

News Technology

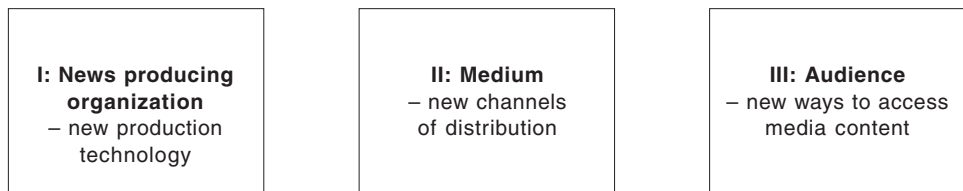
Deconstructing and Reconstructing News

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Technological change is in many ways affecting news organizations and journalists today. The World Wide Web (WWW) and its different applications, as well as the increasingly popular concept of Video Journalism, are two examples of this. These two phenomena have much in common. Both are innovations with a strong technological element, enabled by new digital technologies. Both have consequences for how news production is organized. And both are elements in what is known as *convergence* or *multimedia* journalism (e.g., Deuze, 2003). Today, such innovations are considered increasingly important (Aquino et al., 2002), and it is important to understand what kinds of processes are unfolding and which consequences the development may have.

The objects of study here are two processes of change in a Belgian regional media group: the introduction of a multimedia desk, and the introduction of Video Journalism. An important realization is that the changes are not merely technological. Social forces are active during the process of innovation, and these forces may have consequences for the outcome. The following accounts try to determine the consequences of the two processes through analysis of the technological and social factors that are at work at an early stage of the innovations.

A study of convergence and news journalism might have different “points of departure”:



Digital technologies affect all three spheres. News organizations (I) are increasingly dependent on digital production tools, such as computers, digital cameras and digital video recorders. The Internet and the WWW (II) have been christened (although temporarily) “New Media”. And the audience (III) now has a number of digital appliances (personal computers, mobile phones, etc...) through which they can access media content. This study

focuses on the news producing organization, and in particular on the role of the journalist. However, the changes also involve the new channels of distribution as well as the audiences' new ways of accessing content. It is important to note that when spheres II and III come into play in this report, it is from the perspective of the organization.

In the research community, as well as in the professional community, there are different expectations about how news producers should act with regards to new technologies such as the WWW. Many agree that news organizations should start to deliver content through a number of different channels (Quinn et al., 2002; Rasmussen, 2000). Newspapers and broadcasters should join forces in order to produce news more effectively. Multimedia news desks should distribute stories across a range of media outlets, enhancing the overall value of the news for the audience, and for the news organization. The technology required to do this is clearly present, but many companies struggle to find practical solutions (Aquino et al., 2002).

The research behind this report was motivated by a wish to examine the interplay between new digital technologies and journalism. During the process, this wide research question was narrowed down to three specific areas: The *quality* of news (1), the *skills and job satisfaction* of journalists (2), and the relationship to the *audience* (3). The latter (3) was found relevant because some literature has predicted audience empowerment due to new technology (Hall, 2001; Pavlik, 2000; Engebretsen, 2002). (1) and (2) turned out to be crucial elements in the organizational processes that were initiated by the new technology. Thus, the main research question is: What are the consequences of the innovations in Concentra in terms of the quality of news, the skills and job satisfaction of journalists, and the relationship to the audience? On the agenda is also another more fundamental question: Can the developments in this case be seen as determined by available technology, or are other factors playing an important part?

While similar cases have previously been described at a national and international level (e.g., Quinn, 2002; Aquino et al., 2002), until now little has been said about the regional level. Furthermore, many accounts tend to be centred on best practices. This report tries to broaden the perspective by also focussing on a project that was not successful. Another reason for choosing this case is that it provides a unique perspective on Video Journalism, as the two stations that are examined have chosen quite different strategies. While Kanaal 3 was built from scratch as a "green field", TV Limburg has had a gradual process of implementation. Some of the problems they have faced are similar, while others are specific to the context, making this a good opportunity to explore differences in the concept and practices of Video Journalism.

Method and Material

The system of news production for any television station can be conceptualized as a heterogeneous configuration (Williams, 1997: 309-312). The concept of "configuration" highlights the process of adaptation, or configuration, which happens as a technology is introduced to an organization. It is "heterogeneous" because it consists of both technical and non-technical elements. The concept enables the analyst to treat both the technical and the non-technical elements that go into the system in a similar manner. This is an advantage because the boundaries between the "technical" and the "social" are often blurred; technical problems may have social solutions and vice versa.

Once the system is in place, it tends to be stable, with journalists, editors, cameramen and administrative staff following their routines that ensure stability. Although improve-

ments are constantly happening, the scope for “radical” innovations is limited. Thus, although the people responsible for the different parts of the process have always been aware of the whole range of elements that go into the production, it is possible to view this as a kind of “black box”.¹ Organizations have many such black boxes, and most of the time what is important is the input and the output of the box, not the content. However, from time to time it is necessary to open the boxes. The introduction of Video Journalism is one of these occasions, as it involves changing the system of production quite radically. In fact, the result of the process of change is in many relevant ways completely different from the traditional configuration. A new configuration, or a new black box, has to be created. Hence the title: “Deconstructing and Reconstructing News”.

In this account, the process through which the new configuration becomes part of the organization is emphasized. This is done because through the process, relevant forces in the organization become visible as they shape the look of the final configuration.² Readers should note that the choice to use an organizational perspective has implications for what kind of answers the report can give. The perspective is not neutral, in the sense that agents that for some reason become marginalized or don’t make their presence felt on the organization, are also left out of the analysis. The choice to do this is deliberate, because the main questions can best be answered this way. Other studies will have to confront the question of “left-out agents” in the development.

A Steady Point of Reference

The choice to study the new configuration as it is shaped makes it difficult to analyse and present the empirical data. It would be convenient to start out from an essentialist definition of Video Journalism and then proceed to analyse the “impact” it has on the organization of work, the skills and practices of journalists, and the quality of news. However, the intention to explore how the concept and practice of Video Journalism is itself shaped and embedded in the organization prohibits such an approach. Other possible essentialist “hooks”, such as “journalism” or “the organization”, are rejected on similar grounds. These are also social constructs that are shaped in the process of change.

