

# Crisis, What Crisis?

## *Three Nordic Photo Departments Fighting Back*

Anne Hege Simonsen & Jon Petter Evensen

### **Abstract**

As in most countries, Norwegian and Danish media houses struggle to adjust to new technological, economic and political realities. Photo departments have seen their budgets cut and people have been let go. It looks, however, as if the organisational response to the crisis is more nuanced than it may seem at first glance. We have examined three media organisations, with a reputation for an above average interest in photojournalism, through the filter of organisational psychology. By looking at the conjunction between organisational culture, the present climate, and what we may call visual editorial competence, which relates to a photo department's relative power within the organisation, we try to shed some light on when and why photo departments are able to implement their own crisis management and thus influence their own situation. Our findings suggest that photo departments with a strong culture are more resilient to a climate marked by disruptive change. The overall visual editorial competence does, however, impact their manoeuvring space within the organisation.

**Keywords:** photojournalism, organisational theory, visual editorial competence, crisis management, optimism

### **Introduction**

The global media industry is presently going through fundamental and seemingly paradoxical changes. In an era that is sometimes described as 'occulareentric' (Jay in Rose 2012:3) or by terms like the 'pictorial' or 'visual' turn (e.g. Mitchell 1994, Rose 2012, Sturken & Cartwright 2009), images proliferate daily and at an unprecedented speed (e.g. Meeker 2017). Photography and other visual material are recognised as click generators in Internet publications, as well as entry points in newspapers (e.g. Holsanova 2001, Quinn 2012, 2007). Digital technology has been hailed as a blessing for visual creativity, and news organisations like the New York Times state that visual journalism will be an area of priority in the future (Mullen 2016).

Yet, the editorial photojournalist has been described as redundant by several legacy media (e.g. Bowers 2014, Anderson 2013, Greenwood & Reinardy 2011, Quinn 2007). From all corners of the so-called Western world, extreme measures have been taken by media organisations big and small, resulting in cutbacks, the laying off of photojournalists or employment freeze in the photo departments. In Norway editors have explained

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their reductions in statements like this: ‘There will always be a plumber with a camera nearby when something big happens.’<sup>1</sup>

Such decisions are often explained with reference to one or more of the following reasons:

1. Photojournalists and their equipment are too expensive.
2. Photojournalists do not contribute enough to the journalistic content.
3. Freelancers and journalistic staff with a smart phone are able to deliver the same, or at least almost the same, as the old photography departments could.
4. Photojournalists are seldom the first to be present at an action scene. The news media may thus get better and cheaper material directly from the audience.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while photographs have become more attractive than ever, photojournalists find themselves challenged both from within the media houses and from the outside. What can be labelled the democratisation of photography (Ritchin 2013) has led to a situation where the image making technology no longer requires specialised skills; with the result that ‘everyone’ is a potential photographer (e.g. Mortensen & Keshelashvili 2013). From within the media organisations, however, the demand for multi-skilled photojournalists, who master video for the web as competently as still photography for the weekend paper editions, has significantly increased during the last two to three years (e.g. Lindblom 2015, Solaroli 2015). These demands occur within organisational cultures that, as varied as they may be in other respects, often share a view of photography as predominantly illustrative and secondary to text (e.g. Bjercknes 2012, Ritchin 2013, Simonsen 2015, Zelizer 2010). In addition, leading positions in media institutions are often held by people with no visual background (e.g. Bjercknes 2012, Moses 2000). What Moses (2000:7) called ‘a disconnect between how the industry views the paper and how readers do’ has thus only widened in recent years.

Little wonder then that the situation is often painted as bleak and discouraging, highlighting loss in revenue, inter-organisational fights between employees and leadership and prophecies of further cut backs in an imminent future.<sup>3</sup>

From these narratives of doom, it seems like the photojournalist profession is experiencing a variant of what Gregory Bateson (1972) referred to as a ‘double bind’, crudely described as an emotionally distressing communication dilemma where an individual or, in this case, a group, has to deal with severely conflicting messages.

There are, however, organisational experiences that point in the opposite direction, where photojournalists have approached the new situation proactively and initiated change from within their own department or institution. In this article, we will highlight a few such examples, as we find that there is uncovered ground between the narratives of institutional gloom and technological euphoria regarding innovation in visual story telling methods. The global image of the post-industrial situation in journalism is valid, but it nevertheless obscures national and local variations in how real people and real media organisations deal with the overall challenges. As noted by Anderson, Bell and Shirky (2012), the journalist profession needs new tactics, a new self-conception, and new organisational structures. Our material suggests that this is already an ongoing process.

