

Challenges in Covering Innovation Topics

Experiences of Journalists in the US, Japan and Finland

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Abstract

Journalists face plenty of challenges when covering innovation topics. Because innovation stories combine elements from several traditional beats, they are often left “homeless” in the media. The general lack of resources in the media affects specialty areas in particular. On top of that, innovation topics are often difficult to write because the issues are complicated and unpredictable. The risk of engaging in PR is particularly high when writing about innovation. Journalists can try to cope with these challenges, for instance by networking with experts, doing collaborative stories between desks, appreciating the fact that innovation stories take their time and finding a personal involvement in the topic to make it more appealing to the reader. The data in the present article consist of 69 thematic interviews with press journalists from the US, Japan and Finland.

Keywords: innovation journalism, thematic interviews, comparative analysis, USA, Japan, Finland

Introduction

Journalists who cover innovation topics have to deal with plenty of uncertainties. Innovations are by definition something new and unforeseen, and thereby trying to weigh their significance can be a difficult task. It is often hard to find critical sources to challenge the information provided by the original source, because it is quite possible that no one has the ability to evaluate the importance of the innovation in question. Furthermore, innovation topics are typically of a horizontal nature (see, e.g., Nordfors 2009: 7); a single case can easily involve business, politics and science. This poses a challenge to journalists, as they ought to have a very broad understanding of the issues. On top of this, the whole media scenery is in a maelstrom. The media are in an economic crisis and newspapers have been hit hardest. About a third of the newsroom jobs in American newspapers in 2001 no longer exist, and those cuts have come particularly in specialty beats like science (Pew Project 2010, key findings). This can be seen in various reports from around the world. In 2009, ad revenues in US newspapers fell 26 percent, and over the past three years they have fallen in total as much as 43 percent (Pew Project 2010). The development is similar in Finland and Japan. Finnish newspapers gained 22 percent less (Finnish Newspapers Association 2010) and Japanese newspapers 18 percent less ad revenues in 2009 than in 2008 (Tabuchi 2010). About a third of all newsroom jobs

in the US in 2001 were gone by the year 2010. Still, the numbers of newspapers going out of business have not been as large as was expected. (Pew Project 2010.) Even though numbers of issues have been cut and pages have been reduced, the journalists who are still left in the newsrooms do not have fewer duties; on the contrary, they have to produce content for the Web as well as the paper. Separate deadlines have turned into a constant online, and journalists have little time to be critical and reflective. This creates a situation of great pressure for journalists. For instance, a Finnish report that discusses how journalists see their role in the changing media shows that hurry, stress and pressure are the biggest problems in journalists' work (Jyrkiäinen 2008: 35). How do professional journalists verbalize all these challenges and how do the challenges affect their work? And moreover, what kinds of strategies do journalists use to face these challenges and cope with their work during these difficult times? All in all, is there room for "innovation journalism" in today's print media?

The research material consists of a total of 69 interviews from three different countries: Finland (n=34), the United States (n=21) and Japan (n=14). The interviewees also represent three different thematic groups: business/technology reporters (those who typically write about innovation topics, n=34), journalists who focus on environment issues including climate change (n=18) and journalists who have written about issues related to aging (n=16). The Finnish focus group consists of journalists writing for daily newspapers and magazines (print/online). The American journalists are employed by newspapers, magazines and online publications. The Japanese interviewees are journalists working in the five major daily newspapers. Thirty-nine of the interviewees are men and 30 are women. The interviewees are identified in this study by national codes: FI1...FI34, US1...US21 and JP1...JP14. Interviewees within one national group are categorized alphabetically. The interviews have been conducted by four different interviewers in several locations in Finland, Japan and the US. Some Finnish interviews were conducted on the phone or by e-mail, whereas all the interviews in Japan and the US were conducted face to face. The interviews were semi-structured. Two question patterns were in use: one for the business/technology journalists and another for both journalists covering environment issues and journalists covering issues related to aging. The question patterns dealt with a broad variety of topics related to innovation journalism. The interviews were carried out as part of the research project Challenges of Global Innovation Journalism GINJO (2008-2010), which is funded by the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation, TEKES. The present research paper focuses on questions concerning what challenges journalists face when reporting about innovations and how these challenges are related to the overall difficult phase the media are going through.

