

Positive renewal in newsrooms through crisis in crisis

GUDRUN RUDNINGEN

WORK RESEARCH INSTITUTE, OSLOMET, NORWAY

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study explores how the Covid-19 pandemic was an occasion for sensemaking and for (re)organising newsroom practices. Interviews with both journalists and editors from three Norwegian newsrooms in May 2022 demonstrate how the Covid-19 crisis was experienced as an opportunity for positive renewal and innovative ways of organising. The pandemic reinforced the ongoing changes in the media ecosystem and was hence viewed as a “crisis in crisis”. This chapter reveals the lived experience of the pandemic, and the findings offer an enriched understanding of how the crisis created opportunities for collective efforts and differentiation of modes of organising work guided by flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity.

KEYWORDS: newsroom, sensemaking, resilience, crisis in crisis, renewal

Rudningen, G. (2024). Positive renewal in newsrooms through crisis in crisis. In M. K. Solvoll, & R. Kr. Olsen (Eds.), *Innovation through crisis: Journalism and news media in transition* (pp. 65–84). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855923-3>

Introduction

I wonder – because you’re getting really fed up with corona, I’m sick of corona. Is there anyone who can bear to read what you come up with?
Or is it just going to be put in a drawer until someone is ready to read it?

The above question was posed to me by a journalist, in the middle of an interview, engagingly talking about the experience of being a journalist during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was two years into the pandemic, when lockdowns and much of the news interest in Covid-19 had come to an end, and many looked forward to a “new normal”. The quote addresses several interesting issues explored in this chapter: first, that Covid-19 is understood as a state of emergency, an isolated period one wanted to leave behind but that had some lasting effects; second, the state of mind among news workers when this research was conducted and how they perceived the pandemic narrative’s end; and third, an awareness of the epistemic value of studies *of* and *during* the Covid-19 pandemic, and what can be taken from them.

This book’s main question – How did Norwegian news media respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of innovation and value creation? – is addressed in this chapter by considering how the pandemic created opportunities for different modes of organising and innovation relating to work practices seen through narratives and insights from three Norwegian newsrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings are summarised in the concept of “crisis in crisis” based on how members of the news organisations experienced the pandemic as a crisis in an already existing crisis narrative – seen as both an occasion for (re)organising and a catalyst for positive change. The Covid-19 pandemic was hence experienced as meaningful, an experience that also ties to increased readership and motivation by the social responsibility aspect of their work. The initial excitement and work spirit was followed by a backlash, and this study shows how the enduring effects of the crisis encouraged collaborative efforts of innovation in journalistic work modes. These effects of remote and flexible working conditions formed a sensitivity to different modes of working creatively and collectively and a higher level of trust between editors and journalists, resulting in experiences of increased autonomy and solidarity. This chapter contributes to a wider understanding of how crises motivate different modes of organising in a situation in which the context of available technology, governmental regulations and recommendation, and organisation’s ability for resilience set the premise.

Theory and background – the “crisis in crisis”

Crisis is normally perceived in negative terms as the condition of disorder that follows the plot of rupture (Roitman, 2013). In this chapter, however, the aim is to enrich our understanding of the term crisis by exploring the Covid-19

pandemic as a possibility for positive renewal, leaning on the empirical material and existing theory of crisis (e.g., Turner, 1969; Weick et al., 1999). Crisis is a well-known concept, found in everyday speech as well as used (or maybe sometimes misused) in explaining the time we live in – “an omnipresent sign in almost all forms of narrative today” (Roitman, 2013: 3) and a key theoretical concept in modern society (Koselleck, 1959/1988). If we look at the etymology of crisis, tracing it back to ancient Greek, we arrive at the term *krinô*, meaning to separate, to choose, to decide, and to judge. Interestingly, this meaning of the term indicates creation of order. However, the term appears to be currently understood as the condition of disorder creating particular narratives, meanings, responses, and actions (Roitman, 2013). In organisational studies, the definition of crisis is highly fragmented, but folds into two main conceptualisations: crisis-as-event and crisis-as-process (Williams et al., 2017). Whereas the first reflects sudden incidents, threats, and disasters that cannot be planned for and responses seeking to get back to equilibrium, the latter regards crisis as developing over time, forming a new order and reflections. In a process-oriented view of organisational change, these are not necessarily exclusive perspectives. It is “the reweaving of actors’ webs of beliefs and habits of action as a result of new experiences obtained through interactions” in the attempt to prevent changes that actually generates them (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002: 570). Organisations are first and foremost stabilising chaos (Hernes, 2014). This theoretical lens is applied here to understand that change is fundamentally embedded in organisations, with organisations defined by a continuous becoming through human interaction.

To actively use the concept of crisis as a nexus for ethnographic investigation and analysis in relationships between persistence and change is not new in social sciences (Beck & Knecht, 2016), but in the global context of the Covid-19 crisis, existing literature falls short of fully understanding the complexity of the pandemic’s effects (Sarkar & Clegg, 2021). And even though news media have always been in flux, characterised by continuous uncertainty (Deuze, 2008) and continuously facing new challenges and reorganisations (Breese, 2015), the Covid-19 crisis is considered a critical moment to “rethink the meaning and practices of digital journalism”, and additionally, the research of it (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021: 1204). Crises are powerful occasions for sensemaking, both during and after a crisis, as they trigger creative and alternative reasoning despite the normal flow of events being disrupted (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Crisis always comes with some threats (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016), but crisis can be looked upon as encouraging a positive renewal through which new social order can be established (Turner, 1969), a precondition of hope: the awareness of multiple possibilities and the willingness to act under such conditions, “even embracing situations of uncertainty” (Kleist & Jansen, 2016: 383) and provoking positive adjustments through resilience (Weick et al., 1999).