## Method and material

Modern journalism is presently being reconceptualised as ‘networked’, ‘post-industrial’ or ‘remote controlled’, and, as Deuze and Witschge (2017) have noted, there is a need for the researcher to look beyond the newsroom and the classic understandings of journalism. Yet, the newsroom still plays a vital role, including when we look at how the media, perceived as ‘inhabited space’, is organised (ibid:8).

Traditionally, photo departments and photo editors have often been situated at the fringe of the newsroom. This partly explains a certain marginalisation in editorial decision-making processes (e.g. Bjercknes 2012, Knudsen in Fonn 2015). In our study, the point of departure was to look for newsrooms with a slightly different organisational take. As noted by Argyris, in times of disruptive change, defensiveness is a strategy that may cause even bigger organisational problems further down the line (Argyris 1991, Bang 2003). We have thus deliberately chosen media organisations where photojournalism has been a conscious priority, implicating a high level of what we call *visual editorial competence*. This concept contains not only a high editorial regard for the photographic image as a journalistic tool, but includes an above average inclusion of photojournalism on an organisational level.

The aim of the study was to explore how the restructuring of Norwegian media organisations affects photojournalism, according to photo editors and photo department leaders. We chose six Norwegian local, regional and national media outlets for a pilot study and included the Danish Politiken because of its status as a beacon in Nordic photojournalism and its direct impact on Norwegian photojournalism. Several award winning young Norwegian photojournalists have served as interns in Politiken, and the relations between Politiken’s photographers and their Norwegian peers are strong.

In this article we present pilot findings that we believe demonstrate how researching the fringes of the newsroom as ‘inhabited space’ (Deuze & Witschge 2017:8) may nuance simplistic understandings of an institutional crisis in the news media as uniform. This article only gives voice to the three most optimistic examples, based on semi-structured interviews with five people in leading positions. We chose this sample because they bring some qualitatively interesting perspectives to the debate that may not be representative, but nevertheless should not be overlooked. To avoid misconceptions about the media outlets in our study that are *not* highlighted in the article, we have chosen not to include them in the discussion.

## The Norwegian context

For contextual purposes, it should be noted that there are aspects of the Norwegian media landscape that make Norway a somewhat special case. One such aspect is that Norway, a country with a rather decentralised population, has an abundant flora of local media outlets; and in recent years, the number of local media has increased even more. There has been a ‘revalorisation of the local’ in the Norwegian media landscape, where local newspapers play a key role in preserving a sense of local community identity (Hatcher & Haavik 2013).

Another aspect that characterises the Norwegian media landscape is the financial support system, where media in a non-dominant position may receive state subsidies in order to retain local and political media diversity (e.g. Åmås 2017). As we shall see, this contextual framework plays into the editorial responses we present.

## Crisis response

According to Fink, Beak and Taddeo (1971:16ff) both individuals and groups perceive change as a crisis when their ‘repertoire of coping responses [are not] adequate to bring about the resolution of a problem which poses a threat to the system’. This rather general statement seems to cover how many Western media houses have reacted to the unpredictability of the present media landscape. As an example, one of our respondents claims that he sleeps poorly because he never knows if the technological landscape may have shifted while he was resting his eyes.

A crisis should not, however, be considered a constant situation. According to Fink, Beak and Taddeo there are four predictable phases that may foretell how individuals and organisations respond to what they perceive as a crisis. These phases may briefly be described as the initial *shock* (when change is perceived as disruptive and nobody really knows how to cope), followed by *defensive retreat* (where actions tend to be protective, ritualised, mechanistic and driven by fear). The third phase is labelled *acknowledgement* and implies a more pro-active approach where actors seek to understand their new conditions and explore their opportunities. The final phase is *adaption and change*, where new organisational and occupational patterns are internalised in a more organic manner.

**Table 1.** *Phases of organisational crises*

Phase	Interpersonal relations	Intergroup relations	Communication	Leadership and decision making	Problem handling	Planning and goal setting	Structure
<b>Shock</b>	Fragmented	Disconnected	Random	Paralysed	None	Dormant	Chaotic
<b>Defensive retreat</b>	Protective Cohesion	Alienated	Ritualised	Autocratic	Mechanistic	Expedient	Traditional
<b>Acknowledgment</b>	Confronting (supportive)	Mutuality	Searching	Participative	Explorative	Synthesising	Experimenting
<b>Adaption and change</b>	Inter-dependent	Coordinated	Authentic Congruent	Task-centred	Flexible	Exhaustive and integrative	Organic

*Comments:* From Fink, Beak and Taddeo (1971).