Defining Innovation and Innovation Journalism

According to Collins English Dictionary, innovation is "something newly introduced, such as a new method or device". Carlson and Wilmot (2006: 6) define it as "the process of creating and delivering new customer value in the marketplace". Innovation does not need to be commercially driven; social innovations such as developments in public services like the school system or healthcare are also a part of the field of innovation (for social innovation see, e.g., Hämäläinen and Heiskala 2007).¹

The Finnish interviewees were rather unanimous in thinking that the word innovation has spread widely during recent years, and as a result of that also faced inflation. Many journalists stated that it is part of a political jargon that is empty in meaning. *“It is used in municipal strategies and everywhere in politics and no one really knows what it means.”* (FI8) Some journalists’ attitudes toward the word were rather strong. *“Innovation is one of the most laughable words among journalists. -- To me it’s a snobby and empty word. Sure, it has entered all fields, we’ve got it in the caring industry as well... when you turn a granny around you’ve achieved plenty of innovation.”* (FI9)² Several Finnish journalists problematized the word because it is of foreign origin. *“We pretty much shun these foreign words in general.”* (FI32) Most Finnish interviewees said that they avoid using the term altogether. There were exceptions, but they were often aware of being exceptional: *“We do talk about innovation in our newsroom and in the magazine as well. We’ve got enlightened readers, so we can use the term. Probably most magazines can’t.”* (FI20) These results are in tune with a content analysis conducted in Finland a few years back; only 6.9 percent of the 911 studied innovation-related stories included the word innovation (Kauhanen & Noppari 2007: 30).

Quite on the contrary, the American interviewees saw innovation as a basic word in their vocabulary. *“Innovation, innovate, innovative... any time there is novel behavior it is an appropriate term.”* (US9) Those who had a more critical approach to the term based their opinion on the hollowness of the word. *“I don’t use the term innovation very much. You don’t need it. It doesn’t say anything. If you talk about new ways to desalinate water, you understand it is something new. Otherwise we wouldn’t write about it.”* (US10) (See also Uskali 2010: 3.)

The Japanese interviewees often stopped to discuss the definition of the word innovation. They said that it is mainly used in technological contexts. Most interviewees avoid the word, but for different reasons: foreign origin, complexity, political jargon – or simply because they think their readers would not understand what it means. *“I don’t know if they would understand or not, but we think they wouldn’t and that is why we don’t use the term.”* (JP7) The problem with avoiding innovation discourse is that the word remains a mystery to the readers. According to Mäkinen (2009: 11), the media should demystify this discourse because this “might open access for more people to join the discussions, which is now restricted to the political and expertise elites”.

The concept of “innovation journalism” is usually defined by its horizontal nature. It combines, for instance, science, business and politics in one story (Nordfors 2009: 7). Kauhanen has presented a rather declamatory definition, which puts plenty of expectations on journalists:

The new journalism for this new era must be able to recognize important innovations already in the cradle, see false alarms and empty marketing bubbles for what they are, and analyze the functioning of innovative companies and indeed the whole innovation system in such a way as helps the various agents of the innovation system and the society in general in the crucial process of opinion building and policy making. (Kauhanen 2005: 3.)

However, as the concept “innovation journalism” was strange to the majority of the interviewees, many of them were rather skeptical of it, *“It seems to be a peculiarly Scandinavian concept... I am not quite sure if it is quoted anywhere else.”* (US1) The

Japanese interviewees had practically never heard of it. The American interviewees who were based in Silicon Valley and/or were connected with the Innovation Journalism program at Stanford University³, as well as the Finnish interviewees who were involved with innovation journalism activities in different ways, were aware of the concept. Furthermore, those who were familiar with the concept did not all believe in its usefulness. Most of them said that innovation journalism can be a good way of approaching different topics, that is, applied as a special mindset, but that there is no reason for it to be a separate beat (see Nordfors 2009, p. 8). *“I’m not too interested in the concept of investigative journalism either. Both cases are all about good journalism. Those special concepts give conventional journalism a lower status. There’s no use in promoting one type of journalism over the others.”* (FI15) Similar findings have been revealed in an earlier research project in Finland (Kauhanen & Noppari 2007: 66).

