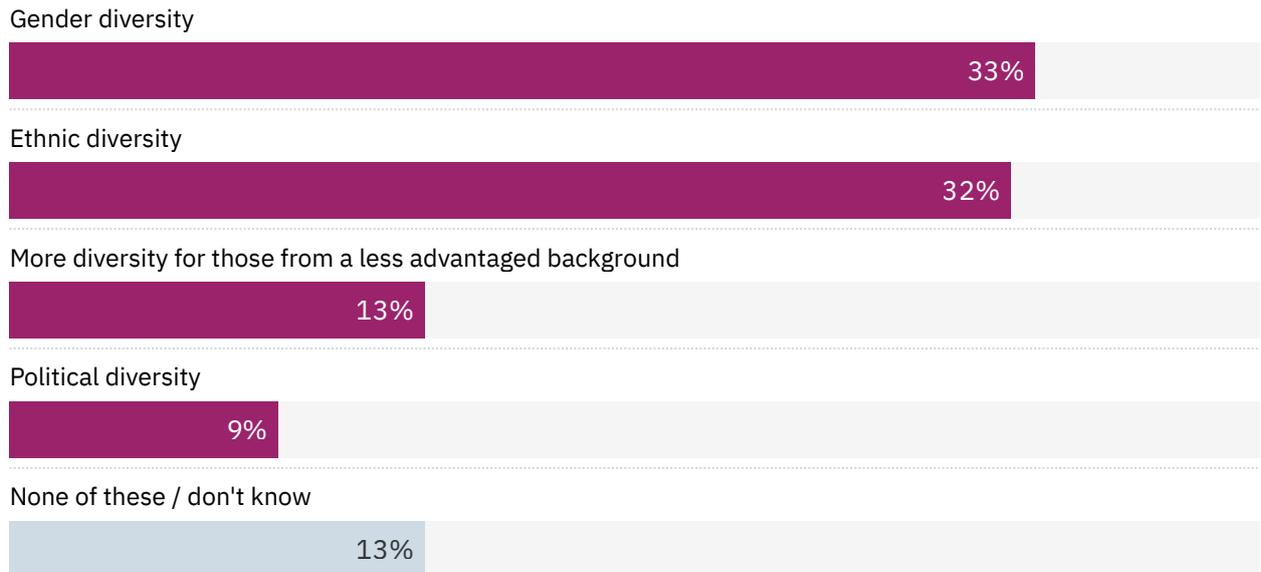
Figure 11. How news leaders think their organisations are doing in terms of diversity



Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I feel my news organisation is doing a good job when it comes to gender diversity | ethnic diversity | diversity with less advantaged | political diversity. N=129.

This year one-third (33%) of the leaders who participated in the survey indicated gender diversity as the single most important priority for their news organisation to change, while another 32% indicated ethnic diversity, followed by more representation of those from a less-advantaged background (13%) and more political diversity (9%).

Figure 12. Gender and ethnic diversity are seen as the top priorities for change



Q18. In terms of improving newsroom diversity which of the following is the single most important priority for your news organisation this year? N=128.

For some organisations the focus on diversity is seen as a competitive advantage in terms of finding diverse talent. ‘We are a small newsroom, but diversity is one of our strongest assets and it comes naturally because of the type of content we work on,’ explained Alia Ibrahim, co-founder and CEO of Daraj Media in Lebanon. She continued, ‘Since we create content that focuses on marginalised groups and underreported minorities, we tend to attract journalists and content producers who belong to those categories, and this reflects on the structure of our team.’

In some countries, geographic diversity is also a dimension to consider, as this Colombian editor explains: ‘We have focused on regional diversity, bringing interns from regional public universities to be less Bogota-centred and less elitist.’

Some leaders have mentioned working on bridging a generational gap, others a societal background one. ‘We are welcoming teenagers from underprivileged areas to spend a week in the newsroom, to discover how it works so they can feel legitimate to embrace the career if they are interested,’ explained the editor of a French local outlet. ‘We think it is the right age: early enough. Our difficulty to increase diversity in the newsroom comes from very little diversity in the students coming from journalism courses,’ they added.

