

Limits to Change

A Case Study of an Attempt to Innovate in NRK's Factual Programming during the Mid-1980s

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Abstract

Production studies have become popular over the past decade. Recent studies have analysed, amongst other things, innovation, management strategies and the effects of convergence on editorial processes. There have only been a few studies that have analysed what happened inside media organisations in the earlier transformative stages (outside the UK and the USA). This paper analyses how the Norwegian public service broadcaster (NRK) adapted to the loss of its monopoly and the beginning of competition during the mid-1980s. It provides a window into how the flagship of public service, the Enlightenment Department, dealt with the new situation.

If one follows the production process of the main programme of the department (with the revealing working title 'Flagship') from its conception to its realisation as a weekly programme broadcast in prime time, this reveals how innovation at the time was restricted by organisational arrangements, internal values and external pressures. The programme makers included many elements that are still today considered to be advantageous in factual programming (humour, dramatization, popularisation, serialization, recognition, and even interactivity). Along the way several of these were changed: what had started as a proposal for a documentary series turned into something that was predominantly a discussion programme.

Keywords: Television production, innovation, ethnography, factual television, Norway, competition

Introduction

In Norway, the transition of television from the scarcity phase to the availability phase (Ellis, 2000) entailed the abolition of the monopoly held by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) and the establishment of new independent and commercial radio and television channels, as well as the availability of foreign and local channels. Norwegian researchers have used different criteria to determine when different phases ended and new ones started. Using legal terms, we can say that the monopoly phase ended at the beginning of the 1980s when the government allowed both local broadcasting and cable networks to distribute (foreign) satellite television. Bastiansen and Syvertsen (1994), on the other hand, argue that the public service broadcaster NRK dominated the 1970s and 1980s, and they draw the dividing line at the end of the 1980s. By that time two national commercial satellite channels had just started, and the national terrestrial commercial

television broadcaster TV2 was only two years away. They also note that it was the establishment of these national competitors that sparked ‘a deep-rooted reorganisation’ in the NRK in 1990 (Bastiansen & Syvertsen, 1994, p. 147). As Syvertsen (1997) writes, the NRK adjusted to the competition with TV2 in a number of ways – by reorganisation, by identifying the strategic priorities of certain programmes (news, children’s and regional programmes, Norwegian drama and entertainment), and by applying models developed by commercial broadcasters (serialisation, scheduling, counterprogramming).

But what was the public service broadcaster doing during the 1980s? Did it just wait for almost a decade until the seriously big competitors turned up? In this paper, I shall examine how the department that was, at that time, called the Enlightenment Department (FOLA) adjusted to the media situation in the middle of the 1980s, and I shall do this by looking at how they developed their main programme for 1986. The Enlightenment Department is important for the legitimisation of public service broadcasting, because it is meant to produce exactly the kind of programmes that commercial broadcasters often leave out from their programming, including programmes for minorities and special interests. This article focuses on the production processes of a single series of programmes. The programme in question was intended to stake out a new profile for the department. I raise the questions of what internal and external factors influenced the programme in question, and how these factors were negotiated during the programme development process. What was the role of external competition and how did management react? What happened when innovative ideas met administrative routines? How were internal differences in power, ideology and approach negotiated in the different planning stages?

Studying Programme Production

Ethnographic studies of television production have shown the complexity of the production process. There is no linear route from the original idea to the finished product. Phillip Elliot (1972) differentiated between three chains when he studied factors that influenced a documentary series for ITV.

One of the three chains – the subject chain – was firmly based on the producer’s ideas and past experiences. However, the other two chains – the presentation and contact chain – placed two limitations on the producer’s creative role. Material had to be suitable and available for television presentation. (Elliot, 1972, p. 146)

Elliot also observes that chance, too, plays a big part in production processes. Silverstone (1985) also showed how the producer had to meet the demands of television, such as having a good story, personalities and dramatic pictures, when producing a science-based documentary about the Green Revolution for the BBC’s Horizon slot. In addition, public service requirements of ‘balance’ had to be incorporated. Dornfeld (1998), analysing a documentary programme series for American public service television, also notes the struggle between institutional and cultural forces and, in this case, educational demands. In the case of US network television, Todd Gitlin’s (1983) study shows how the acceptance and development of a prime time television show is dependent not only on whether the programme concept meets the channel’s specification of a successful programme, but also on personal factors related to network executives and presenting ideas at the right time.