Next, I will present five different areas of challenges that can be distinguished in the interviewees’ comments.

Challenges in Writing about Innovation Topics

Most of the interviewed journalists tended to think that writing about innovation is more or less the same kind of process as writing about any other topic or area. However, some interviewees were more involved with the concept of innovation journalism than others and had analyzed the characteristics of innovation journalism more consciously. *“Innovation journalism is curiosity times two. The work process is more laborious because the whole field is less organized and thereby writing a story requires a wider use of sources and more fact checking, perhaps also fitting together more contradictory viewpoints.”* (FI4) Or as one interviewee put it, *“good innovation journalism doesn’t differ from journalism. Bad innovation journalism does.”* (US8) The interviews show that there are several challenges that journalists recognize and discuss when they are asked about covering innovation topics. These challenges, often interrelated and overlapping, can be summarized under five categories: unestablished status, lack of resources, unpredictability, difficulties in popularizing and risk of engaging in PR.

1. *Unestablished status.* The difficulties in the media have resulted in cuts in specialty beats as well as cutting pages and reducing the number of issues altogether, which obviously results in less story space. Furthermore, innovation journalism does not have the status of a journalistic beat. Innovation stories tend to be “homeless” in the media, as they combine contents from several beats (see Nordfors 2009: 3). *“The problem is that most editors need to understand where a story fits in the formulas they have become accustomed to. And sometimes I am trying to write pieces that just don’t fit their mold.”* (US15) And if it was not easy to find the right place for an innovation story earlier, it is not any easier nowadays in many cases. *“Two and a half years ago when I arrived, the magazine was big enough and there were enough stories that if my boss didn’t love the story but I felt that it was really really important, I could fight for it. But now we have so little space in the magazine, that there’s just not the room anymore for a story that isn’t the takeout on Bernie Madoff or, you know.”* (US8) Companies are naturally reluctant to talk about their innovation processes when they are at sensitive stages. However, if there is not a routine in innovation reporting in the media, companies do

not feel a need to communicate about their innovation activities at all, not even when it would be perfectly safe – and thereby journalists often only find them by coincidence. For instance, in Finland, very few publications cover start-ups and few publications cover innovations systematically. *“Our challenge [in this particular magazine] is that we only look for things that are important. Things that are in the embryo stage aren’t that obviously important.”* (FI4)

2. *Lack of resources.* A journalist who writes about innovation should be knowledgeable in several areas – or should at least have the time to concentrate on the topic by studying it, especially because, for instance, news magazines in the US are moving toward opinion journalism (Pew Project 2010), and in order to form an educated opinion about something one ought to have a certain amount of expertise on the topic. However, several interviewees stated that opportunities for practicing innovation journalism (or writing stories related to innovation) have become fewer as the media economy has worsened. Special reporters seemed to have more time, and several of them considered themselves very lucky. Those participating in daily news production, on the other hand, reported plenty of experiences of having to work in haste. One great challenge is the Internet, which has changed journalistic work processes remarkably. *“Online journalism kind of has ramped up what we call the news cycle, so that you are constantly covering things all the time, so suddenly we’re all 24/7 cable news channels where we have to just pump out product all the time--.”* (US3)