Even if the new media realities are no longer a shock, the narrative of doom referred to above suggests that several media organisations still talk and act according to phase two; defensive retreat. This often implies temporary belt-tightening, centralisation of control and restraints on what is considered wasteful entrepreneurial ventures (e.g. Starbuck, Greve & Hedberg 1978).

To understand the relative passivity of the photojournalist profession, it is enlightening to look at how photojournalism traditionally has been positioned within the journalistic field. The concept of social fields was coined by Pierre Bourdieu to describe social ‘cosmoses’, structured by an inner logic of power, endowed with its own social laws and assumed norms, ideologies and structures (Bourdieu 1998:59, 2005:30, Lindblom 2015). The journalistic field differs slightly from other social fields in the sense that it is less autonomous and that it depends upon the activities and power structures in other fields (e.g. Benson & Neveu 2005). Yet, the mechanisms governing the internal power struggles and social mechanisms do resemble other fields, like politics, academia, art etc.

Photography has traditionally played an ambiguous role within journalism (e.g. Bjerknæs 2013, Lindblom 2015, Simonsen 2015, Zelizer 2010). Photographs entered the newspapers as proofs or documentation, or as illustrations that may ‘liven up’ a

newspaper spread (Evensen & Simonsen 2017:134). The in-house photographer, and certainly the concept of the photojournalist as an equal within the journalistic field, is of more recent origin (Knudsen in Fonn 2015:153). According to Lindblom, the photojournalists thus serve as the proverbial canary bird when times get rough. They are easier to let go, because they do not have the same solid position within the core of the journalistic field. This marginality is embedded in the social structure (Lindblom 2015).

If we switch from the broader journalistic field to individual media organisations, we find that journalism is produced by a variety of specialised subgroups (e.g. Lowrey in Appelgren 2016). The set of shared visual practices, its organisational value and status, is what we have labelled a media organisation's *visual editorial competence*.

Photojournalists are one such subgroup, specialised in producing still images and/or video. Subgroups share norms, practices, and values, which, as Lowrey claims, provide meaning to their areas of work and guide them in their decision-making processes (ibid: 411). This constitutes an important part of what we may call the subgroup's *culture*.

Culture is a broad concept. In organisational psychology it refers to the deeper foundations of the organisation, including values, beliefs, history and traditions (Isaksen, Lauer & Ekvall 1999:666, Schein 2010). Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall further introduced the term organisational *climate* to describe variables that affect organisational and psychological processes and influences the overall productivity and wellbeing of an organisation (ibid.). A change of climate will impact the organisational culture and, possibly, the visual editorial competence in a media organisation.

For our purpose we find this distinction particularly relevant because the concept of organisational climate provides us with a set of criteria that describe the transition process from defensive retreat via acknowledgment to solutions. According to Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall, these criteria are often found in innovative organisations:

**Table 2.** *Dimensions of creative climate in organisations*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Challenge/involvement</b>	The degree of emotional involvement, commitment and motivation in the operations and goals.
<b>Freedom</b>	The level of autonomy, discretion and initiative in behaviour exerted by individuals to acquire information, make decisions etc.
<b>Trust/openness</b>	The degree of emotional safety and openness found in relationships.
<b>Idea time</b>	The amount of time people can use (and do) for elaborating new ideas.
<b>Playfulness/humour</b>	The degree of spontaneity, ease, good natured joking and laughter that is displayed.
<b>Conflict</b>	The presence of personal and emotional tensions and hostilities.
<b>Idea support</b>	The degree to which new ideas and suggestions are attended to and treated in a kindly manner.
<b>Debate</b>	The expressing and considering of many different viewpoints, ideas and experiences.
<b>Risk-taking/innovation</b>	The tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty.

*Comments:* From Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall (1999:668); adapted version.

We have used these dimensions as a filter, and as we shall see our cases all have a relatively high score on this list.

## **Findings: Rejection, adaptation, capitulation**

We have identified three response types that may describe how photo departments have reacted to the broader climate of crisis management. First, there are the rare examples of *rejection*, where the concept of a crisis is denied altogether. Second, there is *adaptation*, where the photo departments have their own contingency plans, and are able to influence the decision-making processes in the organisation. Finally, there is *capitulation*. This is where photojournalists passively (if not approvingly) accept what the organisational leaders consider to be the best contingency plans.