In this book, the concept of resilience is applied to understand organisational change during crisis. We differentiate between three dimensions of resilience: first, persistence is the ability to regain stability or to get “back to normal”; second, adaptability refers to the ability to adapt or adjust; and third, transformability refers to a long-lasting radical renewal of the organisation (see Olsen & Solvoll, Chapter 1; Solvoll, Chapter 2). Thus, resilience is about collaborative sensemaking and (re)organising. In this chapter, I investigate crisis-driven innovation that takes place in newsrooms during a crisis in crisis.

The concept of crisis in crisis is based on how the informants in this study considered the Covid-19 pandemic as a crisis-as-event in an already pre-existing crisis-as-process – in other words, an isolated rupture in a prolonged chronic crisis. The grand media crisis narrative attests to the long period of economic instability and disturbance in the established news ecosystem over the last decades: an economic, political, and social crisis (Curran, 2019) marked by massive losses in revenues for print journalism, but also by technology-driven development, new forms of distribution (e.g., through social media), global competition, new user habits, and new media actors. Worldwide, the structures within which journalists operate have undergone fundamental changes during the last decades, and Norway is not an exception. However, Norwegian newspapers are market reliant yet publicly funded. They are operating in a well-established media system with institutionalised self-regulation, strong protection of press freedom, and a tech-savvy, news-reading population. Even though there is scholarly scepticism towards naming the period a crisis (Zelizer, 2015), the emic understanding of the state of the art these years attests to a chronic crisis, that is, that the conditions are endemic rather than episodic: Crisis has become the context (Vigh, 2008).

Recent studies of journalism assert how the Covid-19 pandemic has altered journalism, “facilitating the changes that were already taking place, creating new challenges and opportunities, exacerbating existing problems, and so forth” (Lee, 2021: 1433), and points to a crisis that became immersed in the changes that were already taking place (complying with the crisis in crisis concept). There is a vast body of recent research from all over the globe emphasising the effect Covid-19 has had on journalistic practices; in the US (Finneman & Thomas, 2021; Hoak, 2021), Australia (Hess & Waller, 2021), Europe (García-Avilés, 2021; García-Avilés et al., 2022; Libert et al., 2022; Šimunjak, 2022), Asia (Tandoc et al., 2022; Zhang & Wang, 2022), and Africa (Matsilele et al., 2022; Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2022; Santos & Mare, 2021). These studies mirror many of the findings presented in this chapter, and I draw on some of these insights throughout.

Method and data

This chapter draws on empirical data from three Norwegian news organisations: one local, one regional, and one national newspaper. The organisations are different in terms of newspaper reach, but similar in terms of organisation: with approximately 30 employees each, 36,000–76,000 daily readers, and owned by larger media companies. In addition, the organisation of work and challenges faced in the last decades and during the Covid-19 pandemic have been alike. In this chapter, I thus emphasise the similarities across newsrooms, rather than differences. In the years leading up to the pandemic, all newspapers went through a digital transition towards a focus on the online version of the newspaper with new digital tools, reorganisation of the newsrooms, and new digital business models (Rudningen Skjælaaen & Bygdås, 2019). The three newspaper organisations were part of a research project called OMEN – Organizing for Media Innovation (2015–2019) (Bygdås et al., 2019). I draw on insights from that project, but the chapter is mainly based on 15 semi-structured one-to-one interviews conducted in May 2022, most of them done face-to-face, but some on Microsoft Teams. Four to six interviews were performed in each organisation, and interviewees included management, journalists, and the union leader among the journalists. These interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, in which the interviewees were asked to recall the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, recapitulate the events that took place, and reflect on how these events affected newsroom work practices, relations, and cooperation.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed based on an inductive approach and a methodology inspired by grounded theory, in which theory is built in a flexible and innovative way (Gioia et al., 2013). The analysis is empirically based and thematically structured, and this chapter has been written around the codes that arose from the material (e.g., “motivation”, “social responsibility”, “fatigue”, “collective practices”, “meaningful”, “media crisis”, “sources”, “tools”, “trust”, “flexibility”, and “hybrid meetings”). The quotes for each code were the starting point for writing the analysis, and the themes were inspired by these codes and quotes. Some of the themes derived directly from one code (e.g., social responsibility), others were joined together (e.g., flexibility and collective practices; and meaningful and readership). Interview excerpts quoted in the chapter have been translated to English, and informants are anonymised in line with the guidelines for research ethics for social science and humanities (National Research Ethics Committees, 2021).

The timing of these interviews is crucial for a full understanding of the empirical data of the chapter. In May 2022, the “new normal” following the pandemic had started to take form, yet there was still uncertainty about what this meant. During the two years of occasional lockdown (March 2020 to March 2022), all newsrooms had ongoing reorganisation projects initiated

before the pandemic, for instance, moving to new premises, new owners and collaborators, new systems and technology, new working routines, and new colleagues – circumstances that have affected them independent of Covid-19. Hence, this study cannot be isolated from the wider political, economic, and social context and processes it is part of. My informants found it difficult to determine what was to be regarded as a direct consequence of the pandemic and what was not. However, they noticed that Covid-19 “accelerated”, “triggered”, “nurtured”, “boosted”, “hindered”, and “stopped” various aspects of working life. These words indicate that ongoing reorganisations experienced changes due to Covid-19.