3. *Unpredictability.* There is an essential uncertainty that comes with writing about the future and the as yet unknown (see, e.g., Alkio 2006). Traditionally, journalism has more or less meant reporting facts about things that have happened in the past. Today, however, it is claimed that an orientation toward the future is common in journalism (Väliverronen 2007: 146) – and it definitely is an essential factor in innovation journalism. *“The entire profession has a pretty firm opinion about what’s right and what’s wrong and so forth. Then there are areas, where you’re talking about innovations, and there’s a lot more uncertainty about whether it’s right.”* (US4) Even the most skillful journalist cannot predict which innovation will break through and which will fail miserably. *“I’d say we get, on a typical day, somewhere about 75 email pitches about new products, new announcements and so on. And you have to pick through them and identify the ones that are significant. At that rate you get things wrong on a regular basis.”* (US20) Another journalist described how he has continuous fights with his editors because they want to hype things whereas he wants to give caveats. *“You can write any number of stories about something that turns out to be wrong -- but there’s such a premium in the news business, especially the popular press, to wanna shout out headlines.”* (US5)

4. *Difficulties in popularizing.* Innovation topics can be very complex. Especially in Finland and Japan, where innovations are easily perceived as part of a national, political and institutionalized decision-making process, the system structures are often difficult to grasp. Interviewees in the US practically did not mention governmental direction at all (see also Mäkinen 2010: 5), but that does not seem to make innovation topics so much simpler. The following, lengthy quotation describes not only how unpredictable innovation is, but also what kinds of problems this unpredictability brings to reporting about innovation.

But I have to tell you that over the years, over certainly the last few years, what I've grown an increased appreciation of is just how unpredictable innovation is. And from the point of view of journalism which likes to have narratives, that has stories that have beginnings and middle and ends, the innovation process is far too open-ended. Things happen, things stop happening, things don't work, things do work surprisingly. And there's no rhyme or reason beforehand. (US13)

There is also a crucial controversy between news journalism, which tends to emphasize sudden changes and dramatic movements, and for instance science, which moves along slowly and usually far less dramatically. Several interviewees said that journalists often have a tendency to write science stories in a far too dramatic tone. *"You write the headline on full blast and the story starts living a life of its own. You don't know how to fit the story into the big picture, realize what it really means."* (FI28)

5. *Risk of engaging in PR.* The above factors actually result in a risk of engaging in PR. If there is not enough time to do research and become familiar with one's topic, and because it is often difficult to evaluate the significance of the claimed innovation in question, there is definitely a risk of being led by sources.⁴ Many journalists are aware of this, and they have to be critical and skeptical of companies' approaches. *"Companies can be tempted to use innovation as window-dressing for PR. They may use communications agencies instead of buying ad space."* (FI16) Often times journalists do not succeed in being critical. *"There is a tendency to do press release journalism. Just to repeat something in the press release. -- I think that is a big problem...not only in innovation journalism, but especially in business journalism."* (US9) Several journalists said that it is especially challenging to write about new gadgets and technology and still be critical. *"There's a great quote that I like: news is what someone somewhere doesn't want you to know, everything else is advertising. And a lot of times in the innovations base, for good or for ill, it's more advertising than actual journalism, because you're just saying hey, here's this great product, and the unwritten subtext is hey, you should go out and buy this great product."*(US3) Another American journalist went even further in thinking about his responsibility when writing about new gadgets. *"Working in a technology magazine, sometimes I feel that I am promoting problems in society. If I write about a new iPhone, then what to do with your old iPhone... it is not my problem, but it should be. You should embrace innovation, but also be conscious that sometimes there are negative consequences."* (US9)

Next, I will show what kinds of tools journalists have to overcome the challenges in writing innovation journalism.

Dealing with the Challenges

Journalists have different ways of coping with the challenges they meet when writing about innovation. Innovation journalism can neither be considered a beat, nor should it necessarily become one, according to the interviewees in this as well as earlier studies (Kauhanen and Noppari 2007: 65). However, because innovation stories include elements from several beats and do not have an established status, they may fall somewhere between desks and sections and sometimes even be dropped out of the newspaper altogether.