Therefore, time is used as the point of reference in this study. The development is accounted for in four stages. The first stage is the *motivation* behind the process. This is followed by a phase of *resistance* from social and technical elements in and outside the organization. The instigators seek to overcome resistance through a variety of *strategies* to enrol supporters of the concept. These strategies crucially shape the final configuration, which in stage four is either *rejected* or becomes *stabilized*. After stabilization it becomes possible to discuss *consequences* of the process. Of course these phases are analytical, and “stabilization” does not imply that nothing happens to the configuration any more. There is a continuous development, but after the stabilization, there are no radical changes in the concepts and practices.

Material

Empirical data have been gathered through semi-structured interviews with people from different places in the organization. A total of 13 interviews with 15 people have been conducted.³ The interviewees include managerial staff, journalists, chief editors and technical staff. Interviews were recorded and transcribed before a qualitative analysis was conducted. In this analysis, data were approached primarily as a *source* for gaining access to the developments in the organization. Accounts were cross-checked in order to

avoid personal biases. It has become clear, however, that the process of shaping these innovations is also dependent upon the local construction of certain concepts, such as “Video Journalism” or “interactivity”. These are concepts that do not have a clear *a priori* meaning, but are given a highly context-dependent meaning in the process of change. By analysing the qualitative data as a *topic* in itself, it is possible to gain access to this interesting aspect of the case. The analysis presented in the following is thus based on a dualist approach to data, which are used both as a source and as a topic.

Context

The “Old” Configuration

In order to understand what is new, it is necessary to understand what was there before. What follows is therefore a brief description of the traditional system for gathering news at TVL. A normal day would start with a morning meeting with all the newsroom staff present. The main purpose of the meeting was to coordinate today’s news production. There were a limited number of cameramen (three) and newscutters⁴ (two), five journalists, one production manager, and one news manager. For each story a team consisting of a journalist, a cameraman and a newscutter must be assigned. The resulting schedule was then put on a whiteboard that was visible for everybody in the newsroom. The production manager kept track of this schedule and updated it when necessary (for example when a “hot” story comes in during the day). Hot stories could also frequently require the use of freelancers, both cameramen, journalists and newscutters. Parts of the system were also the so-called “spotting machines” on the walls, for spotting the footage during editing.

Going a little bit further into the system, the journalist used a computer to write text for the news item. There was both an introductory text (read by the news anchor) and text for “voice-over”. This is important because it shows that television production is also about text, which can potentially be re-purposed. Computers in the old system were networked, but there was not a single system controlling the production flow, meaning that for example the autocue for the news anchor had to be generated by manually cutting and pasting from different documents.

In interviews this system has been presented with extensive focus on its shortcomings. We should, however, keep in mind that it has worked successfully for several years and the current configuration at TVL consists of a mix of this system and Video Journalism. Although the system is complex and involves many people, it also has mechanisms to control this (morning meeting, production manager, whiteboard).

Media in Belgium⁵

Belgium consists of two parts:⁶ a Flemish-speaking part (Flanders) and a French-speaking part (Wallonia). The media are also divided between the linguistic areas. The context of this study is Flanders, a region with a relatively high readership of newspapers compared to Wallonia. The total circulation of newspapers has shown a decline in recent years.

The regional media landscape in Flanders is dominated by a few media groups. They started out as family-owned newspapers, but have lately become involved in both print and audiovisual activities. The ownership has also changed gradually, and the groups are now owned by financial institutions. There are no legal restrictions prohibiting cross-media ownership, and no action has been taken to prevent ownership concentration.

Regional television has between fifteen and twenty percent of the national market. The rest belongs to the national public and commercial broadcasters. Belgium is the most densely cabled country in the world. Ninety-four percent of the households with television are connected to a network. Lately there has also been a quick growth of broadband connections in Flanders.

The government distributes licences to run regional broadcasting. There is also financial support from the government to the stations depending on the number of viewers. This support, however, is lower than in, for example, the neighbouring Netherlands,⁷ making the climate quite competitive. With a squeezed market for advertising on television, and competition from international stations as well, it is not easy to stay in the business. One factor that makes it somewhat easier, though, is that once a licence is acquired to run a regional television station, you are ensured a distribution monopoly. Another licence will not be given for the same area. So the competition for regional television comes from national and international television, as well as from other media.

Lately the Belgian government has introduced a new interpretation of the laws about freelance work. Now, employers are obliged to pay social security also for freelancers, making the use of such work less attractive. We will see that this action from the government has been conducive to the introduction of Video Journalism in Concentra.

Concentra

Concentra is one of three dominant media owners in Flanders. Its origin is in the Limburg area, with the family-owned regional newspaper *Het Belang van Limburg* (HBvL). However, during the 1990s, it expanded into a multimedia group with regional television, as well as a printing house and other activities. Two regional newspapers and the national free paper *Metro* are part of the Concentra portfolio.

Just as the other previously family-owned media houses in Belgium, the ownership of Concentra was changed lately. A financial holding company now owns the group, and the media activities are gathered in Concentra Media.

The audio-visual media of Concentra are gathered in a division called Avalon. At the moment, Avalon consists of three television stations: TV Limburg (TVL), Kanaal 3 and ATV (in Antwerp). Kanaal 3 was recently taken over by Concentra.

Concentra is described as a technologically strong and innovative media group. During the past years, it has been confronted with the challenges brought on by new digital technologies. Several projects have been initiated to benefit from the perceived new opportunities. The processes that are explored in this study are two such projects. The first is the introduction of a multimedia desk, which was supposed to be shared between the newspaper and the television station in Hasselt. The second is a change in the production of regional television through Video Journalism. While the process of introducing Video Journalism in Kanaal 3 is completed, it was at the time of writing still going on in TVL.⁸

Results

I: The Multimedia Desk

The story begins with the attempt to introduce a multimedia desk. This account serves as an introduction to the methodological approach as well as to the idea to introduce Video Journalism to the television stations in Concentra.

Motivation

The motivation for pursuing the idea of a multimedia desk was partly rooted in the predictions of a change in the demand for news. The audience was presumed to change its behaviour and expect to be served through a number of channels. In particular the WWW was seen as an important part of the package of media in Concentra, and it was expected that it would soon become self-sufficient with income from, among other sources, banner advertisements. The multimedia desk would provide the audience with added value to the news, because it was now possible to choose which channel best suited individual needs.