In the following, the chapter follows the narrative of the pandemic from the perspective of news workers – from the excitement of covering a once-in-a-lifetime event in the beginning, through the period of news fatigue and endurance, to what the journalists and editors will take with them from their working experiences during the pandemic. The narrative captures the experience of a crisis in crisis that paved the ground for new ways of organising that is outlined before a discussion at the end.

Making sense of the crisis for positive renewal

When the pandemic hit – motivating excitement

You remember it very well; it is a very special experience. (Journalist)

All informants remembered exactly what happened the day everyone was ordered to work from home, 12 March 2020, when then Prime Minister Erna Solberg called for “the largest intervention in our time”: a national lockdown in Norway. In the interviews, my informants spoke in detail about the first lockdown. Some drew parallels with other events, like one of the editors: “To put it bluntly, it was almost like the war in Norway. There was such a great professional will to work journalistically with this”. A journalist had the same experience as on the day of terror in Oslo and Utøya in 2011:

I worked the evening shift July 22. It was somewhat the same feeling I had on March 12; I have not been involved in anything like this before. It is a completely unreal situation. It gives a kick in a way.

There was also excitement and feelings that what was happening was beyond belief. One of the editors put it like this:

The first phase was an adrenaline rush. We felt we were part of something big, something that would shape both our careers and lives forever. It produced motivation and inspired journalists, at least in relation to that large workload. There was no problem getting anyone to work.

A journalist gave a similar description:

In the emergency phase, we were surprised, relieved, and satisfied. It is a bit of an adrenaline boost when so much happens and everyone clicks on our page and there is a need for information. When it's bad for others, it can be good for us in the media, in a somewhat cynical way. It was acute and dramatic, but I remember it as a positive time, the first few days anyway. We managed to make a newspaper from home, and it somehow went beyond all expectations.

Even though many found the outbreak of Covid-19 exciting and compared it with other events, many experienced it as a “cosmology episode”, to use Weick’s term (a vu jàdé, i.e., the opposite of déjà vu): “I’ve never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me” (Weick, 1993: 633–634). Events like these are especially triggers of sensemaking, as they disrupt the ongoing activities in the organisation and thereby impel participants to make sense of them and act (Weick, 1995).

Interviewees described the adrenaline rush as ambiguous, as it was accompanied by worries. Many Norwegian newsrooms experienced an immediate cancellation of advertising revenues and had concerns about funding news production (Olsen et al., 2020). One of the editors in charge was sitting next to a sales employee and told me: “We looked at the ads. They leaked, meaning they were cancelled. They just disappeared. We saw all cancellations ticking in, and the money was gone”. The editor continued to talk about the absurdness of the situation and said that it was difficult to envision the consequences at the start, but “it hasn’t gotten as bad as we feared at first, rather the opposite”. Worries were also connected to infection control and how they were going to organise the work. Another editor recalled all the questions and worries in the first phase of Covid-19: “One thing was that we should work from home, but how are we going to do our work? What can we do and not do? Shall we meet sources? It was a completely untested situation then”. This narrative is summed up well in this quote from a journalist: “It was a bit panicky, what do you do, right? But it went surprisingly fine”.

When the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic began, all newsrooms experienced that they were well equipped for starting to work from home, mostly due to technological upgrades, recent courses, and well-working digital communication (e.g., Slack, Google Hang-out, Microsoft Teams, and the planning tool Trello). Still, the pandemic took them by surprise:

Although we had been warned, it happened suddenly. I was impressed how incredibly well we got things to flow with communication, right from the start. You know, it is the same PC, but you are sitting at home. It was a very big transition for everyone. (Journalist)

“Surprised” and “impressed” are words that echoed through the interviews: “I never thought that we would make it work, to make a newspaper in that way. We went digital in every possible way” (Editor). All three newspaper organisations had experienced a massive digital transformation during the previous decades, and especially in the most recent years. An editor said that if it had happened half a year earlier, their organisation would have been in trouble, and that newsrooms had practiced working from home just a day in advance, to be prepared: “It suddenly became reality, then it hit us. The exercise became practice from day one”. This illustrates that during a crisis, sensemaking often occurs through “thinking by acting”, characterised as an immediate sensemaking in the present (Weick, 1988). Given the timing of the interviews, the informants also indicated sensemaking in retrospect, reflecting on how they were working:

We just hung onto the wheel that turned and turned and turned. In hindsight, we could certainly have taken a step back and gotten better quality out of it by structuring ourselves a little better in the initial phase. (Editor)

Many of the editors were in the process of evaluating the state of Covid-19 coverage and work at the time of the interviews, as they considered the crisis as something to learn from at that point: a good occasion for re-organising. At the start of the pandemic, there was a paradoxical nature between the loss of income engendering an existential anxiety and finding the work meaningful.

Accelerated growth – meaningful work

Many found it exciting, when it’s something happening; your work is read and important to the public; the figures just exploded all the time. (Journalist)

During the pandemic, most newspapers in Norway had growth in readership and subscribership, alongside a slight increase in trust (Jortveit, 2022). As with many other news providers all over the world, especial on digital platforms (Pavlik, 2021), my informants agreed with the sentiment that “news media in times of crisis matter more than ever” (Van Aelst et al., 2021: 1225). The informants underlined how the need for news was experienced as motivating and highlighted their social responsibility, particularly for one local journalist: “For once it was the societal mission in centre, not just missing cats and small accidents”. All three newspapers had worked towards digital subscribership in the years leading up to the pandemic and witnessed this development accelerate: “We surfed a huge wave because we had many stories and all were well-read, and all the curves pointed upwards” (Editor). Another editor asserted the following:

The boost in the media started long before the pandemic because the digital business model has worked, which means that people in Norway choose to pay for editorial news content. Therefore, we have a far better financial foundation than we did a few years ago.