In the next section, we will present three cases that belong (mainly) to the first two categories. We have chosen to leave out clear-cut examples of capitulation, but our third example, Politiken, shows that even traditionally strong photo departments may lose their foothold and that editorial leadership may be put under a lot of strain to maintain a strong organisational culture. We have structured the interview findings according to culture, climate and visual editorial competence in order to identify some relevant strategic responses. The aim is to provide insights into the preconditions for dynamic and innovative attitudes. It should be noted, however, that since our research material is based mainly on qualitative interviews with people in leading positions, there are some obvious limitations to the material. One major disadvantage is that the interviews only provide insight into the visual editorial ideology and self-conception; not necessarily into actual practice.

### *1. Rejection. Hallingdølen: The assertive local*

Hallingdølen is a local media house, published in Ål in Hallingdal. The newspaper was founded in 1936 and in 2015 it had a circulation of almost 9,000. This is down from 10,000 in 2006. At the time of our interview, Hallingdølen employed some 35 people, of which 17 were editorial staff. Apart from one person, responsible for photographic training and maintenance of photographic equipment, the paper does not distinguish clearly between photographers and other editorial staff. At the time of our interview they were just about to expand their staff with a trained photojournalist whom they hoped would also help improve photographic skills among the others.

*Culture:* As mentioned above, Norwegian local media seem more stable than the rest of the media market. Even if the circulation curve is pointing downwards for Hallingdølen, the decline is slow and far from dramatic compared to most national and regional newspapers (Høst 2012). The Norwegian ‘passion about local news’ (Hatcher & Haavik 2013), alongside the fact that Hallingdølen has deliberately avoided joining any of the dominant media groups, gives the paper a unique market position with very little competition. Market control is probably an important reason why Hallingdølen has avoided contingency measures and chosen to adjust to the new digital situation at their own speed and in their own way. According to the (now former) managing editor, the paper never experienced the present situation as a shock.

The editor describes himself as an advocate for his community, and the newspaper’s visual policy is grounded in a wish to please the audience by providing a combination of interesting reading and visual material on all platforms. To him, this means, for example, to avoid being restricted by customised templates:

It is of vital importance that the paper looks good and as long as I am the editor we will never produce a template driven paper. [...] The media groups make all their papers look the same. They decide how the page is supposed to look before they get the material. It may sound as a rational way to do things, but that is only in theory. Here, we let the material decide.

To improve visual competence has been a conscious part of the newspaper's organisational culture since the 1970s. Contrary to modern trends, Hallingdølen has even expanded their number of graphic personnel, a profession that is almost extinct in Norwegian newspapers. They sit with the editorial staff and contribute to the discussions about content. The results have been noticed elsewhere, and the paper has received several awards for good newspaper design and layout, e.g. the European award for good newspaper design in 2014.

*Climate:* Even if Hallingdølen has a solid market position, the paper has been open to innovation and started exploring digital solutions quite early. The way they have handled the digital transition give them a high score on the dimensions of creative climate in organisations (see Table 2). In 2015, they had already been experimenting a lot with video in the Internet edition, and all staff members were encouraged to do some filming when on assignment. The editor labels his work philosophy as 'madness and gladness' (a reflection of what Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall call 'playfulness and humour') and claims that his main goal is to create an arena for creativity and experiment. The idea is that the different editorial subgroups, which in this case consist of very few people in each group, come together to make a solid product. This is a kind of strategy that has been called 'collaborative cycling' (Gynnild 2006:99) and may be described as the process of going back and forth between cooperative situations with different actors. Staff members are required to try new things, and encouraged to break with traditional definitions of, for example, 'the writer' or 'the photographer'. Yet, professional expertise in specific fields is respected and valued as such.

The photography department (in reality 1-2 people) is responsible for keeping up with the technological development in their own field, otherwise all staff members have an equal say in editorial meetings. The editor says that he expects all his staffers to be self-sufficient and to bring ideas to the table. His goal is 'an unbureaucratic organisation where decisions can be made quickly and put into action immediately'. According to him this explains why Hallingdølen is 'not afraid of change' and even 'good at it'.

At the core of the activity, the editor says, there is always the content: 'If the quality of the content is poor, you will never be able to reach a better circulation.' In his view, Hallingdølen provides better quality journalism today than it did ten years ago, and he gives credit to his staff for this development. In this respect he echoes Amabile's claim that managers in successful, creative organisations 'freely and generously recognise creative work by individuals and teams – often before the ultimate commercial impact of those efforts is known' (Amabile 1998:83).