Another key motivation was to make the news production more effective. Instead of having two desks working in the same area, the editors of television and the newspaper would now come together in one desk, reducing the probability of double work. In the long term it is likely that the intention was a co-location of the newsrooms, or even a complete merger. This process of change was initiated from above – the CEO of Concentra at the time asked for the cooperation. He was a strong believer in “New Media”. Upon his request, the editors of the newspaper (HBvL) and the television station (TVL) started to realize the plan of a multimedia desk.

Resistance

Resistance to the idea of the multimedia desk was strong, and it included many of the elements that are commonly cited as “obstacles” to convergence in media organizations (Aquino et al., 2002; Quinn, 2002). A brief review shows that economic, technical and social problems had to be overcome if the project was to become successful.

On the social side, a problematic issue was the competition between journalists about good stories. Newspaper journalists do not like their scoops to be aired on television several hours before the newspaper is printed. Another problem was the fear of cannibalizing your own stories. By “giving away” most of the material through other channels, people in the newspaper feared that less people would buy their main product. Many have also attributed problems to the different “mind-sets” for the different media. Specifically, the production cycles of the television and the newspaper are different. Television news is aired at 6:30 pm, while the newspaper is printed much later in the evening. According to interview data, it was due to this almost impossible to have journalists working on the same story for both media – one way in which multimedia journalism is supposed to increase efficiency.

Resistance also had to be overcome in relation to the content. All the material had to pass through the same multimedia desk, and it had to be prepared for sending to different channels. But originally the television station and the newspaper were operating on different systems, which made this difficult. The project also had to overcome the physical distance (about five kilometres) between the two newsrooms.

In addition, the expected rise in advertising income from the Internet did not occur. Rather the opposite happened, after the “IT-bubble” burst in 2001. Thus the Internet, which was supposed to be the “pivot” of the project, became less important in the eyes of management. The fact that Concentra didn’t receive the licence they applied for to broadcast local radio was also a problem. The initial plan was to locate the radio and the online production together.

Strategies to Overcome Resistance

In order to overcome the resistance, the problems that were viewed as appropriate for technical solutions were confronted first. This was primarily the content management. A

system was developed to facilitate the information flow in the organization. It was originally designed with the newspaper and online newsroom in mind, making all the items that journalists were working on available for instant online publishing. Later, a similar system was developed for the television station, and the systems were made available to everybody, meaning that journalists and editors in the television station could access the newspaper stories and vice versa.

This technical solution could not, however, confront the social resistance related to the competition about scoops and the different “mind-sets”. Thus, a system was established whereby the chief-editors would agree on where the different stories go. There was also a call for cross-promotion between the different media, so that for example viewers of TVL would be informed that they could read more about this night’s stories in tomorrow’s newspaper.

Another strategy that was tried out was to have a permanent camera in the newspaper newsroom. This made it possible for journalists from the newspaper to appear in the television news (so-called “stand-ups”) without having to travel the distance between the newsrooms.

Rejection

In this case, the resistance turned out to be too strong to be overcome by the strategies that the organization was ready to apply. The reasons for this are interpreted differently across the organization. Some talk about the competitive mind of the journalists, others emphasize the problems with deadlines, while others again refer to the too optimistic expectations for online publishing. Indeed, some people don’t even view this as a failure. But it is a fact that the idea of a physical multimedia desk was rejected, after having operated for less than a year.

The data do not allow a definitive conclusion as to which explanation is “correct”. It is clear, however, that the combined resistance, from inside and outside the organization, was not addressed properly through the strategies that were followed. In particular the organization’s answer to the drop in income from the online edition was a complete re-evaluation of what online news *is*. Instead of seeing it as a stand-alone medium, it is now considered to have value only in combination with print or broadcast. This is significant because it signals a shift in what kind of journalism the online efforts will be directed towards.

Consequences

Even if the multimedia desk was not stabilized in the ways it was originally conceived, it did have consequences throughout the organization. The technical solutions that were developed to manage the information flow are still operating and indeed still being developed and improved on. Recently the system was introduced also in TVL as part of the new Video Journalist configuration (see the next section). The intranets are still open, and management is talking about a “virtual multimedia desk” instead of a physical one. It is not clear, however, how much this system is in use, and the assessment of the virtual desk is different depending on who is asked.

Another consequence is that management and journalists are talking about competition between newsrooms as a good thing. The situation in the area of TVL and HBvL is that the television station is granted a monopoly by law, while the newspaper is enjoying a very high share of the market (around 87%). According to management in Concentra, it would not be good to abandon the competition in the region:

I think [competition is] a good thing – let them be competitors. Because they are the two strongest media in the region. When they do not compete on a healthy basis, then we act like a monopolist. And monopolies always disappear (CEO, Concentra Media).⁹

I view this as a consequence of the project instead of an obstacle to it. If it were indeed the prevalent view in Concentra that they had to keep up the competition in the local area, it is unlikely that the multimedia desk project would have been initiated in the first place.

Thus, the cooperation between the newspaper and the television station is now approached in a less radical way. On a day-to-day basis they are competitors with regards to regional news, while they are able to cooperate on special events. Recently this was demonstrated through a largely successful cooperation on the election coverage.

This brief account of the developments at a media group level between HBvL and TVL serves a number of purposes. Firstly, it shows how this simple scheme for ordering the analysis can highlight the organizational processes that shape an innovation. Secondly, it shows how the scheme can also be used to describe processes that do not turn out to be successful in the end. Thirdly, it shows how the importance of the WWW as a stand-alone medium has been re-valuated by the media group in question. Now the focus is directed towards maintaining a community among the audience of the newspaper or the television station. Finally, it sets the stage for the next process: the introduction and shaping of Video Journalism.

II: Video Journalism

1. Motivation

The main motivation from the start of Video Journalism was to cut the costs of television production. The acquisition of the unprofitable Kanaal 3 was based on an assumption that this was possible:

[Video Journalism] was generated by a problem ... There was one [television station] east of Antwerp which was not doing well – and it was for sale. So we looked at it and said “how can we make a successful station out of it?” And it was, out of the brainstorming and what was going on, a project of the BBC on Video Journalism, where we found a way to make it profitable, or an opportunity to maybe make it profitable (CEO, Concentra Media).¹⁰

A more clear-cut view on the motivation is possible through the concepts and metaphors management interviewees use to describe the development. Words like “efficiency”, “automation”, “flexibility” and “commoditization” illustrate the direction in which management wants to take the company.