Many informants talked about Covid-19 as being helpful for the digital transitions and digital subscribership. For instance, a journalist stated:

Corona has helped to get more readers online. We have forced digitalisation on our readers when we have invested less in print. But in addition, with corona, it accelerated, went faster than we had hoped for.

During the pandemic, readers increased their digital competence, and consequently, digital subscribership grew. The three newspapers in this study have experienced that though the numbers have decreased after the pandemic, the willingness to pay for news has continued. An editor spoke about it similarly: “Corona helped the newspaper organisations. Now that the dust has settled, we have managed to retain and bring out a few more readers”. The above quotes highlight how respondents considered the pandemic crisis as a catalyst for change.

Even though the pandemic itself produced a large supply of news stories for immediate publishing, it did not necessarily boost journalism. One of the editors addressed this issue directly: “If I’m honest, much of the journalism was very simple. After all, we received press releases about infection numbers and deaths. Pretty basic journalism”. Even though the crisis became a source of increased news interests, it was “one dimensional”, in which the main interest was reduced to numbers of contamination and deaths.

However, since the whole community was shut down, press conferences, digital lectures, and national meetings – everything – was streamed digitally. Thus, it was easier to work journalistically from home:

There was not a journalistic challenge to cover things and it was easier to have source meetings since it was natural to talk on the PC or phone. It was a lower threshold for interviewees to talk digitally, not so scary anymore” (Journalist).

This was considered positive, but infection control affected journalism, as it was forbidden to meet people for long periods and required to keep a distance of two meters; for example, one couldn’t take the photographer in the car, podcast studios with guests had to be closed, and interviews had to be done over the phone or computer. An editor addressed the disadvantage of not meeting sources:

It is not positive for journalism. We constantly work on these issues because you are missing out so much. And, you don’t know *what* you are missing out. If you meet sources, in two out of three cases you’ll get something more. So, we constantly work to resist the temptation to make it too easy for ourselves.

A journalist who was covering Covid-19 said that with digitally streamed meetings, “you don’t get the feeling in the room, you can’t approach anyone during a break, or accidentally meet someone. You cover what is happening, formally. But getting that good or unique angle is difficult”. Both journalists and editors who were interviewed pointed out that the pandemic didn’t help journalism as such, but that it triggered motivation to improve:

Now it might be the other way around, after such a time of endurance, you think it’s a little more worth the effort to go out and meet people, maybe a little more, actually, than before the pandemic. (Editor)

Social responsibility – handling the news interest

To handle their social responsibility and to convey all information, the studied newsrooms organised differently in relation to reach and readership. The regional newspaper created a live news studio with journalists dedicated to Covid-19 news, which was always on the front page of their online edition. The news from municipalities they cover were always on top of their website, with many municipalities sending press releases directly to the newspaper. They also provided opportunities for the public to ask questions. The live studio was active throughout the pandemic but was especially important at the start. Readers didn’t need a subscription to view content from the studio, which attracted a lot of readers. People visited daily, “not necessarily to read anything concrete, but to confirm that nothing new had happened” (Editor). Readership increased and page views “went through the roof” (Journalist).

In the local newspaper, a separate news desk handled all Covid-19 coverage. The desk was established just before the outbreak of the pandemic, and it was staffed with seven employees working shifts, seven days a week. The municipality’s press conferences were live-streamed every day, with two journalists physically present: “It was also a good way for us to get hold of sources. We knew that once every day, in the morning, they were there to answer questions” (Editor). It was open for the public because they saw it as part of their social responsibility. The journalists who had attended the press conferences processed the information and made “plus stories” for subscribers. An editor acknowledged that “it was a very good move. We got a lot of new subscribers. In that sense, it was a success and underlined the importance of all media in Norway when something really happens; how important local newspapers are”. The employees at the local news desk were not sent to work from home: “It was maybe the biggest decision we made then”, according to one editor. In this newsroom, they considered it almost impossible to operate properly without having an operational place where the journalists who handle the current news picture could cooperate. A journalist elaborated:

It has never been such unity, exchange, and professional discussion. It was challenging because it had to go very fast and there were tough stories. But we became more confident, got more feedback all the time, stories were read, we did something important. Many learned a lot and became very motivated.

Many journalists experienced a shift in their experience of working from home after a while. The narratives from the informants became blurrier after the first experience. One editor addressed it clearly: “It becomes a bit of a blur after a while. A lot of back and forth”. The two years melted together in one narrative of coping and testing various new ways of working. After the first phase, many noticed the draining experience of lockdown. This brings us to the second aspect of the dominating newsroom narrative: the backlash.