These studies show the diversity of factors that influence the creation of television programmes. In times of change, the stress on programme creators gets even greater, as they have to deal with a non-routine situation in which existing perceptions and bureaucratic routines collide with new ideas, making these ideas difficult to realise. From the point of view of research, times of change are particularly interesting, as they show the effects of organisational routines and ways of thinking that are normally hidden (Kjus, 2007).

Innovation in Television

Television is changing constantly, but at some moments the changes are more profound. In the 1980s the field of television changed dramatically as new actors entered the previously sealed market. In Europe, broadcasting monopolies were abandoned and commercial channels as well as local television stations were established in most countries, while international satellite channels like Sky, CNN and MTV also surfaced. Innovation here followed a well-known pattern: the establishment of new organisations with new business models, programmes and modes of production, targeting both old and new audience segments (cf. Ewertsson, 2004; Kung-Shankleman, 2000).

The existing players also had to adapt to the new situation: the new channels undermined not only the outreach of the existing public service broadcasters, but also, in capturing increasingly bigger shares of the audience, public service broadcasters' legitimacy. In the course of time, the traditional monopolies were innovating too – they developed more viewer-friendly programmes that could face the competition from commercial channels. This was done partly by showing more entertaining factual programmes, the introduction of which led to the infotainment debate (see, for example, Brants, 1998).

Adjusting to competitors and developments in the market, as well as innovation, are normally part of the strategic processes taken care of by central management (Bessant & Tidd, 2011). The step from innovative strategies to actual realisation of those strategies is often difficult, as organisational routines stand in the way. Within established organisations, innovative projects are therefore often organised as projects, and shielded from ordinary operations (Christensen 1997; Lock 2013). Even though the NRK adheres to these principles today (Sundet, 2008), we would not expect to find the same logic during the mid-1980s in an organisation that had had a market monopoly for decades. In the following paragraphs, I will analyse the internal and external factors influencing the production process of a key programme during the adaptation to external competition, but first I will give an account of the methods used in this study.

Method

This study uses different methods to produce data. I was allowed to be present in the working space of the Enlightenment Department for almost one year (1985-86) in order to gather material for my doctorate (published in Norwegian) (Puijk, 1990).¹ I spent much of my time following the production process of several productions, participating in production meetings, studio and on-location recordings, editing and postproduction sessions, and talking with reporters and different crew members. I also spent time observing different meetings (departmental meetings, general meetings), and talking with

the department's Chief Editor and Deputy Chief Editor, with people in the planning section, and so on. In this paper, I analyse one particular programme with the working title *Flagskipet* [Flagship]. Even though I observed discussions about the programme plans and *Flagship* during the departmental meetings, I was not allowed to take part in the editorial meetings about the programme itself. The project leader told me she was willing to share information about what was going on, but was afraid that my presence would influence the internal discussions, which were sometimes tough. Of course, this is an indication of the rather sensitive relations and conflicting points of view that were present on the editorial board. Since I was present in the department during lunchtimes as well, I was informed about the general gossip around the programme and its board. As time went on, I talked with and interviewed the project leader and most of the members of the board. I was also invited to be present during studio recordings, and accepted these invitations. In addition to this observational and oral information, which I wrote down in my field notes, I obtained a copy of the different texts that were the basis for the discussions in the preparatory phase. I consider this to be important material because it expresses the arguments of the different actors in the internal discourse and is definitely not exposed to a researcher effect.

This paper is based on a case study. Like every other programme, the programme I followed was unique, and it may be difficult to generalise the results of this case to other cases. At the same time this programme was considered by the actors themselves to mark an important crossroads, and in this regard incorporated many of the contradictory forces that were in play in this phase. It also was watched by a large part of the Norwegian population, and even though some of the mechanisms that formed this programme are special, many factors in this story (journalistic ideologies, the planning system, the relations between management and staff) were quite stable.