Flexibility, Efficiency and Standardization

In Avalon, one step closer to the actual news production, interviewees do not pay much attention to the project of the multimedia desk. Their focus has shifted, from looking at what they could accomplish together with the newspaper, to looking at how they could change their own production of news:

What we’re doing now ... is taking away the walls between the camera, the journalists, and the guy that does the [cutting] ... you’d better do that first and

then try to merge like people from newspaper and a TV station because they are two different professions (CEO, Avalon).¹¹

The motivation to introduce Video Journalism is similar to the motivation behind the multimedia desk. On the publishing side, Avalon wants to be able to send news to a number of different channels. This is a continuation of a strategy that Concentra has been pursuing for many years. It has resulted in products like the “TV-krant” (“TV-newspaper”), which is a channel on the regional cable network with short news texts, pictures, advertisements and background music. Although this is a television channel, most of the content comes from the newsroom of the newspaper, which is also where the staff is located. The same motivation has led to news publishing through a teletext system, run by the same people who run the TV-krant.

Another important motivation is more closely related to the corporate context. Of course, the bottom line is important in any business, and there is a constant pressure to cut costs and make the production more efficient. There are several ways in which Video Journalism could be shaped to reach this goal. It could be used as a tool to reduce the number of employees needed in the newsroom, as the news items are now produced by one person and not three. However, according to management this is not the way they want to go. Instead they focus on increasing the flexibility of their employees. The traditional configuration is criticized for being complicated and rigid. To solve this there is an extensive use of freelancers in TVL. This is expensive, and it is also a political issue, as the government does not approve of such an employment policy, and has recently made it more expensive to use freelancers. A way to avoid this is to merge the cameraman, the newscutter and the journalist into one profession: “If you have 10-15 people who can do everything – that’s fantastic!” (CEO, Avalon).¹²

But flexibility is not the only “guiding principle” of this innovation. The motivation from management is also related to an effort of standardizing the tools that are necessary to produce news, both in television and across media. For the company it is important that the flow of information run as smoothly as possible. It is seen as an added value if journalists from the newspaper and from the television station have access to all the information that is produced throughout the organization. In order for this to happen, all information should be accessible in similar formats through the same system, making standardization an important motivation.

This section on motivation shows how the initial goal to cut costs is specified and centred on a few important principles such as flexibility, standardization and efficiency. People at all places in the organization accept that they are working in a commercial enterprise, and that the bottom line is important. However, this acceptance alone was not enough to embrace the perceived wide-ranging consequences of introducing Video Journalism without resistance.

2. Resistance

The resistance that was met during the implementation of Video Journalism was multifaceted. It included both social and technological problems, each of which had to be confronted in order to make a new configuration that works.

Jobs, Skills and the Perception of Quality

Perhaps the most obvious, and most general, objection to the concept of Video Journalism is related to redefinition of jobs. In the version that has been attempted in Concentra,

it involves creating a new type of employee, the Video Journalist, who will perform tasks that were previously performed by three persons: the journalist, the cameraman and the newscutter. This raises a number of concerns. Is it possible for one person to learn to perform all these tasks? Both cameramen and newscutters have their own educations, is it possible to remove these two jobs without a loss of quality? Will the jobs of journalists become more stressful when they get all these new tasks? And what will happen to the newscutters and the cameramen?

The concern about the quality of the news product has been highlighted from people at all places in the organization, exemplified here through a newscutter:

If I watch the news and compare the Video Journalist [items] to the regular ones I do think that the regular ones have better quality: better camera, better lighting, this sort of thing” (newscutter, TVL).¹³

There are two parts to this argument. On the one hand, there are the skills of the professional cameraman with the camera, light, white balance and so on. For the cutting, there are techniques for making nice transitions from one picture to another, combining pictures with sound, etc... These skills and techniques have to be learned by the Video Journalists. On the other hand, there is also the question of the technical quality of the equipment and the software for editing news items. The latter has not been an issue of serious resistance in Concentra, but such considerations still exert influence when choices are made about platforms and equipment. The former part of the argument, however, has produced some serious concerns because it relates to the skills and professional identity of the journalists.

This kind of resistance came from many places. It was an obvious concern to the editor-in-chief of Kanaal 3, the first station to implement Video Journalism: “It was a big question mark in the beginning. The question was: will people be able to film, edit and make text and do that in a good way?” (editor-in-chief, Kanaal 3).¹⁴ Journalists are also expressing concern about having to learn to do new things: “You have to learn techniques about camera and editing. That’s the next step: editing by ourselves also. It’s going to be a little bit harder I think” (journalist, TVL).¹⁵

Interestingly, this kind of resistance was not limited to inside the organization. All the journalist interviewees mentioned episodes where their colleagues, still working in a “traditional” configuration, made sarcastic remarks about the “one-man-crew” of Video Journalism:

You know what the biggest problem is? When you arrive at a press-conference and there are some colleagues ... And you arrive with your camera and they think: “What is he doing? Oh – he’s going to film himself.” And the remarks they make that moment ... maybe those remarks have a bigger influence than the fact that [the Video Journalists] have to film themselves and technical problems (journalist, TVL).¹⁶

Another problematic issue is that it is sometimes not physically possible for one person to perform the same job as two. In normal situations this is solved by substituting the cameraman with a tripod, but sometimes this is not enough. Examples that have been mentioned are when journalists attend large, chaotic press-conferences, when covering court cases, or when doing Vox-Pops.¹⁷

Given these social and technical concerns, which were raised both from the inside and the outside of the organization, it is questionable whether the new configuration can

produce news of the same *quality* as the old one. The issue of quality turns out to be very central to this sociotechnical process, and it will be scrutinized further in the next section.

Resistance also had to be overcome from the journalists who feared they would have to work more because they are substituting for two other professions. This is the flip side of increased efficiency and flexibility for the organization. The journalists are paying the price for this, and most of them acknowledge it.

Content Management

The fact that the content of a television station working in the traditional configuration often exists in different formats and in different physical places can be viewed as an important instance of resistance. Raw footage is located on tapes, as are the final news items. The text that goes into the production is typically located on a file at the journalist's computer, and when the broadcast is over, the tape is moved to the archive room, which contains kilometres of tape and is time consuming to search. Even a standard news item can be deconstructed, making it difficult to handle:

The problem is, if you see a TV-item you have three parts of that item. First there is the presentation ... Then you get the item with two things: everything [the interviewees] say, and the voice-over. So you have three products in one item and you need them all (CEO, Avalon).¹⁸

This is a matter of resistance because it makes it difficult to re-purpose content through different channels. In the jungle of formats and storage facilities, such re-purposing takes a great deal of work and it is not cost efficient. Not surprisingly, the organization has searched for technical solutions to this problem.