The backlash – enduring the crisis

We thought it was only going to last a short while, you know. You can’t keep the spirit of hard work (“dugnadsånd”) going for ever. (Editor)

This experience of struggle and endurance applies to all three newsrooms. From one journalist’s perspective, “working from home was good at the start, but eventually we noticed that it affected efficiency. You had a bit of extra energy at the start, but it faded since the routines are not the same when you sit at home all day”. The value of routines was revealed in the interviews, confirming previous findings in the sociology of news (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013), especially in the form of “routinising the unexpected” (Tuchman, 1973). During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a new awareness of what kind of (digital) infrastructure must be in place to change routines (Finneman & Thomas, 2021). In the newsrooms, daily routines structure the workday. A journalist discovered “how much you need to be connected to others – to have an environment around you to produce”. An editor put it like this: “There was a kind of wear and tear. Home office made creativity low; the digital meetings were uninspired, more silence. It was difficult to start major journalistic projects”. This mirrors the most important findings of a study among editors during the pandemic: the difficulty in motivating creativity (Appelgren, 2022). Another editor addressed the experience of being in charge and leading digital meetings:

It feels like you’re speaking into nothingness – a black hole, there’s no response, everyone was just sitting there. So, we felt that this is the world’s most pointless thing, but the feedback was that most of the employees wanted it.

Even though it felt “pointless”, the fact that the employees wanted it attests to the value of routines and doing journalism as usual during the pandemic (García-Avilés, 2021). The three newsrooms all conducted surveys about what

employees wanted, and they started different social events, for instance, a Friday quiz, with varied success. One editor underscored that “it gradually became clear that this was the way it was. It characterises the entire rest of the period”. Also, the same resignation was noticed among the audience: “There was a bit of news fatigue, too much of the same I think” (Journalist). News avoidance was found to protect feelings and improve well-being during the pandemic (de Bruin et al., 2021), and that it is inherently human – meaningful and situated (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). In addition, journalists themselves were exhausted by always being on guard and not being able to take a break from the news they were covering:

The journalists have had an exciting and important task, but personally it has been tiring, that you are unable to put it away – difficult to take a break because you are in it all the time. It has been exciting, educational along the way, but at some point, you get full, but you have to stick with it. Everyone has had their own experiences, but journalists have been in it all day every day. (Journalist)

The journalists pointed to the special situation journalists found themselves in: not being able to take a break from Covid-19 news. Other studies of journalists reporting on Covid-19 have found that the “emotional labour” can cause trauma amongst journalists (Jukes et al., 2022; Šimunjak, 2022) and that organisational support is important for stress-release and commitment (Hoak, 2021). Based on these experiences, the news organisations in this study started with different ways of (re)organising the work.

Modes for (re)organising: Flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity

The renewals presented in the following came about due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated restricted working conditions, but they are not necessarily totally new. Rather, the crisis was an occasion for reorganisation, to experiment and gain new experiences from lingering in the inescapable situation. Most importantly, work restrictions and imposed work from home induced a sensitivity for which kind of work practice suits different tasks. As such, it became an occasion for learning and discerning how different tasks require different modes of organising. The advantages and disadvantages of the work forms (at home or from central offices) have become clear (for details, see Olsen et al., Chapter 6). In the following, four modes for organising are presented: flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity.

First, there was an opportunity to explore more flexible modes of organising work, where physical location was replaced by technology as a mechanism for cooperation and integration. The values of the different forms of working alone or together, whether at home, in a hybrid format, or physically present have been acknowledged. Most informants considered the flexibility of

working remotely a privilege that is probably going to last. Indeed, working from home is starting to be taken for granted: “If we had not been given the option of that flexibility, there would have been an uprising” (Journalist, union leader). The editors noticed this, as exemplified by one: “Journalists say: ‘today I’m just going to write these two things, then I’ll do it at home’. They didn’t say that before”. At the same time, they expressed that it cannot be taken for granted, as one editor noted: “We must be generous with each other. But no one must abuse it”. One of the journalists posed an interesting question: “I don’t think we’ll let it go completely, but it’s *how* one uses it that will be the issue going forward”. At the time of the interviews, the three newsrooms tested different hybrid and remote work models, from total flexibility to specific days that all employees were required to come to the office for physical meetings. The editors underlined that they were in a mode of testing that was going to last; flexibility in work forms call for flexible modes of organising.

Second, the Covid-19 crisis forced people to cooperate on different terms, for instance, in smaller groups and meeting in various places to walk while talking, which again created opportunities for discovering new creative practices as well as advantages with new modes of organising cooperation to advance creativity. For instance, due to regulations of social distancing, one was not allowed to meet more than five people in a room. In the local newspaper, editors and journalists met outside in small groups and walked together through the town while discussing ideas. They experienced that walking and talking generated new ideas, not only by meeting each other, but also, when walking through the town, they discussed the sites in front of them:

You don’t need to take notes, because you remember what you talked about when you passed the new house, right. We always come back with at least one idea for a new story. It is primarily for the psychosocial, but just as much for discovering new things. So, we’ve tried going to slightly different places. And there is something about our brain that works a little differently when you are not sitting in a meeting room. In here, there is nothing to rest your eyes on; nothing that activates anything. You are forced to sit and look at each other. It’s not very comfortable. You don’t get anyone to actually talk. We have been inside and at home so much. We will continue with going outside. It’s the best thing we take with us. (Editor)

Even after society re-opened, this team continued to walk together because of the experienced value for new ideas that strengthened their news coverage. All newsrooms had tried similar organising before with varied success, but during the pandemic, they were forced to experiment and to linger in new ways of organising for the future. Smaller groups were a necessity in order to get work done and for the psychosocial work environment, but these new ways of working proved to be successful beyond the requirement.