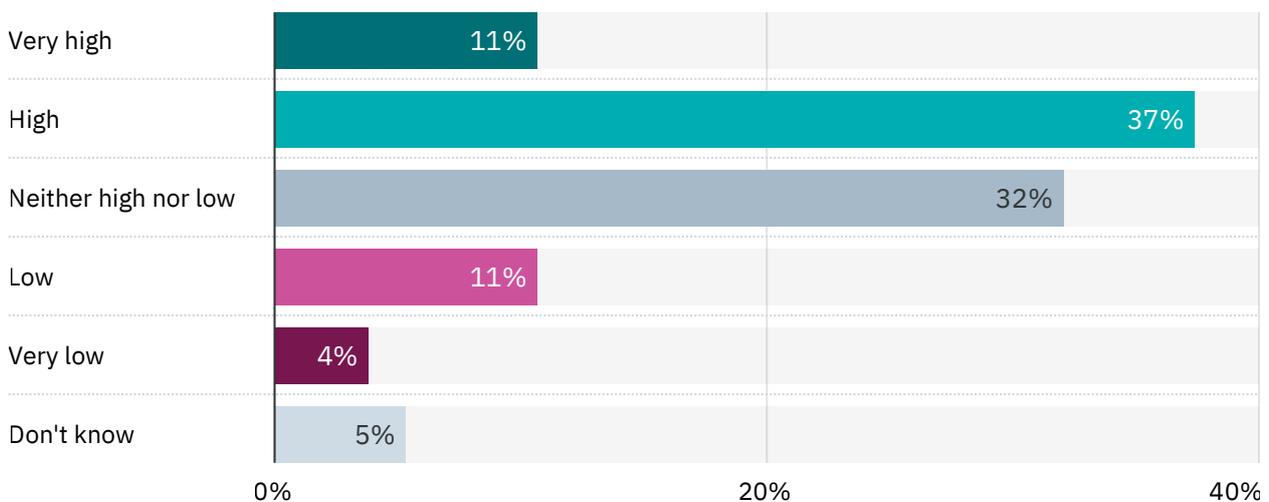
In Germany, CORRECTIV also has a youth programme, publisher David Schraven told us, which is focused on educating talent from diverse backgrounds and setting up newsrooms in regions that are underrepresented or in the provinces.

Several survey participants mentioned in their comments initiatives to improve talent acquisition, with activities like hiring through consultants specialised in historically underserved groups, conducting an anonymised sifting of job applicants (initially reviewing their assessments without looking at their names), and ensuring more diversity in hiring panels.

Despite the initiatives, some constraints might play a role in limiting results. ‘We are in many ways well set up, with proper initiatives and stated goals,’ explained a British editor. ‘But staff turnover is very low and can be a real impediment to change,’ they added.

This is a reminder that many organisations, in particular legacy newspapers and broadcasters, are trying to adapt existing, often long-standing, structures that often come with built-in inequalities along many lines, including gender, ethnicity and race, and class. This also applies to when people joined an organisation, especially when we compare those who joined in the early 2000s or before to those who joined later. Asked about how concerned they are about intergenerational divides around pay and working conditions in their company, 48% of our respondents say they have high or very high levels of concern over this, whereas just 15% express low or very low concern.

Figure 13. Levels of concern about intergenerational divides around pay and working conditions