Hallingdølen is published both on paper and online, and the platforms complement each other. Yet, the editor confesses to a special love for the paper edition, and he is confident that his audience shares his views:

As a local media outlet, we can do things a little more at our own pace. This gives us the opportunity to develop the paper edition. And this is where the money comes from. Only 10-15 per cent of the income is generated online. My business philosophy is thus to guard the paper edition as much and as long as possible.

*Visual editorial competence:* This strategy includes a high visual awareness. The editor describes still photography as part of the paper's 'soul'.

All platforms have their advantages, and the clue is to exploit this in the right manner. Mobile phones are excellent on breaking news, but not a good platform for the Saturday portrait. Still photography on paper gives people a special kind of experience.

In the photography department there is also a high willingness to learn. Renowned guest photographers have been invited to help develop a visual philosophy in the entire organisation. If a visual story needs space, it gets it. This does not mean that Hallingdølen avoids audience generated photography, but not as an alternative to their own editorial skills. 'Everybody may take a picture, but not everybody has the competence to take good pictures', the photo editor says. He also stresses the need for continuity on the news desk: 'I believe stability is key to a good learning environment. It helps establish a solid culture, and a stable work environment help stabilise new ideas.'

## *2. Adaption I. Adresseavisen: The learning regional*

Adresseavisen ('Adressa') is published in Trondheim; the third biggest city in Norway. It is the dominant regional media organisation in mid-Norway and belongs to the Polaris Media group, which own 35 media outlets in mid and northern Norway. In 2015, the newspaper had a daily circulation of a little more than 61,000 copies, as opposed to 79,000 in 2005. The paper is well integrated into the regional community and has won numerous awards for their design, journalism and photojournalism. In 2015, they were awarded a gold medal by Society for News Design Scandinavia (SANDS). The newspaper was also named Norwegian *Newspaper of the year* in May 2016 for its digital profile.

Adressa started to experiment on several platforms quite early. They experimented with radio until 2009, and today the media house includes a television channel (TVAdressa) and two podcasts in addition to the print and online editions. Furthermore, the photo department has always been bigger than the photo department of most other Norwegian newspapers. At the time of our interview it consisted of 16 full time employees and three part-timers. The total number of staff was 230, but, as seems to be the general rule for paper-based news organisations, this number is steadily shrinking to cope for revenue losses.

*Culture:* The newspaper's visual culture was operated in a rather conventional manner until 2013, when, as a tactical response to digital challenges, the photo and TV departments merged. By fall 2016 a new editorial strategy was implemented, making the online edition *adressa.no* the primary outlet. The number of pages in the paper edition was reduced, and so was the opportunity for the photojournalists to expose their material on double spreads. Initially digitisation created some frustrations and worries about the visual quality deteriorating, but defensiveness transitioned quite rapidly into

what Fink, Beak and Taddeo label the acknowledgment phase (see Table 1). According to the visual editorial leaders, this relates to a certain amount of autonomy in how to handle the transition. The remaining frustrations, as explained by the two visual leaders in Adressa, are that the visual staff experiences their workload as heavier, and they are not entirely happy about how the paper looks. According to them, they produce too many single pages where ‘they try to press in as much text as possible, and the photographs get formatted in strange shapes and cropped in weird ways’.

The classic reportage has to a large extent transferred to video. This is not a result of a deliberate policy, but is described more as the natural result of new generations with new work patterns and preferences that have reoriented the work culture from the inside, according to the visual leaders in Adressa:

The young generation [of journalists] don’t leave the newsroom so often; they do more of their reporting by calling their sources on the phone. Thus, our reportages are also more based on interviews. You can see this in the weekend edition in particular. One of the reasons why we wanted to merge the photo department and the TV department was to teach the photographers to do their own stories and come up with more ideas. The TV people have traditionally been good at this.

*Climate:* The merge between the photo department and the TV department happened before the online version of Adressa became the primary platform. It is a result of digitisation, but also a way for the traditional photojournalists to claim some new ground on the new platforms. In the merging process, the visual staff in both departments decided to try what they call ‘buddy learning’, to make sure that relevant skills were equally distributed. This differs from the strategy in other media organisations.

Learning from each other also helped to undo existing barriers between different skill sets, thus opening a space for more involvement, generating of ideas, freedom and trust. This could be perceived as a shift towards a more creative climate as described in the creative climate dimensions of Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall (see Table 2).