Third, the dynamics of how responsibilities are distributed have changed during the pandemic. As such, it was a process of reorganising the foundations of the trust relations at work through organising of the self and self-governing. A journalist talked about how this came about: “The first phase was not very well managed, but that was the best things; that I could manage a lot myself – a mixture of taking but also being given responsibility”. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the possibility to work from home was restricted in all three newsrooms. During the pandemic, the editors disclosed that employees not only delivered on time but delivered stories with high quality from home. A journalist expressed that “compared to before, many felt that managers did not have confidence in us. We feel they do now”. This led to a higher degree of self-management and autonomy among journalists. One of the editors put the demonstrated efficiency while working from home in relation to autonomy: “Journalists became quite efficient and structured when they were home alone. And they also became more independent. Which contributed to the efficiency, I think”. Correspondingly, there was higher trust among the editors and journalists in all newsrooms: “Everyone is incredibly responsible and takes on responsibility. I think the most important thing we learned is that it doesn’t matter where you work” (Editor). This was also recognised by the journalists: “You take responsibility when you gain that trust”. One editor admitted that has to do with technology:

It was more difficult to contact people before. Now we see in Teams that they have a green bubble: They are available. We can chat with them and see if they respond. If they go away from the screen and wash clothes, Teams will turn yellow [laughter]. It is very concrete. We see that they are at work without them sitting next to us.

With technological platforms, control can be negotiated in a way where trust is gained and given. Technology represents a confidence mechanism, in increasing the ease by which managers and co-workers can contact each other and in terms of opportunities for control for the editors.

Fourth, respondents underscored the sense of solidarity that the crisis brought forth. Whereas the economic disturbance of the previous decades divided the management and the employees, the pandemic was a crisis that brought the employees together across disciplines and rank:

It was a crisis we were in together, on all levels. That was not the case in other types of crises for economic reasons. We must figure it out together now, especially post-pandemic. That is different – such a sense of community. (Journalist)

Crisis is a reminder of solidarity for the wider community (Hess & Waller, 2021), also among news workers. The informants for this study put this in relation to the huge turnover among the staff during recent years in all

newsrooms, referred to as a generational change. They had recruited many new young journalists recently and thought that new colleagues change the work environment: “The new [employees] need a community. And then we discovered that everyone enjoyed the meetings, not just the new ones” (Editor). Together with a better economic situation, which started before the Covid-19 pandemic, it creates synergies that affects the work environment.

Discussion

You have been able to see the best and worst during the pandemic. You have had time to think about it.

When you’ve been through something as serious as a pandemic, I think everyone looks at working life and appreciates working life in a different way.

Above, the interviewed editors point to the Covid-19 crisis as an occasion for sensemaking in which resilience and the ability to cope and respond to the crisis became clear. The crisis presented a turmoil in an already uncertain situation: The current ways of working were disrupted, and the newsrooms were compelled to find new ways of organising their work.

While operating in a high-risk environment, a robust finding is that it requires sensemaking for noticing, reflecting on, and understanding the significance of crisis, especially between employees and managers (Weick et al., 1999). Crisis is seen as an opportunity to assess an organisations’ ability of resilience (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2011), the interactive process of sensemaking, acting, and changing – a process of organising.

This chapter illuminates the Covid-19 pandemic as a crisis in crisis, indicating a crisis-as-event, defined as sudden incidents, threats, and disasters that cannot be planned for, in an already established crisis-as-process developing over time. The crisis-as-process was the context for the newsrooms when the pandemic hit: They were already in a mode of resilience. More specifically, they were in a process of reorganising the way they organised their work for the digital era. All newsrooms point to this state as the backdrop for being equipped to handle the Covid-19 crisis.

To understand the concept of crisis in crisis, it is necessary to consider the grand media crisis narrative that has encompassed the newspaper industry since the Great Recession, which has even been found to change the meaning of the very word crisis for some in the industry – as crisis has become the norm (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). An editor put it this way:

Ten–fifteen years ago I feel it was more dramatic. Because then you closed the entire business base for all the media houses throughout Norway. So, my experience is that [the financial crisis] was much, much more upheaval than the pandemic. Being employees was much more tiring because of the

uncertainty. You didn't know if you had a job. That was the reality. Back then I sat with the PC in my lap the whole time, mostly using Excel sheets to count everything: What will it take to avoid having to fire someone now? Or give a severance package? The two years now of course have been full of misery, for instance, because of redundancies in the marketing department. But, in many ways, we have managed to use the pandemic to grow, to become more digital in the way we socialise and have meetings. We have new working methods and ways of organising. Both we and others have managed to get a lot of benefits out of it. It applies to working life in general. I want to believe that. Then we'll see if the way we do it now is the right way.

The media crisis effected both editors and journalists. A journalist recalled this state: "We were afraid of losing our jobs back then, but now there is more trouble finding good journalists to hire. The wind has totally turned". Another journalist gave the following description of the experience after Covid-19:

I have a feeling that it's all-time high now – financially, technologically, the quality of what we deliver. I didn't work in the 80s, but it's never been so good to work in a newspaper as right now. The pandemic was a crisis, but not a crisis for the media. It only contributed to positive development in the media companies: a development that one had already seen in relation to getting the reader over to digital platforms. In that sense, the pandemic has changed a lot for the media industry.