The Norwegian Context

Like many other European countries, broadcasting in Norway began with private radio entrepreneurs in the 1920s. Partly because the government realised that the private sector would not be able to offer radio services to all parts of the country, broadcasting was taken over by the state in 1933 (Dahl, Gripsrud, Skretting, & Sørensen, 1996). The NRK was also granted a monopoly in both radio and television, but television did not begin officially until 1960. NRK television has from the start been financed through licensing and has never aired advertisements.

The NRK was formally a governmental agency and had close relations with the Labour Party, which was in power for most of the period from 1945 until 1981. During the 1970s some NRK reporters also went through a period of radicalisation, and several times the NRK was accused of being left-wing, not least in their coverage of the Israel–Palestine issue (Bastiansen & Syvertsen, 1994).

When a Conservative government came to power in December 1981, one of the first things the new Minister of Culture did was to allow local groups to apply for local radio licences, while some local cable television licences were also issued. Around the same time, the first foreign satellite broadcasts became available. In a 1982 internal policy document *Norsk rikskringkasting i en ny mediesituasjon* [The NRK in a new media situation], the main challenges are formulated in terms of a good public service ethos:

It should be a duty of the NRK to give the public the opportunity to have as valuable a use of their time as possible. One aspect of this is offering good alternatives to low quality, while at the same time the NRK should be among the vigilant critics of the imperfect, the inferior and the harmful that are offered to the public. The most demanding task is to offer Norwegian programmes that in respect of quality, variation and scope can be at the level of the good quality programmes that foreign sources will show here. It will be part of the NRK's obligations to ensure that the national – and the Nordic – does not drown in the flow from the outside. (NRK, 1982, p. 19)

It is clear that this document perceives competition with foreign broadcasters to be the main challenge – it is not only foreign broadcasters that offer popular commercial programmes (like the first satellite channel that could be received in Norway, SKY), but also those that provide good quality foreign programmes, that are seen as a major threat (the BBC is mentioned in the text).

Although there was no real competition for viewers at this stage – very few could receive local and satellite television – the NRK prepared itself for competition. One of the strategies for the NRK was to improve its efficiency by expanding the schedule, and one of the initiatives was to have different departments compete for the new slots (e.g., Friday night, Sunday morning). Also, on the departmental level initiatives were taken to secure their positions.

Factual Programming

In 1985 the Enlightenment Department was the NRK's second largest department, and was only slightly smaller than the News Department. It consisted of a permanent staff of 58 people of whom 32 were reporters or producers, 15 were production personnel, five were consultants and six were in administration/management; NRK television employed 330 people in total. The department was divided into two sections. The Society Section produced programmes dealing with general societal and consumer issues. The Culture Section was responsible for covering the arts and religion. As the Deputy Chief Editor stated during a meeting, the main mission of the department was 'information, analysis, debate and presentation of cultural and societal conditions, in the past and the present'.

The Society Section's main programmes (Apropos) varied; sometimes they consisted of reports and interviews, while at other times they were studio productions and at others they were combinations. The regular consumer and cooking programme series were studio productions. In addition, this section produced a programme on social policy, a talk show and a science programme as regular series. The Culture Section's main programme (PAN) dealt with issues related to all the arts, mostly by means of reports. A literature programme was produced as a studio talk show. The Culture Section also provided live transmissions of religious services, and a weekly religious programme. Together these regular series produced approximately 100 hours of original programming in 1985. On a more individual basis the staff produced several programmes about the educational system, health issues, agriculture, and the visual arts, while other issues were dealt with in stand-alone programmes. Together these programmes made up 41 hours of original programming in 1985, while co-productions, external productions,

programmes made by the NRK's foreign correspondents and the like covered 28 hours. In sum, this accounts for 12.6% of NRK's total original programming in 1985 (Puijk, 1990, based on NRK's annual reports).

Flagship

In the Enlightenment Department, the planning for the 1986 season began with a memo written by the Chief Editor in 1984, in which he suggested that the department could strengthen its position by having a division of labour. On the one hand, some staff would be charged with producing expensive documentaries, but on the other hand, others had to fill up the schedule with modestly priced programmes or, in other words, studio-based programmes. The Chief Editor's proposition also implied that staff members would circulate between these programmes.