According to Adressa’s visual editors, the merge has been a success. In their view, turning the two visual departments into one has led to greater flexibility; a better economic base for the department and it has contributed to their professional development:

In the video department we have a lot of young people with film background. They have a different visual approach, a different way to tell the story. They don’t use ‘speak’ the way we are used to from traditional television news, they tell their stories with images.

According to the leaders, they still need to develop the content of their visual journalism. Since everybody in principle can do everything, there is always the risk of a greater pressure from above to produce more. Yet, the visual leadership still feels that they are more in control, because the entire department has become bigger. This leads to greater flexibility in the sense that they are freer to give individual journalists the chance to work on their own projects.

*Visual editorial competence:* An interesting development is that the focus on online video has led to a stronger position for the entire concept of visual journalism. As expressed by the leaders, the paper now reflects what they do online, not the other way around:

It has become much easier to argue on behalf of the visual. Now, the entire media house is learning. All departments come to us with ideas, and they are concerned about their stories being covered visually. That is something new. At the old paper [...] they were often more concerned about filling a certain space with a portrait or something.

The experience with running their own TV-channel is considered a major reason for what they experience as a higher visual consciousness regarding video than print. According to the visual leaders, TV has taught the rest of the organisation that the visual stories generate more audience response than others.

It is new to argue stories from a photojournalistic point of view. Video helps [this process] because people understand it better when we say, ‘this is not a good way to tell a story’. With stills the others might argue that a portrait of some important person is enough. Now, the arguments have to be more solidly based in journalistic decisions. This has led us to prioritise differently.

The downside of the recent development is that the paper edition has less status, and is perceived to receive less attention: ‘Anyone can edit the paper. It is made in the evening, by very few people. They follow pre-fabricated templates to a large degree, and there is no visual editor on the desk.’

### *3. Adaption II. Politiken: A national beacon under threat*

Politiken is a leading national Danish daily broadsheet newspaper, published by JP/Politikens Hus in Copenhagen. In 2014, the paper edition had a circulation 87,000 on weekdays (down from 116,000 in 2007) and almost 109,000 on weekends.<sup>4</sup>

The newspaper has received numerous awards for its journalism, photojournalism and design, e.g. Danish Press Photo of the Year, Pictures of the Year International and World Press Photo of the Year. By the time of our interview, in December 2015, the photo department in Politiken consisted of 17 staffers in total.

*Culture:* The visual culture is thus strong and well established, yet there are signs that suggest that tradition is not enough to secure resilience.

Economically, national media houses are under more pressure than local and regional outlets. This is also reflected in Politiken, where budgets have been cut in all departments over the last couple of years. In 2016, the weekend edition changed from broadsheet to tabloid, thus reducing the photojournalists’ visual playground. In December 2015, the photo department and the TV department joined forces, and the head of the photo department assumed leadership of both departments. Along with the five video journalists, the photo editor’s challenge was to re-established Politiken’s visual culture on several platforms. There has been pros and cons to the process, but the photo editor claims he prefers to remain in control:

In Politiken we have our own style of visual reporting. We want to continue to do it ‘the Politiken way’. We believe that it is better to be in charge and to define our new products and situation, than allowing somebody else to tell us what to do.

*Climate:* The photo editor describes the on-going processes as unprecedented and unpredictable. According to him, nobody really knows where the paper is heading, and in our understanding, this situates the media organisation somewhere between defensive retreat and acknowledgement (see Table 1). This creates a climate of insecurity, both among the staff and their leaders. The photo editor is highly critical of a strategy that puts economy ahead of journalism, but he also stresses the need to look at the new situation as an opportunity to reach new audiences and to develop professionally.

We established our own Facebook page and reached 13,000 without doing anything at all. I have assigned one of my staff to the home page. I have also put everybody through a course in TV journalism, and my strategy is to divide the workflow into news and reportage rather than platform. This is a challenge, as the newspaper has influenced our thinking for 132 years.

*Visual editorial competence:* In the photo editor's view, Politiken is still dominantly a newspaper culture. To work with TV represents a new turn in a professional development that he otherwise describes as an organic transition from one technology to the next. TV is radically different, because it demands new skills and new approaches to narration and dramaturgy. He does, however, see the potential for synergy and exploration, as long as it is on the photo department's terms.

In still photography we have developed a visual language where we try to compress the big story into one strong photograph, or several photographs that tell a strong story together. This is how we have always done it, since we worked with tripods and glass plates. [...] We are not going to make 'flow TV'. [...] We will transfer the uniqueness of our still photography tradition onto our TV.