This quote addresses how the pandemic was not necessarily experienced as a crisis-as-event within newsrooms, but rather as influencing a crisis that the news organisations already found themselves in – accelerating effects that were already taking place and regarded as meaningful. However, this study has shown that during the pandemic, the modes of organising were different than previous reorganisation projects. The regular set of actions were limited, confined, and untested. It has been acknowledged that "the pandemic has disrupted how people take action" (Christianson & Barton, 2021: 574): The pandemic interfered with what kind of actions were possible, but also the way actions are taken. For instance, rather than highlighting different perspectives, editors and journalists made sense together for responding to the situation they found themselves in. The mode of reorganisation was collectively motivated since everyone was "in it together". The crisis in crisis constituted a necessity of active and deliberate collaborative efforts of organising, with a closer interaction and connection between employees of different professions and rank in an experimental mode. Paradoxically maybe, their resilience was inherently collaborative, and there was a higher level of solidarity and sense of community even when they were socially and physically distant.

The Covid-19 crisis created an occasion for differentiation of modes of organising, and with that, a sensitivity towards different dimensions of re-

silience: what practices worked (persistence), what practices ought to be adjusted (adaptation), and what practices should be totally changed (transformation). There seemed to be a collective sensemaking process of the differentiation of the dimensions of resilience, rather than on specific isolated reorganisation projects. The experimental phase of improvisation and testing laid the ground for reflections, insight, and narratives based on the current experiences of new practices. Since resilience is fundamentally about action and sense to be synchronised – to be resilient, we must make sense of the actions we enact – the pandemic offered an opportunity to see the best and worst and to encounter this in practice. In this process of reordering work, different practices were employed as they unfolded and emanated, offering an expanded understanding of what is gained and what is missed by different modes of organising. The pandemic instigated more flexible working conditions, reorganisation of collaborative and creative work, an occasion for emergence of trust, increased autonomy for the journalists, and a higher degree of solidarity among all employees in the newsrooms.

Thus, the crisis in crisis was constituted, on the one hand, by the creation of order (and the term's original meaning: to separate, to choose, to decide, and to judge), and on the other, collective sensemaking of the condition of disorder (current denotation of crisis). In other words, resilience in crisis is about creating order in a collective experience (of disorder). Crisis in crisis motivates reordering, in which different dimensions of resilience become clear and the nuances of different modes of organising have been tested and reflected upon together. Informants for this study spoke about the “new normal” soon to transpire, indicating the prospect of a mode of organising of continual stabilisation. As outlined before, the “normal” before the pandemic was predominately a state of reorganising. When informants for this study expressed both that they will probably “not go back to how it was before” or “not work very much differently after the pandemic”, these are not necessarily exclusive perspectives. It points to a normal of becoming.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 crisis created an opportunity for collective sensemaking and different modes of organising work practices through an experienced crisis in crisis: a crisis-as-event in an already existing crisis-as process, a larger “media crisis”. The pandemic was regarded by the news workers as meaningful, both because of their social responsibility as news providers and because it was an occasion for sensemaking and reorganisation. This chapter demonstrates the collaborative mode of resilience when facing a crisis in crisis and a sensitivity to differentiation of work practices through experimenting. The collective efforts towards reorganisations engender resilience in terms of positive renewal characterised by flexibility, creativity, autonomy, and solidarity.

References

- Appelgren, E. (2022). Media management during Covid-19: Behavior of Swedish media leaders in times of crisis. *Journalism Studies*, 23(5-6), 722–739.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1939106>
- Beck, S., & Knecht, M. (2016). “Crisis” in social anthropology: Rethinking a missing concept. In A. Schwarz, M. W. Seeger, & C. Auer (Eds.), *The handbook of international crisis communication research* (Vol. 43) (pp. 56–70). John Wiley & Sons.
- Breese, E. B. (2015). The perpetual crisis of journalism: Cable and digital revolutions. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(1), 49–59.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-015-0063-1>
- Bygdås, A. L., Clegg, S., & Hagen, A. L. (2019). *Media management and digital transformation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429490187>
- Christianson, M. K., & Barton, M. A. (2021). Sensemaking in the time of Covid-19. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(2), 572–576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12658>
- Curran, J. (2019). Triple crisis of journalism. *Journalism*, 20(1), 190–193.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918807034>
- de Bruin, K., de Haan, Y., Vliegthart, R., Kruikeimer, S., & Boukes, M. (2021). News avoidance during the Covid-19 crisis: Understanding information overload. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1286–1302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1957967>
- Deuze, M. (2008). The changing context of news work: Liquid journalism for a monitorial citizenry. *International journal of Communication*, 2, 848–865.
<https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/290/197>
- Finneman, T., & Thomas, R. J. (2021). “You had to be reporting constantly”: Covid-19’s impact on US weekly newspapers’ journalistic routines. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 42(3), 330–345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07395329211030390>
- Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2016). *Organizational crisis communication: A multivocal approach*. Sage.
- García-Avilés, J. A. (2021). Journalism as usual? Managing disruption in virtual newsrooms during the Covid-19 crisis. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1239–1260.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1942112>
- García-Avilés, J. A., Arias-Robles, F., de Lara-González, A., Carvajal, M., Valero-Pastor, J. M., & Mondéjar, D. (2022). How Covid-19 is revamping journalism: Newsroom practices and innovations in a crisis context. *Journalism Practice*, 18(1), 181–199.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2022.2139744>
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>
- Hernes, T. (2014). *A process theory of organization*. Oxford University Press.
- Hess, K., & Waller, L. J. (2021). Local newspapers and coronavirus: Conceptualising connections, comparisons and cures. *Media International Australia*, 178(1), 21–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X20956455>
- Hoak, G. (2021). Covering Covid: Journalists’ stress and perceived organizational support while reporting on the pandemic. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 98(3), 854–874.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990211015105>
- Jortveit, A. (2022). 24-timersundersøkelsen: «Korona-trilogien»: Norske medievaner før, under og etter (?) koronapandemien [The 24-hour survey: “The Corona trilogy”: Norwegian media habits before, during and after (?) the corona pandemic]. Kantar.
<https://kantar.no/rapporter/24-timersundersokelsen-korona-trilogien/>
- Jukes, S., Fowler-Watt, K., & Rees, G. (2022). Reporting the Covid-19 pandemic: Trauma on our own doorstep. *Digital Journalism*, 10(6), 997–1014.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1965489>
- Kleist, N., & Jansen, S. (2016). Introduction: Hope over time – Crisis, immobility and future-making. *History and Anthropology*, 27(4), 373–392.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2016.1207636>