Tensions

Another area of resistance concerns the fact that some elements in the traditional configuration performed more than their primary task. In particular this is true of the morning meeting, which was primarily a coordination meeting. It has been mentioned as something that is no longer needed, but the editor-in-chief is aware that dropping it might have unintended consequences:

I think that's a weak point [abandoning the morning meeting]. It's important that you see each other, that there's one line in the newsroom. And the meeting in the morning is very good to keep that line going on (editor-in-chief, TVL).¹⁹

This quote illustrates one of the tensions that this innovation makes visible: between *centralization* and *decentralization*. ICTs are often said to have typically *decentralizing* properties, for example through making geographical distances irrelevant. In this case, however, it is obvious that it is not the technology itself that is decentralizing, but the way it is put to use. TVL might keep the meeting, despite the fact that its primary function is obsolete. This is one area where the Video Journalist configuration has still not stabilized.

Another area of non-stabilization in TVL is related to the fact that people have to change or quit their jobs in order for the new configuration to be fully operational. Here the difference between the two television stations is clear. While Kanaal 3 started virtually "from scratch", TVL had to choose a more gradual strategy in order to make Video Journalism work. This brings the story to stage three: the *strategies* that are chosen to

overcome the resistance. It is my intention to show that these strategies are specific to the organization, and that they impact on two things. Firstly, on whether or not a configuration will stabilize, and secondly, on what the stabilized configuration looks like.

3. *Strategies to Overcome Resistance*

The resistance that had to be addressed consisted of both social and non-social problems. Naturally they were confronted with a wide range of strategies, ranging from prototypical “technical” solutions to social problem solving and rhetoric. Kanaal 3 and TVL sometimes differ in the strategies chosen to overcome resistance. These differences are highlighted along the way.

Clear Leadership

As mentioned, some of the strongest resistance was encountered in relation to the redefinition of jobs and the quality of the news output. It was highly necessary to recruit the journalists as supporters of Video Journalism, but this was not an easy task given that it means more responsibilities and harder work. Management in TVL gave a strong message to the journalists:

We made it very clear: “you will change or we will fire you – there’s no discussion”. And they didn’t believe that it would work but then we started in [Kanaal 3] and they saw that “well, it’s working so they mean it” (CEO, Avalon).²⁰

What we see in this quote is actually two strategies. There is emphasis on strong leadership, something that is highlighted throughout the “how to” literature on convergence and multimedia (Quinn, 2002; Aquino et al., 2002). This strategy utilizes the hierarchy and the power structures in the organization. But we also see that another strategy was pursued. By buying Kanaal 3 and building a configuration centred on Video Journalism there, Concentra made a strong argument for the feasibility of the system. This was not the only, or even the major reason for buying Kanaal 3,²¹ but it is clear that the effect of the transaction in this context was to demonstrate, internally and externally, that Video Journalism was possible. The CEO of Concentra Media confirms this: “We thought we could make something out of [Kanaal 3] – prove for the world that we could do it!” (CEO, Concentra Media).²²

Jobs and Skills

The process in Kanaal 3 clearly influenced what happened later in TVL. For the journalists in TVL it proved two things: that it was possible to make television news with a Video Journalist configuration, and that management was serious in its efforts to change. But how could the resistance from journalists be overcome in Kanaal 3? Management there didn’t have the advantage of being able to point to a closely related station to promote the concept. The answer is that the context in Kanaal 3 allowed a different strategy to be followed. The old configuration had already broken down because it was not profitable. When Concentra came in, they had a “green field” and could build everything from scratch. Only two employees from the old Kanaal 3, a journalist and a technician, were carried over to the new station. The strategy was to employ young journalists who had no experience with “old” configurations, and who had signalled that they were willing to try building a new system:

We made a choice to look for very young people, with a quite high education profile, university with post-graduate in journalism or something ... We made the choice not to look for people who knew the old way of working. Because that's, like change management that's what they always say is very difficult (editor-in-chief, Kanaal 3).²³

They also actively sought people who were familiar with video editing. In fact, all the journalists who were employed in Kanaal 3 had experience with this from their education, meaning that there was one less barrier that had to be overcome.

Another strategy is also exemplified in Kanaal 3: extensive focus on enhancing the skills of the journalists. The newly employed journalists were put through an intensive training course of around a month. This course was received very positively, and it did a good job in convincing the journalists of the benefits of Video Journalism. Because they already had experience with editing, most of the focus was on the fieldwork: the journalistic work and the camerawork. An additional function of the intensive training was to build a configuration based on teamwork. This is an instance of the same tension that causes the problem with the morning meeting: centralization or decentralization. Apparently, Video Journalist configurations *can* be decentralized in various ways, but this is not inherent in the concept. On the contrary, journalists in Kanaal 3 value the teamwork nature of their configuration:

I think that it's a credit for (sic.) my boss that he has made a very good team, that he has picked various people who like to be together, who like to be a team ... I think it has an influence on the end product (journalist, Kanaal 3)²⁴.

Finally, the resistance grounded in quality has been confronted by giving increased priority to skills with respect to budget planning. TVL has already doubled the coaching budget this year, and the plan is to double it again next year. The CEO of Avalon intends to have a permanent "trainer/coach" in the management of the company, who will follow up the journalists on the technical quality of their items. And journalists have been sent to the BBC for training – a course that has convinced many that Video Journalism is possible.

Empowering Journalists

In order to persuade journalists, emphasis was put on empowering them in relation to the production of news. Most of them are excited about having more power and control over the production of news items:

I think actually it's quite logic (sic) to do it all by yourself, because now from the very start until the very end it's in my hands ... I think it's quite artificial to make a separation [between cameraman, sound-engineer, newscutter and journalist, because] it's more difficult to combine four different ideas about how the piece should be than if you only have to listen to yourself (journalist, Kanaal 3).²⁵

In a quite homogeneous critique of the traditional configuration, Video Journalism is embraced because it makes journalists less dependent upon others. Less administration, coordination, communication and waiting, frees more time to focus on the journalistic content. This is also cited as a reason for accepting the increased workload: "We had a lot of spare time before, so I think we have to work a little harder, but still it's a nice job to do" (journalists, TVL).²⁶ The problem of the workload has also been directly con-

fronted from management: “We will pay people 20% more than now because they have to work more” (CEO, Avalon).²⁷

A New Understanding of “Quality”

We have now seen that a wide range of strategies have been applied in order to push through the redefinition of the jobs in the newsroom. But how has the resistance based on quality been addressed?