Politiken is still going to tell visual stories on paper, but the photo editor strongly regrets leaving the broadsheet format since the weekend edition was 'what separated us from the rest. In tabloid, we will look more like everybody else. That is damned sad'.

One of the biggest challenges in this new situation has been to 'recalibrate the internal quality standards', according to the photo editor. On the Internet, speed should be considered a quality, even if other elements of visual quality are compromised. In the daily edition the photographs need to hold a decent level, and in the weekends there is still an opportunity to shine. These different needs also structure the work flow:

I want my staff to be happy when they arrive in the morning and happy when they leave. And a little tired. It should be hard [to work here], but fun. If people get used to changing from the news beat to reportage they'll know that it will be their turn when they have a good idea. The reportage is our sugar, our honey pot. That is why I pressure the photographers to go out and try new things, and why I sometimes let them do crazy things.

The visual leadership at Politiken is also conscious about editorial work being teamwork, and the photo editor's ambition corresponds with most of the creative dimensions listed by Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall (see Table 2). The department has defined their common goals together, and they support each other. The visual quality is thus considered a consequence of this tight-knit work environment, and to the editor this culture is a necessary precondition for his ability to fight for the department. This echoes Amabile's claim that

people will be most creative when they feel motivated by the interest, satisfaction, and challenge of the work itself, and not by external pressures (Amabile 1998:79).

### Discussion: The effect of strong visual editorial competence

Is there a link between strong visual editorial competence and the photo departments' ability to cope with perceived organisational crises? The three media houses we have examined in this article share some interesting similarities, but also some relevant differences. While all three of them experience pressures, they all keep photojournalism and visual journalism in high regard and all three fit quite well with the list of requirements for a creative work climate put forth by Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall (1999).

**Table 3.** *Dimensions of creative climate applied on our three cases*

Dimensions of creative climate	Hallingdølen	Adresseavisa	Politiken
Challenge/involvement	High	High	High
Freedom	High	Relatively high	Under pressure
Trust/openness	High	High	High
Idea time	High	Under pressure	Under pressure
Playfulness/humour	High	Not mentioned	Under pressure
Conflict	Not mentioned	Existing	Existing
Idea support	High	Relatively high	Under pressure
Debate	High	Relatively high	High
Risk-taking/innovation	Relatively high	Relatively high	Relatively high

*Comments:* Dimensions derived from Isaksen, Lauer and Ekvall (1999).

All three express a willingness to adjust to new working conditions, but preferably without letting go of the professional strengths they have developed over many years.

Together, our cases suggest that even if photojournalism in general has a weaker position within the journalistic field than text journalism (Lindblom 2015, Zelizer 2007), this does not apply to all media houses. In Hallingdølen, photojournalism and visual knowhow are talked about as an integrated part of the journalistic production process. Adresseavisen used to have a more conventional view on the role of photojournalism, but with the merger of the two visual departments, this has changed. At Politiken, visual thinking has been a strong part of the media house's overall journalistic approach, and still is, even if the paper today is under economic pressure.

All three houses have visual departments that show an explorative and flexible approach and a willingness to assume responsibility regarding their own working conditions. They all share a strong sense of professional commitment. The leaders are protective of their staff and try to manoeuvre in a way that provides them with the most freedom.

Some of the differences between them may be related to their market positions. At Hallingdølen there was never any mention of a crisis, just a continuous assessment of different possibilities and challenges. This suggest that Hallingdølen has acknowledged the digital challenges, and that its editorial leadership has found a way to adapt to the new situation and started to organically form new conventions and traditions

on the basis of what they perceive as the organisational culture. The calm, and the surplus energy to do so, is probably related to a near monopoly market situation in the valley they serve.

Adresseavisen also has a strong market position, on a larger regional scale. It may be considered a strength that the paper started to experiment with digital solutions in addition to the paper edition quite early. This has provided an arena for local initiative, in this case from the two visual departments who by themselves suggested to reposition, and to convert an on-going situation into what Nystrom and Starbucks (2015) labelled ‘a learning opportunity’. This has contributed to their professional development and has helped to form a so-called ‘adaptive culture’ that is able to learn and adapt to a changing external environment (e.g. Moxnes 1981).

However, if we compare the statements made by the visual editors in Adresseavisen with the statements made at Hallingdølen, we find a higher degree of tension between the visual departments and the rest of the media house. According to the phases in crisis management discussed by Fink, Beak and Taddeo, Adresseavisen fits between phase three (Acknowledgment) and four (Adaption and Change).