The Japanese interviewees, who all come from big publishing houses, described some useful solutions to this problem; they often have a multidisciplinary approach to topics that are of a horizontal nature. One interviewee who writes about the environment reported that they have a weekly page in the newspaper for environmental issues. The topics belong to four different sections in the newspaper: science, life science, economy and politics. Every week the four sections have a meeting at which they share topics between the desks and decide who will cover the overseas report. *“We have a sort of a virtual environmental section.”* (JP11) The environment page often deals with innovation, but innovation in itself is a topic that could very well be handled by collaborative work. If an innovation page was produced by turns, the topics would benefit from a wide range of expertise and the labor of producing the stories would be shared.

Lack of time is a current problem in the media in general, not only in innovation journalism. Journalists are under constant pressure to produce news content. As such, this not a new phenomenon; demands for speed have always been an essential feature of news journalism (Deuze 2005: 449). Innovations tend to be such complicated issues that they do not make their way to the daily news. One view is that innovations are not even meant to be topics that appear in the newspaper every morning. *“Innovations are easily left out of the day’s news and web – but even better, let’s do a thematic story later!”* (FI11) This comment implies that thematic stories are actually a better forum for innovation topics. However, some interviewees seemed to think that the topics that do not make it to the daily news do not make it to the newspaper at all, because journalists do not recognize them. *“In my opinion, in Japan, people expect to see results within a short period. The mass media are too busy following the news in front of them, therefore they cannot follow the long-term topics like innovation.”* (JP7) Indeed, it has been stated that “news organizations do not see their role as building ongoing policy narratives that can engage ordinary citizens in the way fragmented daily news reports usually cannot” (Entman 2010: 110).

Unpredictability is a challenge that journalists, according to the interviews, just have to accept. *“It’s just like you’re writing about on-going research, and you really don’t know for sure what you’re gonna find out the next day. So when I write about it, I usually adopt a tone of less certainty that says “this is on-going, I wanna write about this, but I’m not pretending as though this is the last word”.*” (US4) Several journalists mentioned blogs as a good forum for expressing uncertainty; their conversational form makes it possible to make assumptions and educated guesses instead of stating facts. Another way of approaching tricky topics is to write openly opinionated stories. *“Fact-oriented news are regarded as being of high importance now, so their [the journalists’] efforts are put into finding facts. In order to change this trend, the role of analysis or commentary should be reconsidered. For example, an analysis article could make the front page in the newspaper.”* (JP14) On the other hand, in another context, some journalists have also questioned the whole idea that journalists should predict the future (Nordqvist and Picha 2007).

Some interviewees more or less refused to make innovation journalism too difficult a task for themselves and described a more practical approach. A small desk, for instance, can be seen as an advantage, because no writer gets to focus exclusively on certain topics and in this way the journalists have a wider perspective on issues. And because one cannot be an expert on all things, one can always try networking with ex-

perts. *"We can't assume that a journalist needs to be an expert. After all, the world is a simple place when you look at it from the right angle. A journalist should also think about which people are worth meeting. The best way is to expand one's lunch circle."* (FI11) Sources definitely do play a crucial role in innovation reporting, as in any other journalistic work. *"I think that innovation journalism has a huge potential in bringing new topics to the agenda, things that aren't currently covered in the media. It's also a question of sources, like, your work routines are shaped by the channels you get your impulses from."* (FI4) Furthermore, while the new technology has increased journalists' workload, it has also brought with it some relief. For instance, practicing investigative journalism has become less expensive as online documents have become available (see Georgia Tech 2008); in other words, obtaining different documents nowadays is cheaper and takes less time.