“Quality” is a concept that can be contested.²⁸ It can be seen as being composed of many different factors. There is the quality of the footage, which is a function of the standard of the equipment and the skills of the cameraman. There is also the quality of the edit, which is dependent upon the standard of editing equipment/software and the skills of the person who performs the editing. Finally there is the journalistic “core” of the item which could be assessed by criteria such as the immediacy of the story, how understandable it is, critical use of sources, relevance, thoroughness, etc...

The problem of quality was handled in two ways. On the one hand, it was emphasized that the quality of the new equipment is so good that it is virtually impossible to tell the difference in picture quality in a Video Journalist item, from the quality of a full-crew, traditional item. A meeting where pictures from Kanaal 3 and a national broadcaster were compared has made a great impact on people, and is referred to by many as “proof” that the quality is not suffering. It is acknowledged by many, however, that if you’re an expert you may be able to see the difference, not least with regard to the skills in handling the camera, picking good shots, etc... The same goes for editing – nobody expects that the cuts of the Video Journalist will be as sophisticated as the ones made by a professional newscutter.

This means that stabilization had to be sought in another way. In this case the strategy has been a redefinition of the quality concept. Quality in news is now defined as something different from quality in other programmes. In news, quality is dependent only upon the journalistic content and not on the pictures or the editing. In this way the focus was taken away from the possibly problematic effects of removing two people from the production of a news item.

Related to this rhetorical move, an attempt was also made to win the support of the very people that are redundant in the news production in the new configuration: the newscutters and the cameramen. Because of the “fact” that quality in news has little to do with their skills, it was proposed that they do other tasks that are said to be more challenging and satisfying for them. TVL has a number of programmes in addition to the news, and in these programmes (lifestyle, movie, debates, etc..) the need for skills in editing and camerawork is much higher than in the news.

Content Management

So far the focus has been on strategies involving mostly social elements. As indicated before, however, some problems were deemed suitable for technical solutions. Most importantly this applies to the problem of multiple formats and storing locations for content. A digital multimedia database has been developed in order to address this. The system allows all kinds of content (text and video mainly) to be stored and archived in one place. It is linked to the software for editing to make the information flow as efficient as possible. One of the most important aspects of the ongoing changes in Concentra is to make the content flow freely between different people and channels:

All the process behind should be automatically done. So if you have your content once, you should be able to use it on all the different media. That's important. So it's more an automation of these processes (ICT-manager, Avalon).²⁹

The increased dependence upon technology that follows from this is illustrated by the fact that Avalon now *has* an ICT manager. This position is new and can be seen as another strategy to make the new configuration work. Also in Kanaal 3 there is a local "technical expert" who is in a new position. He used to be a newscutter, but now he supports the journalists when they have technical problems and takes care of the actual broadcasting of the news every day.

4. Stabilization

Phases one through three are dynamic in nature. All kinds of sociotechnical processes: negotiations, adaptations, choices and conceptual "battles" take place there. In phase four, the configuration reaches its final shape – it becomes a black box. In TVL this phase has not yet been reached – negotiations are still going on about the final shape of Video Journalism. But in Kanaal 3, the situation is different. The organization is working 100% in the new configuration.

One sign of stabilization is coherence in, or at least compatibility between, the accounts people give about a phenomenon throughout the organization. One of the most remarkable features of the data is the strong coherence in the accounts of journalists, chief editors and management about Video Journalism. Although the emphasis varies, they all seem to agree on the most important issues of flexibility, skills, increased reach, cost-cutting and quality. This is particularly true in Kanaal 3, and it suggests that the configuration has stabilized. In contrast, the accounts about the multimedia desk are quite divergent depending on who you ask. There appears to be at least two versions of the story: one that is dominant in the television station and another in the newspaper. Thus, this configuration is not stabilized.

Video Journalism in Kanaal 3

The configuration of Video Journalism in Kanaal 3 includes a number of tangible elements. The Sony DVCAM PD-150 with accessories, the software for editing video, the Video Journalists who operate cameras and do the editing, the news manager, and the in-house technical expert are all parts of the new black box. But as the narrative has demonstrated, there are also a number of intangible elements embedded in the configuration, such as a new concept of quality, team-spirit and an understanding of an upgraded journalist profession. Through different strategies, the elements have been put together in a way that results in a stable system. Thus we have seen how a heterogeneous configuration has become a black box in a news organization.

Discussion

Having given a thorough description of the two projects in Concentra, it is possible to discuss what the consequences may be. The discussion will be centred on the three issues that were presented in the introduction: *quality, job satisfaction and skills*, and the *audience relationship*. Readers should note that this section is meant as a discussion of some questions that can be raised in relation to the development, and not as a conclusion.

Some possible wider implications based on data from the case as well as literature and comments from other researchers are also considered in the following. These implications do not necessarily apply to Concentra if not explicitly mentioned.

Quality

The concept of “quality” in news is, as mentioned, both contestable and highly subjective. It has been shown how a redefinition of quality was part of the strategy applied to gain acceptance for Video Journalism. So far, quality has been treated as if it were internal to the organization. In a way it is, but it can of course be argued that it is the audience that decides what “quality” means: quality is quite simply what the audience wants to watch. Such an argument gives the audience a reactive role. If people keep watching the news when it is made by Video Journalists, it means that the new perception of quality is “right”, and thus the old one, which emphasized the quality of the pictures and the editing, was “wrong”. This argument is only partly valid, though. Focussing exclusively on the amount of viewers might lead to shallow and tabloid news coverage. It is reasonable to expect that a television station also has other criteria when deciding what constitutes acceptable quality of the news coverage. In this way, news organizations are not “discovering” what quality is, but they are shaping the concept of quality. The audience’s privilege is merely to “veto” the development by ceasing to watch. In a situation of monopoly such as in Belgian regional television, this power may be rather limited. Therefore, the media organization’s perception of quality is of high importance.