The focus on documentaries was in line with a reorientation within the department. In the memo it is seen as a consequence of a changed division of labour between the NRK's departments. The memo argues that the abandonment of monopoly broadcasting should also involve the abandonment of 'wall-to-wall' coverage:

(...) i.e., the view that television is a mirror where everyone, virtually without reference to how interesting, can demand to be reflected in the programming. The consequence of this mission, which we have never been able to fulfil to anyone's satisfaction, is a magazine form, often with a sort of thematic bound current affairs programme without the frequency and the technical resources that would be necessary for a reasonable wall-to-wall coverage (Memo, Chief Editor Enlightenment Department, 1984, p. 2).

The Chief Editor argues that in the future more cultural items should be included in the news, while more descriptive programmes about ordinary life around the country should be made by the regional offices, leaving the more analytical, critical journalism as a major focus for the Enlightenment Department.

The proposal was discussed first in a departmental meeting, after which an internal committee consisting of three senior producers was created. Their recommendation, 'FOLA's new profile', pointed in another direction. They argued that the department should make more innovative and solid programmes, and that it was not very fruitful to take budgets as a point of departure. According to this group, budgets could be reduced by better planning. They also argued that major projects should have a project leader who was not also a producer.

The report proposed different programmes, of which the one called Flagship was the main commitment for the department in the next season. It suggested that the department should make its mark 'on the schedule, for the press and the viewers with a solid, regular programme on Thursdays at 20:05 hours' (Internal committee report, p. 2). As the working title Flagship indicates, this was to be the department's centrepiece, a 50-minute programme containing both reports and studio segments. The reports (mini-documentaries) were to be the main element; they were to be solid, but would not necessarily be produced internally by the staff. They could also be commissioned by other departments or bought from other broadcasters. The report proposed that the editorial board should be small and should function like a commissioning board, with

the department producing a few programmes itself but mostly buying programmes from other departments or external producers.

Following discussions in the department, the Chief Editor accepted the proposition for *Flagship* and it was included in the NRK's plans for 1986. One of the members of the committee was appointed the project leader. In April 1985 she presented an explanation of the concept. Here she characterised the main prerequisites of the programme as follows:

- Recognition: the programme had to stand out from other programmes on the schedule by regularity, a fixed host and humour.
- Broad audience: the programme should not restrict itself to special segments, but should instead address a broad, adult, audience. Narrow themes could be chosen, but they should be presented so everyone could relate to them. The programme should be serious, but there should be room for humour and entertaining elements.
- Journalistic: the programme should be based on sound journalism, both serious and controversial, and should treat themes from new angles, but at the same time it should be simple to follow and easy to understand.

Building on these prerequisites she sketched the following structure:

1. *Under the surface*: After the opening, the programme would start with a thorough investigative report of approximately 20 minutes.
2. *A special story*: there would be one or two shorter stories about a malfunctioning public body or an individual's struggle with bureaucracy, or a feel-good story, etc.
3. *Studio sequence*: the programme would end with an interactive sequence in which viewers would be asked to give their opinion by responding to a statement. Those in favour would phone one number, and those against, another. This sequence could also be alternated with a reunion of two well-known people who previously had had a close relationship.

In addition to these ideas the project leader proposed that the editorial board should try to acquire two specific film-makers who were regularly connected to the programme, instead of using film-makers who were assigned randomly from a pool. Moreover, marketing of the programme in the press was mentioned as necessary, especially during the first programmes. Here the project leader added: 'Do we need professional help?'