Several interviewees suggested that a key to succeeding in writing about an innovation topic seems to be personal involvement of some kind. *"Writing the stories told by experts does not stimulate the readers' interest. Unless each writer finds and writes about a topic he finds interesting, nothing will come across to the readers. It might be a little unscientific way of thinking, but that's how I think when I write."* (JP8) The journalist himself can also be an innovator. *"Once I bought cooking oil from the store and used it to fill up the tank of my car. It worked well, even though it smelled like French fries. That was many years ago, when people were just starting to talk about biodiesel. I thought I'd try and see what happens."* (FI8)

Personal involvement also includes letting go of the traditional "objective" reporting, which in practice tends to mean quoting people from both sides of a controversial topic, which according to one interviewee is *"a lazy way of doing the story"*. (US4) Another American journalist was frustrated with the basic formula that he said is being used in nearly all innovation stories. *"You know, here's the innovation, here's the guy who did it, a quote from him, here's the person that says that it's full of bunk and then here's the person that's not involved with the discovery that will kind of tell us whether it's real or not."* (US5) An attempt to get both sides reported in the story can also lead to distortion. *"You're looking for that goal of objectivity... even if 99.9 percent of researchers think that climate change is a fact, you go and find that 0.1 percent in the name of balance and the outcome in the story is like fifty-fifty..."* (FI7) This problem has been recognized in journalism research as well. Entman (2010, p. 110) stated that news production norms do not lead journalists to look for truth but just conflicting views with no guidance as to which side might be closer to the truth or the scientific consensus.

Good stories were appreciated by several interviewees. *"Because you want to tell a story and for that you need strong personalities. So it often begins with a person who is good at telling a story about the topic. When you find the person, that's like winning the lottery."* (FI17) According to many interviewees, narrative is a useful format for innovation stories. *"I think the best writing, whether it's journalism or any other kind of writing, is to tell a great story. Even about innovation."* (US5) An American interviewee discussed at length how frustrated he is with consultants who convince journalists that they need to dumb down their newspapers because young readers have shorter attention spans.

I have two words for them: Harry Potter. 700-page books bought in massive quantities and gobbled up overnight with flashlights under covers, and not even

a picture. So, my answer is always story, story, story. If you can find a compelling way to tell the story of a problem and the innovation that might point the way to solving the problem, then you will have readers at any length, as long as it's a well-told story. (US11)

In a narrative story the journalist can also be present as a character. A rather extreme example of these kinds of stories could be “Vanished”, a story written by one of the American interviewees. The project began with a story published in *Wired* magazine in August 2009. It was about a businessman who was accused of fraud. He had staged his suicide and tried to disappear, but did not succeed. A while later the author of the story himself disappeared. *Wired* promised 5,000 dollars to the person who found him. *Wired* published hints on their website, helping people to find the writer. In the December issue of *Wired* magazine, the author told the whole story of how he tried to vanish and was eventually exposed.

Where once you could move a few states over, adopt a new name, and live on with minimal risk, today your trail is littered with digital bread crumbs dropped by GPS-enabled cell phones, electronic bank transactions, IP addresses, airline ID checks, and, increasingly, the clues you voluntarily leave behind on social networking sites. It's almost easier to steal an identity today than to shed your own. (Ratliff 2009)

This truly devoted, unequalled stunt is obviously an extreme example of an innovation story, but it is a very useful example in its lavishness, as it combines so many of the things that the interviewed journalists mentioned as examples of how to overcome the challenges in writing innovation stories. The story combines narrative with plenty of fragmented, non-linear information, pictures, graphics, etc. It was published both on the Web and in the magazine. One could not really ask for more personal involvement, and as the author asked the audience to take part in creating the narrative, the story got thousands of readers personally involved as well. The information about innovations in today's society and some associated downsides were intertwined in this exciting real-time mystery.

However, not all journalists believe that narrative is the right way to approach innovation topics. *“I think that they [other journalists] resort to the narrative format because that's the one that they have. -- Which means that some innovations are easier to write about than others. I actually think that journalism as a whole is going to have to move to non-narrative formats, non-linear formats, which I think will benefit other types of journalism as well.”* (US13) Several Japanese interviewees mentioned charts, graphics, drawings, etc., as a useful means of making innovation topics more understandable. The Internet also gives many different kinds of possibilities to elucidate complicated innovation topics.