It has been shown how the standard of footage and editing has been “defined out” of the notion of quality in television news. This development has apparently not been vetoed by the audience, which has not decreased since these stations began to air Video Journalist items. This also fits well with developments in television news elsewhere. International news providers are more than happy to show pictures of poor quality, for example from Video Phones, if the content of the items is good enough (Quinn, 2002: 122). The change in what counts as quality in television news might be seen as rather trivial. It is, however, possible to raise the question of how this might affect the credibility of the medium. Will the less professional look of news items lead viewers to question the quality of the organization behind the item?

- More cameras on the streets allow a quicker response to breaking stories.
- More cameras lead to a higher quantity of news, making it possible to be more selective concerning what gets broadcast.
- Less administration gives journalists more energy to focus on content.
- Homogeneity of news items is increased because one person is completely in charge of the whole process.

These arguments can be challenged. During the past twenty years, there has been a steady development towards quicker and more immediate news coverage. Media critics, such as the editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Ignacio Ramonet (1999), have questioned whether this means that speed is more important than accuracy in news coverage. The movement towards standardization of news production, here exemplified through Video Journalism, contributes to the same development.

The use of “homogeneity” as a sign of quality in news is also questionable. It rests upon the assumption that the team behind a traditional news item mainly contributes to

the content through producing “noise”, which is removed when the journalist is in complete control. Communication between journalists, cameramen and newscutters is seen as an unnecessary complication of the production process. However, the interaction between journalists, cameramen and newscutters could also be seen as increasing the quality of the content. This kind of “mental input” to an item is necessarily higher in a traditional configuration. Just like *resistance* in this report has been considered to be a force in shaping the development, the resistance a journalist meets when working on an item can be seen as a useful corrective. A possible compensation for this loss of resistance is a chief editor who follows the journalists more closely in their work.

This case demonstrates how the concept of quality is actively shaped and used in the promotion of a new innovation. However, the discussion also shows that a different understanding is possible and that the assessment of increased quality is not unproblematic. Due to the limited scope of this study, as well as the contestable nature of “quality” in news, it is impossible to conclude whether quality in regional television news is likely to increase or decrease with Video Journalism.

Skills and Job Satisfaction

A central issue in processes of sociotechnical change at work is what happens to the skills of employees. Sometimes management is accused of wanting to “de-skill” the workforce in order to increase flexibility and control. Defenders of change often claim that what is happening is actually an “enskilling” of the employees, which will increase their job satisfaction. In the case of journalism, new technologies and ways of working can be seen as a challenge to journalists’ *professionalism*. The data from the case provide some evidence on how the affected journalists reason about the changes.

There is no doubt that Video Journalism has an impact on the skills of journalists. They have to know more in two fields. Firstly, they have to know how to operate the equipment and the software. Secondly, they have to know basic principles about camerawork and video editing. Does this imply a shift towards journalists needing technical skills instead of journalistic skills?

The experience from this case is that the extra skills needed are relatively quickly internalized by the journalists, allowing them to focus on the journalistic content. Accompanied by the redefinition of quality, this means that the Video Journalists feel “enskillled” on all levels.

But despite the positive experiences from Concentra, the development may have negative consequences for skills in the long term. As in Kanaal 3, broadcasters might begin to seek journalists with technical experience. This may lead to a less visible shift away from journalistic skills, which in turn might have consequences for the quality of journalism. In any case it is reasonable to expect that in a competitive climate, journalists without the technical skills, or the willingness to learn, will have a considerable disadvantage. An issue calling for further investigation is whether the development could produce new biases in the profession, for instance because young journalists are seen as more attractive for Video Journalist positions.

How has the job satisfaction of the journalists been affected by the development? The impression is that it has to some extent been increased. There is a change in professionalism, related to the mental process behind a news item. Journalists explain how they are now in a better position to exert more influence on all parts of the items. The process of editing can begin in the mind of the journalist as soon as the interview is over because

he knows exactly what pictures he has. The focus on empowering the journalists through giving them more control over their final products is positively received.

When talking to journalists, the increased power and control is one of the fundamental reasons for enjoying working in the new way. They are proud of their products and of the fact that they are using considerably less resources than before. Another thing that makes the work more satisfying is that the journalists see possibilities to do things they couldn't do before due to economic constraints. The ability to travel and cover international events from a regional perspective is very much appreciated.

The increased job satisfaction experienced in this case is not reported in a case study by Simon Cottle from the BBC (Cottle, 1998). This shows that it is not inherent in the new technology, but rather in the way it is put to use in the organization. With high emphasis on training, empowering journalists and not putting too much pressure on them, they have come to value that the production is now less "heavy" than before. Data from the case, as well as Cottle's findings, suggest that this is strongly dependent upon continued budgeting at today's level. If the organization uses the opportunity to cut down on their budgets and staff dramatically, this will most likely lead to dissatisfaction with the new configuration. In a wide perspective it may be too optimistic to assume that cuts in budget and staff will not occur, even if this is the case in Concentra at the moment.

Interactivity and the Audience Relationship

One of the predictions put forward about changes in the media industry due to new technologies is that journalism will become more audience focussed. The cause for this is supposed to be the interactivity of new ICTs, in particular the WWW. Analysts have suggested that the wall between the source and the audience has disappeared, and that the way forward is to empower the audience. What is the role of the audience in this story?

In the television stations there is not much talk about the audience. In fact, when asked about the audience, journalists frequently think that the question refers to their interviewees. When the meaning of the question is specified, they commonly express that they have a close connection to their viewers because they work for regional stations. The new technology is not thought to impact on this.

The other case, about the multimedia desk, isn't more promising in terms of audience empowerment. The original content produced in Concentra for the WWW is minimal, and the assessment of it as a medium has changed significantly. Management no longer believes in the WWW as a separate medium, but sees it rather as a tool to enhance the already existing media outlets.

What is the reason for this? As far as the data go it is clear that the new digital technologies are being put to use in connection with already existing services for which the organization knows there is an audience. The period of technology-pushed new products seems to have passed. Now the emphasis is on streamlining the organization. This is not to say that the WWW is not being used. It is thought to have a great function in maintaining a feeling of community among the audience. For instance, people are encouraged to send pictures of "positive" events accompanied with a short text. The pictures and texts are published in a weekly addition to the newspaper called the "Good News Krant" ("The Good News Newspaper"). But this is not a new development, or even a new product. It is simply an enhancement of an existing service and an old strategy to maintain a relationship with the audience. Another example from Kanaal 3 is the use of local people to present the

weather forecast. Again, this is made easier and cheaper because of the technological development, but it is not a sign of a fundamental change in the journalism.