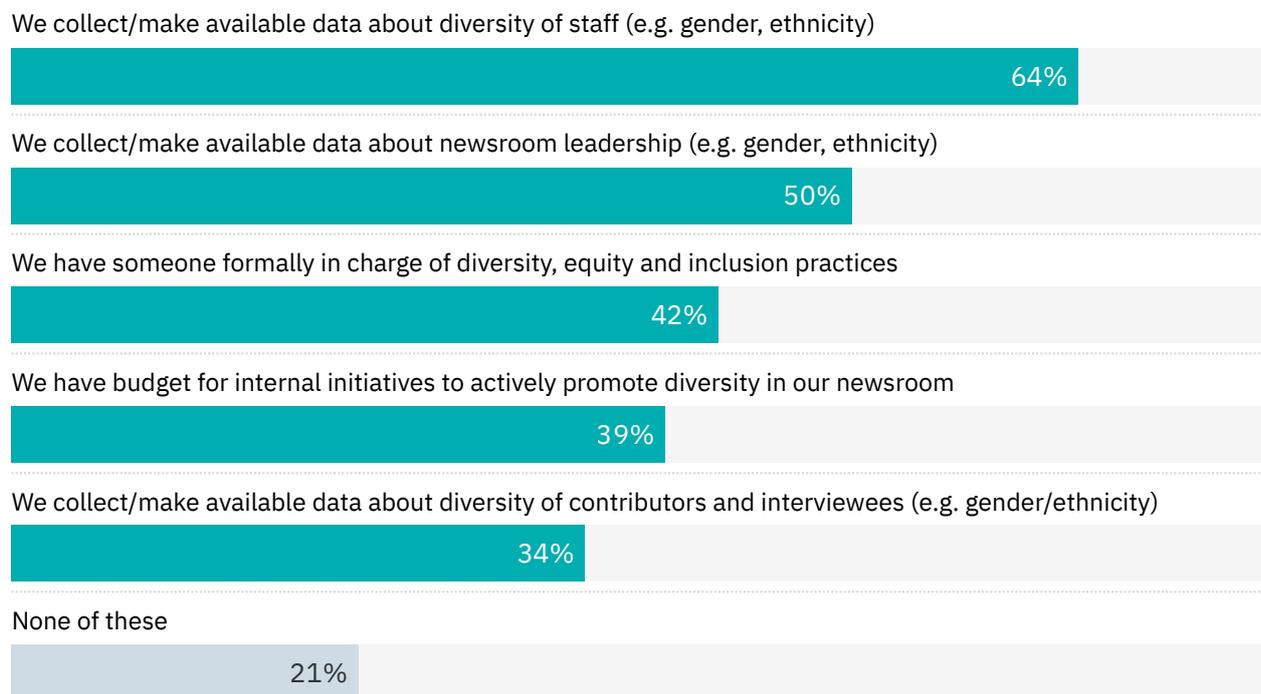
Q16. What is your level of concern about intergenerational divides around pay and working conditions in your company? N=131.

3.1 Diversity and inclusion initiatives

As in 2021, we asked editors and executives what initiatives their organisations have put in place to track progress on diversity: 64% said their organisations are collecting and making available diversity data about their staff and 50% also have data about the diversity of their newsroom leadership. Forty-two per cent of survey respondents said their organisations have someone in charge of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and 34% said they collect and make available data about the diversity of contributors and interviewees.

Just 39% of respondents said they have budget for internal initiatives to actively promote diversity in their newsrooms, and 21% said their organisations have none of the initiatives listed in place.

Figure 14. What news organisations are doing in terms of diversity



Q19. To the best of your knowledge, does your organisation do any of the following? Select all that apply. N=125.

In some cases, to make up for the lack of company-wide initiatives, or in other cases simply to complement them, some leaders have started to play a more proactive personal role. ‘I’ve created mentorship opportunities both inside [the company] and with outside mentors to give a wider view of not just the current media landscape but what is possible,’ explained an editor in a US publishing group.

3.2 Examples of initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion

In a previous issue of this report (Cherubini et al. 2020) we highlighted some of the initiatives that have been undertaken by news organisations to foster diversity, including the BBC’s 50:50 Equality Project, and technology-led initiatives that use bots to track the gender diversity of experts and sources they quote, as in the case of *Dagens Nyheter* in Sweden and the *Financial Times* in the UK (Borchardt et al. 2019).

Below we share some projects and industry initiatives, which is by no means meant to be a comprehensive list of what's being done, nor does it indicate a value judgement on their results. Nevertheless, we hope they can provide some interesting examples.

EqualVoice

EqualVoice by Ringier Group, Switzerland

EqualVoice is an initiative from the Ringier media group in Switzerland.¹⁴ Started in 2019 by Annabella Bassler, the group's Chief Financial Officer, the project leverages AI to promote equal representation of women and men, making women more visible in media coverage and giving them an equal voice.

Using a semantic algorithm EqualVoice measures the visibility of women in articles published by Ringier and Ringier Axel Springer Switzerland. It does so by looking at two indicators: the Teaser Score, which evaluates the visibility of women in images, headlines and titles, and the 'Body Score', which shows how often women and men are mentioned in an article's text.