- Koselleck, R. (1988). *Critique and crisis: Enlightenment and the pathogenesis of modern society* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). MIT Press. (Original work published 1959)
- Lee, E.-J. (2021). Making sense of pandemic-induced changes in journalism and beyond. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1431–1437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1997149>
- Libert, M., Le Cam, F., & Domingo, D. (2022). Belgian journalists in lockdown: Survey on employment and working conditions and representations of their role. *Journalism Studies*, 23(5-6), 588–610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1944280>
- Maitlis, S., & Christianson, M. (2014). Sensemaking in organizations: Taking stock and moving forward. *Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), 57–125. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2014.873177>
- Matsilele, T., Tshuma, L., & Msimanga, M. (2022). Reconstruction and adaptation in times of a contagious crisis: A case of African newsrooms' response to the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 46(3), 268–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221085702>
- National Research Ethics Committees. (2021, May 26). *Guidelines for research ethics in the social sciences and the humanities*. <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/>
- Ndlovu, M., & Sibanda, M. N. (2022). Digital technologies and the changing journalism cultures in Zimbabwe: Examining the lived experiences of journalists covering the Covid-19 pandemic. *Digital Journalism*, 10(6), 1059–1078. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1976065>
- Olsen, R. Kr., Pickard, V., & Westlund, O. (2020). Communal news work: Covid-19 calls for collective funding of journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 8(5), 673–680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1763186>
- Pavlik, J. V. (2021). Engaging journalism: News in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 13(1), 1–17.
- Quandt, T., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2021). The coronavirus pandemic as a critical moment for digital journalism: Introduction to special issue: Covering Covid-19: The coronavirus pandemic as a critical moment for digital journalism, 9(9), 1199–1207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1996253>
- Roitman, J. (2013). *Anti-crisis*. Duke University Press.
- Rudningen Skjælaen, G., & Bygdås, A. L. (2019). Teaming up with technology: Socio-material managerial approaches for digital transformation. In A. L. Bygdås, S. Clegg, & A. Hagen (Eds.), *Media management and digital transformation* (pp. 132–142). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429490187>
- Santos, P., & Mare, A. (2021). The reconfiguration of news work in southern Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1391–1410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1974914>
- Sarkar, S., & Clegg, S. R. (2021). Resilience in a time of contagion: Lessons from small businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Change Management*, 21(2), 242–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2021.1917495>
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2013). *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203930434>
- Šimunjak, M. (2022). Pride and anxiety: British journalists' emotional labour in the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journalism Studies*, 23(3), 320–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.2021106>
- Tandoc, E. C. Jr., Cheng, L., & Chew, M. (2022). Covering Covid: Changes in work routines and journalists' well-being in Singapore. *Journalism Studies*, 23(14), 1740–1757. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2112904>
- Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science*, 13(5), 567–582. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.13.5.567.7810>
- Tuchman, G. (1973). Making news by doing work: Routinizing the unexpected. *American Journal of Sociology*, 79(1), 110–131. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225510>
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134666>

- Van Aelst, P., Toth, F., Castro, L., Štětka, V., Vreese, C. d., Aalberg, T., Cardenal, A. S., Corbu, N., Esser, F., & Hopmann, D. N. (2021). Does a crisis change news habits? A comparative study of the effects of Covid-19 on news media use in 17 European countries. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1208–1238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1943481>
- Vigh, H. (2008). Crisis and chronicity: Anthropological perspectives on continuous conflict and decline. *Ethnos*, 73(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840801927509>
- Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25(4), 305–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1988.tb00039.x>
- Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38, 628–652. <https://doi.org/10.3280/SO2008-002009>
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (Vol. 3). Sage.
- Weick, K. E., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2011). *Managing the unexpected: Resilient performance in an age of uncertainty* (Vol. 8). John Wiley & Sons.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (1999). Organizing for high reliability: Processes of collective mindfulness. In R. S. Sutton, & B. M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (pp. 81–123). JAI Press.
- Williams, T. A., Gruber, D. A., Sutcliffe, K. M., Shepherd, D. A., & Zhao, E. Y. (2017). Organizational response to adversity: Fusing crisis management and resilience research streams. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(2), 733–769. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0134>
- Ytre-Arne, B., & Moe, H. (2021). Doomscrolling, monitoring and avoiding: News use in Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. *Journalism Studies*, 22(13), 1739–1755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1952475>
- Zelizer, B. (2015). Terms of choice: Uncertainty, journalism, and crisis. *Journal of Communication*, 65(5), 888–908. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12157>
- Zhang, S., & Wang, Q. (2022). Refracting the pandemic: A field theory approach to Chinese Journalists' sourcing options in the age of Covid-19. *Digital Journalism*, 10(6), 1115–1134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2029521>