So whatever happened to interactivity? It seems that, although the technology permits interactivity, it is not being pursued actively because of the high costs. A quote illustrates this:

The mistake that many people made the last ten years in their multimedia was always changing their content for the end-user. And mostly because of (sic) technical reasons. That's something that is wrong, it's too expensive, you should not do that (CEO, Avalon).³⁰

Instead the focus is on pushing the content to the audience in as many ways as possible, with no change except for the platform. This is a more efficient and more flexible way of distribution. Some interviewees even use the concept of interactivity in a way that simply implies the ability to choose between more and more specialized content. Video Journalism, through its low costs, might contribute to this. But this is not the same kind of interactivity that has been expected to change news. It is simply an intensification of today's situation.

Expectations of a transfer of power to the audience have followed most new media as they have been launched. In the 1920s, the radio was seen by some scholars as a two-way medium that allowed for a new relationship to the audience (Lister et al., 2003: 71). In the 1970s, cable television through coaxial cables was seen as an interactive medium allowing for a democratization of news publishing (Dutton, 1997: 134). Today, the WWW is described in the same way. This kind of reasoning attributes too much transformative power to technology, and risks missing crucial aspects of the sociotechnical development.

While there are few signs of a transfer of power to the audience, another actor is really experiencing empowerment: the journalist. The role of the television journalist has become more like that of the print journalist through the new development. Software for editing is frequently compared to word-processing software and the DVCAMs to digital cameras for photography. This transfer of power is crucial, as it is one of the main reasons why journalists accept working in the new configuration. Thus, the innovation of Video Journalism can be framed in a long-term perspective in which the journalist is gradually gaining more power over the process of news production.

The findings in this case study are in line with the findings of Quinn and Trench who in 2002 concluded that "We see little evidence of a 'new paradigm' emerging in online news" (Quinn et al., 2002: 51). It seems rather like old practices are being reproduced, and sometimes enhanced, through the use of new technology.

Conclusion

New digital technologies present challenges as well as opportunities to media organizations. As noted by Deuze in a recent review of multimedia journalism, the process "can be typified as a highly dynamic and complex one as each company is converging differently" (Deuze, 2003: 14). In Concentra, the textbook solution of a multimedia desk and a converged newsroom has been discarded due to strong social, economic and cultural resistance. The WWW is no longer seen as a new medium with the potential to change journalism, but rather as a supplement to existing media outlets. The focus has shifted towards utilizing digital technology in the production of news, resulting in the project of

Video Journalism. Perhaps the term “divergence” is more appropriate to describe this chain of events than the often used “convergence” (ibid.).

The Video Journalism project turned out to be largely successful despite the huge changes it entailed for the organization. This report attributes this to the application of appropriate strategies to enrol supporters of the project. A clear and focussed leadership, efforts to enhance the skills and job satisfaction of journalists, a change in the perception of “quality” in news, as well as an emphasis on flexibility, efficiency and standardization have all contributed to the result.

It has not been possible here to give unambiguous answers to the questions about quality, skills and job satisfaction, and the audience relationship. The discussion in the preceding section questions some common assumptions about the consequences of the technological development, but it does not provide an alternative framework. Most importantly, the case provides a solid argument against the understanding of technology as the single, most important determinant of the development. Social and technological factors are equally important, and this has consequences for how new digital technologies should be approached. Looking for ways in which the technology can fit in with current structures and understandings (such as the Video Journalist example) may in many cases be more fruitful than trying to transform the structures completely (such as the Multimedia Desk example).

Further research within the field of regional media organizations is required to gain a better understanding of which path the developments will take. Technological developments at this level are largely understudied; most research focuses on huge national or international news organizations. While the technological options are similar for organizations at the different levels, the social, economic and cultural context is unique to regional media. Also, regional media provide an important part of people’s media landscape and there is no reason to leave this part out of the research. Research should not be limited to successful cases and studies of best practices. For a complete picture of the development, projects that failed to yield the promised results must also be scrutinized.

Notes

1. This use of the term “black box” is borrowed from the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, where it denotes a matter of fact that has stabilized and is accepted by the relevant community without questioning.
2. This is in accordance with the orthodox principles within the Science, Technology and Society research community that call for studying science or technology “in the making”.
3. Two of the interviews had two interviewees.
4. “Newscutter” in this text refers to the person who edits the news items. The Flemish word for this is “monteur”. “Online editor” is another term for the same job. I choose to use “newscutter” because of the semantic relation to news.
5. This section is based on “The Belgian Media Landscape” from the European Journalism Centre’s web-pages as well as interviews.
6. There is also a German-speaking part, but it is quite small and not relevant to this study. German is also an official language in Belgium.
7. The annual support is 1.5• pr. viewer.
8. According to the methodological approach, this is actually an advantage, as it allows more direct access to the process of shaping the new configuration.
9. Author interview, 06.06.2003, Hasselt.
10. Author interview, 06.06.2003, Hasselt.
11. Author interview, 22.04.2003, Hasselt.
12. Author interview, 22.04.2003, Hasselt.

13. Author interview, 30.04.2003, Hasselt.
14. Author interview, 08.05.2003, Dendermonde.
15. Author interview, 30.04.2003, Hasselt.
16. Author interview, 29.04.2003, Hasselt.
17. "Vox-Pops" is the term for interviewing people on the streets to get their opinion on a particular "hot" question.
18. Author interview, 22.04.2003, Hasselt.
19. Author interview, 29.04.2003, Hasselt.
20. Author interview, 22.04.2003, Hasselt.
21. Other reasons include the fact that Concentra believes in regional television and that Kanaal 3 had a strategic geographic location.
22. Author interview, 06.06.2003, Dendermonde.
23. Author interview, 08.05.2003, Dendermonde.
24. Author interview, 08.05.2003, Dendermonde.
25. Author interview, 08.05.2003, Dendermonde.
26. Author interview, 30.04.2003, Hasselt.
27. Author interview, 22.04.2003, Hasselt.
28. It is a deliberate choice not to use the notion of "broadcast quality" because of its narrow, technical scope. Broadcast quality may be seen as one factor of the quality concept.
29. Author interview, 30.04.2003, Hasselt.
30. Author interview, 22.04.2003, Hasselt.

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