Every online outlet in the group gets a score that reflects how many women are represented in their reporting. The data is tracked live and is displayed through dashboards, where journalists can see the traffic to their articles and the number of women that are represented, explained Stefan Mair, Head of Newsroom Coaching for EqualVoice. The tool is used by 100 newsrooms in the Ringier group and its implementation has recently started in newsrooms in the Axel Springer media group in Germany. Mair explained that each newsroom sets its own goals and then reports its results to the executive board twice a year. There are no formal consequences for missing a goal, but the accountability of the reporting process is enough to keep the newsrooms engaged, Mair said.

Alongside the score tracker, the project has introduced side initiatives like the EqualVoice expert list, a database of 500 women in different fields in Switzerland, and the EqualVoice Summit, where media industry leaders are invited to Zürich to discuss representation of women and diversity in media.

Through semantic and picture analysis, EqualVoice also plans to look at how women and men are represented in the story. As an example, Mair cites an instance in which the analysis showed that women were represented, but often as victims, whereas the experts who helped identified solutions were always men.

¹⁴ <https://www.equalvoice.ch/en/>



Language, Please by Vox Media, USA

Inspired by discussions in the newsrooms about how to best use language that can be truly inclusive and help readers understand a topic without risking perpetuating stereotypes, Vox Media launched a project in July 2022 called Language, Please.^{15,16}

The project, we read on its website, is a ‘free, living resource available to all journalists and storytellers seeking to thoughtfully cover evolving social, cultural, and identity-related topics’. It includes:

- A style guidance with a list of terms for definitions that add context, explain usage debate, and suggest related content, with categories like disabilities, neurodiversity, and chronic illness, class and social standing, and borders and populations.
- An inclusivity reader directory to access readers with expertise in a particular subject.
- Editorial tools, including downloadable tip sheets, infographics, and an interactive edit exercise to spark conversations and facilitate thoughtful decision-making around story framing, language usage, and more.

¹⁵ The project was funded by the Google News Initiative Innovation Challenge.

¹⁶ <https://languageplease.org/>



Different Perspectives, by Swedish Radio, Sweden

At Swedish Radio, fostering diversity can take different shapes in different teams or departments, Julia Blomberg, Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator, told us. She explained that the organisation conducts a gap analysis to identify what different perspectives and competences are needed to enhance each division. 'It can be gender, it can be ethnicity, it can be age, it can be different skills, we don't focus on any special [area], it's different for every department,' she said.

Blomberg explained that since 2021, SR's strategy has been focused on three different areas. First, aiming to deliver credible and impartial content to their audience every day; second, to consciously recruit people with different perspective and skills that will be reflected in the content produced; and third to ensure that everyone inside the organisation is contributing to an inclusive and learning workplace culture.

On the content side, SR's aim is to increase their journalistic presence throughout the entire country. They've done so by setting up pop-up newsrooms in 290 municipalities across Sweden to make new connections and get more perspectives and voices from the people living there. 'We educate our staff in mapping out demographics so that we can cover more areas and make journalism more relevant to our audience,' Blomberg explained.

In terms of talent acquisition, a new recruitment team works alongside hiring managers to help them advertise and recruit roles, with a long-term view of filling the gaps that the gap analysis identified. 'We also started a training programme this summer for people without a journalistic degree but with different or specific language skills that we really need, especially for the minority languages in Sweden,' she continued.

Crucially, Blomberg told us, fostering diversity goes beyond recruitment and requires creating a workplace culture that makes sure that new talent wants to stay and thrive inside the organisation. 'We work a lot with leadership or self-leadership trainings, [we run] unconscious bias training and we develop different toolboxes with team building exercises about feedback calibrations, psychological safety, and so on.'

Conclusion

We're in a time of great possibilities: newsrooms have the chance to reset how they work; re-align staff on their organisation's purpose and vision; invest in finding a diverse talent that represents the audiences they want to reach and serve; and focus on nurturing and retaining that talent by creating an inclusive workplace culture.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees proved that many of their tasks could be done remotely. Two years on, our study shows that news organisations have embraced hybrid and flexible working, but they are still figuring out how to best implement it while seeking a balance between individual needs and business needs. There is no going back to a time where hybrid work is not part of our lives, one interviewee told us, so newsrooms should use the opportunity to re-assess what they missed during the time of enforced remote working – social and personal relationships, a shared sense of purpose, the ability to collectively define and shape newsroom culture, the sharing of learnings provided by people working together across different generations, levels of expertise and skillsets – and intentionally planning for it. A key issue will be to persuade staff of the value and purpose of going back to the office.