**Table 4.** Phases in crisis management applied on our three cases

Phases in crisis management	Hallingdølen	Adresseavisen	Politiken
Shock	-	-	-
Defensive retreat	-	-	x
Acknowledgement	-	x	x
Adaption and change	x	x	x

*Comments:* Phases in crisis management derived from Fink, Beak and Taddeo (1971).

Politiken is a national paper and, as a result, its circulation is less predictable than for the two others. The media house is known for its strong visual culture that has been developed, nurtured and maintained over time by several photo editors and a photo department that is used to fight for their relatively strong in-house position.

Yet, among our three cases, this is where we find the highest level of frustration, tension and uncertainty when it comes to the future development of the department. Politiken is to a higher degree than the others subjected to the same fundamental and paradoxical changes as the global media industry in general. It may also be that, because of its strong and renowned visual tradition, the feeling of having something to lose is perceived more strongly than in the Norwegian cases. Even if the photo editor is willing to adjust and re-calibrate the department’s activities, by merging with the TV department, it has become a personal challenge for him to guard and preserve the visual culture, and to adjust to the new demands and opportunities at the same time.

## Conclusion: Keeping an eye on the fringes

This paper is exploratory and based on a partial, qualitative study. Our conclusions thus need to be considered for what they are: a first investigation into photojournalism in the making. There are several parameters that have not been investigated, and our findings are based on interviews with a limited group of people representing a limited stratum

in their news organisations. We have not validated the claims made by our informants by neither observational data nor questionnaires. Still, we believe that our interview findings may be a valuable starting point for other, and more complete future studies.

Taken together, our three cases suggest that photo departments with a strong culture and visual editorial competence will try to develop creative and flexible responses to a climate marked by disruptive change. ‘Strong’ is not a very accurate concept, but in this context, it reflects the photojournalists’ position within the organisational power structures, their manoeuvring space and ability to be part of the decision-making processes. Such positions are, however, not always formal, and the most important aspect is not where the photo department fits on an organisational chart. Deuze and Witschge’s (2017) perception of media institutions as ‘inhabited space’ opens for a take on organisational culture that focuses on self-perception as maybe one of the most important parameters. If we return to the dimensions for a creative organisational climate, we find that dimensions like freedom, involvement and innovation are experienced categories, not objective descriptions. Yet they are vital to furnish the people working in the photo departments and their leaders with the energy needed to regroup, develop and maybe even be innovative.

The responsibility for creating an imaginative professional culture lies both within the photo departments themselves, and in the overall power structures in the institution. In Hallingdølen there is no clear hierarchy between journalists and photojournalists, but professional expertise in different fields is valued as building material for the media organisation as a whole. Such an arrangement is probably easier to master in a small organisation, and, as noted above, it is probably of vital importance that Hallingdølen has little to no competition in its prime market. In Adresseavisen, the two visual departments were encouraged to find their own solutions, thus creating a stronger visual culture to the benefit of both. In this process they have found a more effective way to promote the role of visual journalism within the larger organisation. Politiken seems to struggle the most. Politiken is a national paper, which makes it more vulnerable for cut backs than the Norwegian examples, but it may also be of some significance that the photo department have a proud tradition to defend. New solutions and constellations may in such a situation be experienced as a threat to ‘the Politiken way’, and the Politiken crew is thus the most likely to feel the brunt of Bateson’s ‘double bind’ as we mentioned in the introduction.

Finally, we hope this paper has shown that looking at the people and activities at the fringes of the newsroom may provide clues for more resilient news organisations. It is our understanding that visual journalism will not become less important in the future, and the news organisations should be encouraged to consciously look for the correlation between strong, creative visual departments and survival or success of the overall media organisation.

## Notes

1. Torry Pedersen, chief editor at Verdens Gang to Media24 on January 7, 2016
2. The main source for these points are the contingency measures taken by the Chicago Tribune in 2013, the Swedish Expressen in 2003 and 2014 as well as several newspapers belonging to the Norwegian media group Schibsted, in particular Verdens Gang and Bergens Tidende 2015/16.
3. Some news stories from the Norwegian media that may serve as examples: <http://journalisten.no/2016/01/nye-kraftige-kutt-i-mediibransjen>

<http://journalisten.no/2016/09/dramatisk-nedbemanning-i-aftenposten>

<http://journalisten.no/2016/09/kutter-60-arsverk-i-adresseavisen>

<http://journalisten.no/2014/06/her-forsvinner-jobbene-0>

4. Numbers according to Danish media circulation control: <http://www.do.dk/asp/medie.asp?id=200155>

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