To put these propositions into perspective we should look at both the output of the department and the discussion about broadcasting competition at the time. With a monopoly on broadcasting, the NRK had a limited offer, and most broadcasts, except for educational television during the daytime, were between 6 pm and 11 pm. Children's television (6:00-6:30 pm) and the news (7:30-8:05 pm) had fixed slots, but most programming departments also had 'their' main evening. The main programme of the Enlightenment Department was on Thursdays, either directly after the news or at around 9 pm. In 1984-85 the Culture Section broadcast its programme PAN every two weeks and alternated with the Society Section programme, *Apropos*. These programmes lacked a common frame – sometimes they dealt with one theme, sometimes they had a magazine format. They did not have regular hosts, but often used the reporters as hosts. *Flagship* was to cover both cultural and social content in an analytical but at the same time an

entertaining way. The project leader concluded the section she wrote about experiences with PAN and Apropos with this statement:

Experiences with PAN and Apropos indicate that we emphasize a fixed frame that the audience recognizes, tighter frequency, much more solid work on programme hosting and linking, systematic marketing, especially in the start. (Memo, Project Leader Flagship, 1985, p. 3)

One of the important issues was the creation of an identifiable programme on the schedule. It was argued that a fixed timeslot (preferably straight after the popular news reports at 8:05 pm), a good programme host and a fixed structure would lead to a programme that was recognisable for the audience. Of course these are elements that are also used today: serialisation, fixed slots, and recognisable fixed elements like the logo, host, and structure are ingredients of competitive programming.

Competition and Journalistic Ideology

The stress on identifiability was really an attempt to become more visible within the NRK. Competition was first and foremost a question of competition between different departments. The Enlightenment Department here felt itself trapped between the Entertainment Department on the one hand and the News Department on the other. There was a fear that top management would prioritise these two popular departments in their competition with future commercial competitors. The evidence for this was found in how the Nordic Director Generals talked about strengthening cooperation for entertainment and news in the face of commercial competitors, in how the NRK had reacted to the White Paper on Broadcasting Advertisement (NOU, 1984, p. 5), and in the way factual programmes were scheduled in less attractive timeslots.

In addition to this general fear that the culture and society programming would be weakened, there were also different notions about what kind of journalism should be developed. In particular, in the Culture Section a range of programmes was made by staff members who were educated in the field and who saw it as their main focus to mediate what was going on in the arts. They can be characterised as ‘missionaries’ (Köcher, 1986, p. 63) or ‘accoucheurs’ (Burns, 1977). In the NRK they are called ‘mic stands’. The editors and journalists within the Society Section saw critical and analytical journalism more and more to be their main focus, and promoted this genre as the Department’s main banner. In Köcher’s terms they were ‘bloodhounds’, or what Burns would have called ‘wrestlers’.

While these differences in journalistic approach are applicable to journalism as a whole (see also McQuail, 2005, p. 284-287), another distinction applies to television in the same way as to any audio-visual medium. While most reporters were occupied mainly with the content of the programme, the producers were more concerned about the form. In the Factual Department, few staff members had a visual (film) background. Studio programmes always involved a studio producer, but reporters often were responsible for producing on-location reports. In practice the film-maker (and later in the production process the editor) took care of the visual aspects of the programme. As a result, factual programmes were often visually weak. The Chief Editor touched upon this point in his memorandum:

It is necessary and laudable that FOLA's staff acquires knowledge and insight in society's and cultural activities and is able to see relationships and lines of development. But it is not only here where 'the documentary crisis' is situated. It is imperative that we find a fascinating visualisation, which we exemplify and 'illustrate' in a way that catches the audience. It is not only a question of clarity and conciseness of the spoken word, but severe professional demands on the other aspects: dramaturgy, graphics, décor, tricks, manuscript, direction, personal instruction of dramatic scenes, a conscious relation to variation and informative efficiency when choosing the correct mix of commentary, synchronised sound, inner dialogue, etc. (Memo, Chief Editor Factual Department, 1984, p. 4; also quoted in the working group's memo)

While the Chief Editor underlined the – partly absent – professional requirements, the project leader added humour and irony as the essential factors that should differentiate Flagship from other factual programmes:

A programme being serious does not mean that it has to be solemn and very serious. If we are able to incorporate humour and irony in Flagship we shall have distinguished ourselves far from most magazine programmes that we may collide with. [...] In the department I have noticed solid scepticism, yes almost fear of becoming too eager in our endeavour to become 'broad' and entertaining, that we shall become superficial, unserious and convenient. THIS REACTION IRRITATES ME THOROUGHLY. (Memo, Project Leader Flagship, 1985, p. 3, upper case in the original text)

This implicit infotainment debate was one of the elements in the internal discussions on how to regain a dominant position within the NRK. The project leader herself had a background in the Entertainment Department and was used to working in bigger projects. In her view, her experiences here were the background for her scepticism towards the rather serious attitude of some of the staff in the Enlightenment Department and for her stress on humour and professionalism at all levels.