The report highlighted the additional pressure managers – and particularly middle managers – have been put under, as the ones tasked with implementing hybrid models, while following strategic business priorities and trying to strengthen the social fabric of the organisation.

Our survey participants told us that hybrid and flexible working is an issue raised by job candidates – and in many cases an expectation – when hiring new talent. Many industry leaders see in this the opportunity to broaden the pool of talent they can reach and a chance to increase their ability to hire a more diverse workforce and have a positive impact on their diversity, equity and inclusion strategies. Whether this will become a reality is still to be seen.

Still, retaining that talent is seen as a harder task. Managers in our survey talk about a sense of disconnect among their staff and the fear that hybrid and flexible working is leading to a weakening sense of belonging to the organisation.

Improving the talent pipeline and focusing on talent acquisition is also often mentioned as part of the initiatives news organisations are undertaking in the pursuit of their diversity goals. Yet, even in the recognition that the topic is a complex and nuanced one, which varies greatly country by country, society by society, it is not at all clear that news media generally have built more truly inclusive workplace cultures. While some organisations look like they are making some progress and several new initiatives have been introduced, for all the talk, it is not clear that substantial progress is being made by the industry overall.

The challenges of how to successfully embrace hybrid and flexible working while also significantly improving the diversity of the workforce remain significant, and they are not made easier by the backdrop of rising costs of living, wars, conflicts and social tensions around the world, increasing limitations to press freedom in some countries, and declining trust levels from the audience (Newman et al. 2022). Meaningful journalism is the product of brave and

dedicated journalists, supported by organisations that focus on investing in and nurturing their talent and promoting inclusive workplace cultures. While they cover developments in the world, newsrooms should make sure they don't forget to evolve with that world.

List of Interviewees

Positions held at the time of the interviews

Julia Blomberg, Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator, Swedish Radio, Sweden