Japanese journalists have their own specific challenges in popularizing innovation topics to the public. For instance, it can be difficult to put Western science and technology into Japanese writing. *“We need a new specialized language to do this, and it is first and foremost the task of journalism to create these.”* (JP4) However, journalists do not share a consensus on this task. *“There is a lot of confusion of terms for instance in the case of swine flu, and it is made worse by some very superficial entertainment-oriented reporting in TV and weekly magazines.”* (JP4)

The interviewees talked about their sources in a vast variety of ways. In Finland and Japan, innovations are most commonly associated with the national innovation system. This creates certain problems for journalists. *“We should write more about companies and their innovations than about the innovation system. The system sucks you in really easily. There are all these ministries’ press conferences, projects and plans... it’s easy to spend all your time with them.”* (FI29) And furthermore, the national innovation strategy is most likely to change after the next election. This problem was recognized in several Japanese interviews as well.

The dangers of being led by sources were widely recognized by the interviewees, but few of them had concrete suggestions as to how to avoid this. Finding a balanced viewpoint was often mentioned, but this leads us back to the above-mentioned problem of “lazy reporting”. A typical solution was to be critical and to do one’s homework, but the very same interviewees talked about how busy they are and how little time they have to do the research. Besides, “being critical” can easily become an empty phrase. When asked how journalists manage the critical analysis of new issues and phenomena, a Japanese interviewee responded: *“I could say that it is harder to judge anything now than it used to be. Things were simpler and judging was not so difficult as it is now. I know we have to make judgments, but I don’t know why it is so difficult.”* (JP2) One Finnish interviewee presented the idea of an independent apparatus, a news agency of a kind, that would only focus on innovation topics and send out information on a regular basis so that journalists would not have to go through so much trouble finding innovation topics.

Conclusions

The interviewees described the many challenges they face when writing about innovation. Most of these challenges are related to sources. Sources can be hard to find, and their credibility and impartiality may be difficult to assess. It may also be difficult to popularize the information given by a source into an understandable form. The journalists had rather conventional suggestions concerning on how to overcome these challenges; they proposed, for instance, a critical approach, balancing sources and networking with experts. One suggestion, a kind of a counterforce to all this source-centered discussion, was the suggestion of a stronger personal involvement on the part of the writer him-/herself. Evan Ratliff’s story “Vanished” was presented as an extreme example of a story with personal involvement. Obviously, not every journalist has the resources – or even the willingness – to take on such huge story projects, and not all readers have the literacy to comprehend nor the interest to even approach such a story. Innovation stories should naturally be written on different levels.

Most of the journalists did not consider the work process in innovation journalism to be remarkably different from the work process in conventional journalism. The techniques are the same, but innovation stories often take a longer time and are more laborious. That can be seen as a problem, especially if the editors do not appreciate innovation stories. As a matter of fact, based on the interviews, it could be argued that innovations could very well be dismissed from the daily news routine altogether and be embraced as a topic with a longer time span. However, newsrooms appear to be rather unequipped to handle slower topics. This poses a challenge to innovation journalism as well as other similar topics that are not well served by the fast-paced news production of today.

Finally, innovation journalism is such a new concept that its significance still remains to be tested. Practicing innovation journalism on a larger scale would seem to require innovations in journalism, that is, questioning prevailing practices and finding new ways of doing things. Based on the interviews, it could be predicted that innovation journalism will not become a journalistic beat of its own, but a useful mindset when approaching innovation topics. Furthermore, thinking about innovation journalism drew the interviewees' attention to a wide range of challenges they have to face not only when covering innovation topics, but also when managing their profession in the changing media scenery in general.

Notes

1. To read more about the interviewees' views on innovation, see Mäkinen (2010).
2. Similarly negative attitudes have been observed, for instance, in Germany (Spachmann, 2006).
3. The program existed from 2003 to 2011.
4. In addition to this, journalists and PR professionals have actually become more alike than ever as companies hire journalists to handle their PR, etc. (Luoma-Aho and Nordfors 2009).

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Interviewees

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The American journalists US1–US21 (2009–2010)
The Japanese journalists JP1–JP14 (2009–2010)