From Magazine to Theme

At this time the project represented an innovative approach in the department, in organisational terms, approach and content. Many changes were made before the programme was aired in March 1986. Let me give an overview of some of the biggest changes.

At the organisational level, the ambition to function as a mini commissioning board failed. A male and a female programme host from other departments (Television News and Radio News, respectively) were recruited, but engaging reporters from other departments over shorter time spans to contribute reports became too complicated. Eventually, all reporters came from the Enlightenment Department.

The programme format also changed. When the editorial board was established in autumn 1985, they arranged an internal seminar and invited researchers from Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research. During the seminar the future of Norwegian society was discussed. The seminar showed that there were many interesting themes to cover. It was decided to have one common theme for the whole programme series: 'Norway towards the year 2010'. Each programme should still consist of three parts, but instead of

three different themes each programme would have just one theme. A short documentary would introduce the theme and pose questions, a studio debate between people involved with the theme would discuss these questions, and the programme would end by asking the viewers some questions concerning the theme, using the phone-based measurement of opinion. The programme thus changed from being a magazine into becoming a theme programme. The male host would lead the studio debate, while the female host would present the final segment, the opinion measure.

Pilot

A pilot programme was made by the end of 1985, which dealt with the issue of fish farms along the Norwegian coast. According to several members of the editorial board who I spoke to, the pilot was heavily criticized in an internal editorial board meeting. Some of the elements in the programme were still provisional – for example, the studio décor was not yet ready and the members of the discussion panel were not top politicians, as they would be in a real programme. Still, the programme was criticized for being boring, the report (25 minutes) for being too long and the debate for being too rigid and tame. As a result, the structure of the programme was changed: the reports were cut into different parts and alternated with shorter debate sequences. The studio design was also changed: the participants in the debate and the audience were placed in three rows, with the debaters on the first row, people called ‘witnesses’ on the second row and ‘the audience’ on the third. The host, who had been sitting in the pilot, stood and walked in front of these rows, guiding questions from one debater to the next, and interspersing the questions with ‘testimonies’ from the witnesses. The concentration of the participants and the audience into a tight area resulted in a higher temperature in the debate.

A few weeks before the first programme was due to be broadcast, another change was made. During the autumn of 1985 the NRK had used audience responses to announce ‘The most Norwegian food’, ‘The Norwegian bird’, and so forth. In a letter to the General Director of the NRK, the director of Statistics Norway had stated his disapproval of this practice because it was not based on sound statistical methods. The General Director in response limited the use of audience feedback. The editorial board of Flagship consequently decided to drop the interactive section, because they felt that they were not allowed to ask serious questions. This decision led to a problem: what should be done with the female host who was supposed to present this part? The result of change was that the programme now consisted of two elements: a studio debate, alternating with journalistic reports. The male host would still lead the debate, while the female host took care of the show’s opening and closing and interviewed one or two guests during the debate.

Programmes

When the programme series started at the end of March 1986, the first programmes were discussion programmes in which different experts and politicians discussed themes like the media situation, the future of pensions, leadership courses, national theatre, and the like. The discussions were preceded by a report in which one of the reporters drew up some themes for discussion. After a first round of discussion a new report was introduced

that was thought to give new impetus to the discussion. In most programmes three to four reports were shown and discussed.

The combination of live discussions in the studio and prefabricated reports was difficult. Even though the host steered the discussions according to a prearranged scheme it was difficult to anticipate exactly how they would develop. This difficulty arose especially when a new report was to be introduced, since the report often presupposed that the discussion had reached a certain point. This was not always the case, and it disrupted the smooth development of the programme. As the panel members were often people with little media experience (few were politicians), it was difficult to anticipate what they would say during the discussion. The programme host told me that the panel members and witnesses were often much more critical during the preparatory phase. During the live broadcast they would often become overawed and moderate their statements in such a way that the pre-planned line in the discussion was not realized.