Naresh Fernandes, Editor and Founder, Scroll, India

Stefan Mair, Head of Newsroom Coaching for EqualVoice, Ringier, Switzerland

Sandra E Martin, Head of Newsroom Development, *Globe and Mail*, Canada

Armando Mayorga, Managing Editor, *La Nación*, Costa Rica

Tom Miller, Chief Transformation Officer, DC Thomson, UK

Mpho Raborife, Managing Editor, News24, South Africa

Survey Methodology

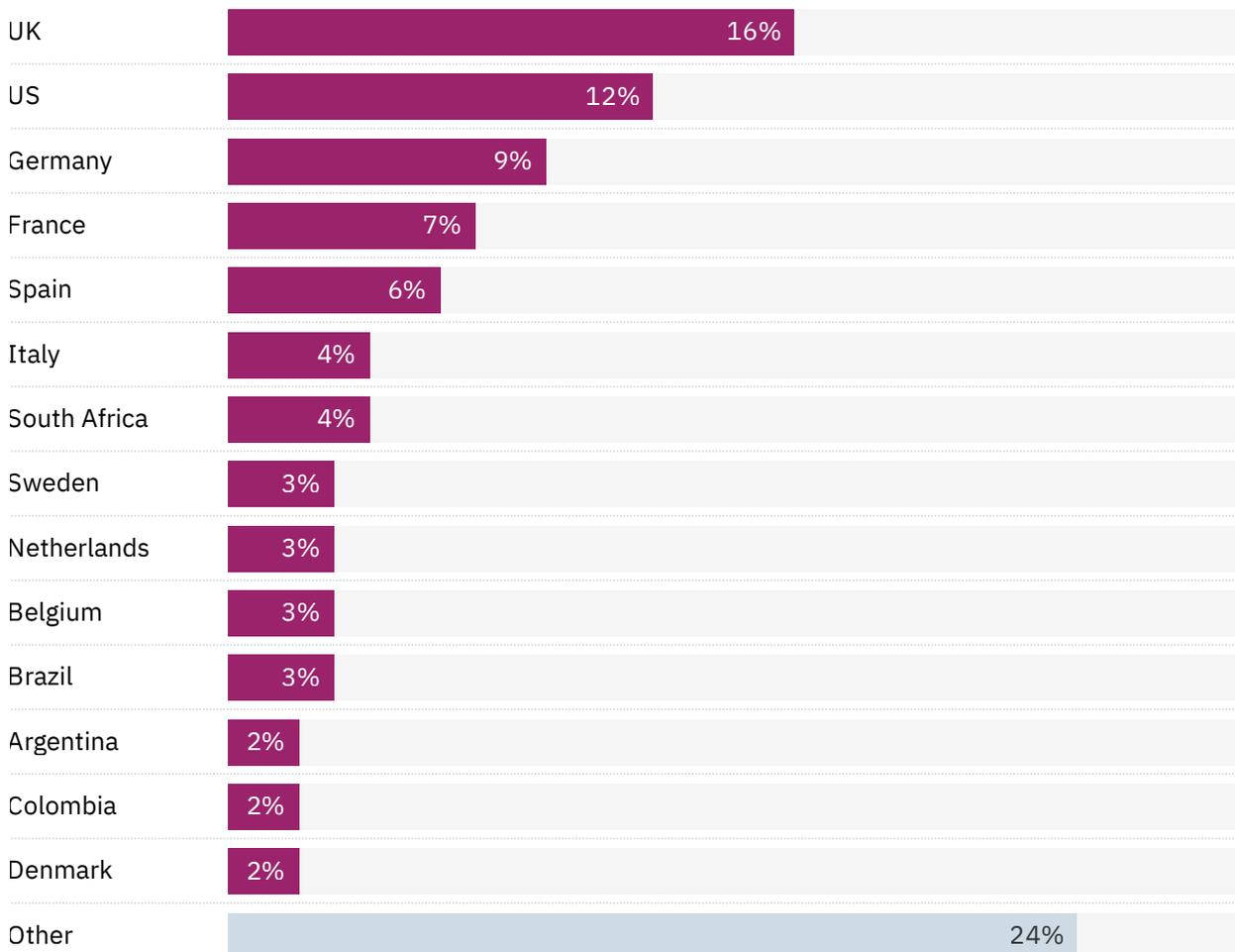
This report is based on a survey of a strategic sample of newsroom leaders from around the world. The questionnaire was sent directly by the author to individual potential respondents. It included both a set of closed questions and open-ended fields for respondents to share their experiences.

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 136 individuals from 39 countries between 27 September and 28 October 2022. Participants hold senior positions in editorial, commercial, and product. Typical job titles included Editor-in-Chief/Executive Editor, CEO, Digital Director, Managing Editor, and Deputy Editor.

Figure 15. Participants and countries surveyed

Survey country mix (%)



Base = 136 individuals from 39 countries between 27 September and 28 October 2022.

Survey job titles (no.)

Editors-in-chief/Executive editors	29
CEO/Publisher/General Director	28
Deputy Editors	10
Digital Directors/CDOs	7
Managing Editor	3
Audience editors	3
Others	56

Base = 136 individuals from 39 countries between 27 September and 28 October 2022.

Of these participants, 57 were from organisations with a print background (42%), 52 came from digital-born media (38%), 18 came from commercial or public service broadcasters (13%), and a further five from news agencies and two podcast companies. 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 46% of respondents, men 54%. Participants filled out an online survey with specific questions around flexible and hybrid working, talent, and diversity in 2022. Around 95% answered all questions, although response rates varied. The majority contributed comments and ideas in open questions and some of these are quoted with permission in this report.

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Lucy Kueng

Worlds of Journalism: Journalistic Cultures Around the Globe
Thomas Hanitzsch, Folker Hanusch, Jyotika Ramaprasad, and Arnold S. de Beer (eds)
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NGOs as Newsmakers: The Changing Landscape of International News
Matthew Powers (published with Columbia University Press)

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Richard Sambrook (ed)

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Risto Kunelius, Heikki Heikkilä, Adrienne Russell and Dmitry Yagodin (eds) (published with I.B.Tauris)

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Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (ed) (published with I.B.Tauris)

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John Lloyd and Cristina Marconi (published with I.B.Tauris)

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

Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022
Nic Newman, Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, Kirsten Eddy, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

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Kirsten Eddy, Meera Selva, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

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Kirsten Eddy, Meera Selva, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

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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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