There was one incident during a programme on the tabloidization of the Norwegian press that was especially decisive. Here the reports used one of the biggest newspapers in Norway as a case. The newspaper, *Dagbladet*, had recently changed to a tabloid format and had provided extensive coverage of the marriage between Diana Ross and the well-known Norwegian shipowner and adventurer Arne Næs. Having accused the newspaper of becoming more and more celebrity-oriented, the last report consisted of a visit to the Danish tabloid newspaper *BT*, where the editor stated that they served the readers what they wanted: stories involving sex, crime, children or animals. During the studio debate after this report, the Chief Editor of *Dagbladet*, Arve Solstad, accused the whole programme of being a fraud:

Programme host: Solstad, have you moved in this direction?

Solstad: Not at all. I don't know of anyone from the Norwegian press who has been to *Ekstrabladet* or *BT* in Copenhagen in the last 30 years. I insist that the programme you have made is false. If the former chief editor of *Dagbladet* had not been chair of the Broadcasting Council, I would have considered reporting you to the Press Complaints Commission, because you are as far outside the Norwegian reality as possible.

Solstad said this half laughingly, but the accusation made by the Chief Editor of what was still considered a serious newspaper was something that affected the reporter. She felt physically ill afterwards and was depressed because she reckoned that the tendency towards commercialisation in the media was not properly discussed.

This kind of incident contributed to a certain level of frustration among the reporters. As a consequence, they increasingly constructed their reports in a way that would be independent of what happened during the debate. Some gave up recording serious reports and just created humorous sketches, while others continued to produce critical reports. After a year the programme was cancelled.

Discussion

From the beginning of the 1980s the monopoly broadcaster NRK was confronted with competitors. As in other countries, the combination of political deregulation and satellite and cable technology was the impetus that heralded a new era. The first decade after the

abolition of the monopoly on broadcasting was quite different from the era of availability, which had as its central feature a fierce competition between the two main national television channels (Bastiansen & Syvertsen, 1994; Syvertsen, 1997).

Although local radio and television had begun broadcasting in 1981/82, this did not represent any real competition, and the NRK had not developed a full strategy to meet competition. The top management in the NRK implemented internal competition to increase efficiency and to maintain their future position, with the aim, among other things, of proving themselves worthy of having a second channel that would be advertisement-based. We can conclude that top management did not judge the situation to be sufficiently threatening to justify radical changes.

Maybe some things were imagined, but the leadership and staff members of the Enlightenment Department saw a number of signs suggesting that factual and informational programming would have to play second fiddle. As we have seen, this internal competition triggered innovation in the department. At the same time, they used the opportunity to try to redefine their field of activity: they tried to divest themselves of some obligations and to carve out a particular territory for themselves. In this case changing conditions resulted in bottom-up rather than top-down changes.

Flagship became the department's main priority. It was organised as a project and to some extent shielded – even from me, as a researcher. The original organisational plan of Flagship contained a range of innovative ideas that were never realised. The ideas that the editorial board could be a commissioning unit, and involvement from other departments, the proposal of live interactivity with viewers, and the integration of film-makers and editors were all abandoned because of bureaucratic hindrances that pushed the editorial board and the programme in a more traditional direction. Here they encountered forces at the institutional level as well as external pressure.

The concept involved a series of innovative elements – elements that even today are considered to be the first priority in programme development. Some of these elements were new for the department but not unknown elsewhere in television production, or in the NRK, for that matter. Serialisation, fixed slots, fixed programme elements, external marketing and more entertaining features are also the means used today to make a programme series stand out from the crowd. This marks the transition of individual monopoly programmes to serialised competition based on flow (Ellis, 1982, 2000; Williams, 1975). In terms of values, the editorial board contained members with diverging journalistic ideologies. Internal processes had already been developing over a number of years. The increased call for more critical reporting, made by bloodhounds, had existed since the 1970s. Another ideology that put more weight on visual storytelling and design had also had its proponents within the editorial board. Many of the internal discussions were about how a greater emphasis on ratings could be integrated into the production process without risking losing the essential informational value of the programmes. This internal infotainment debate reflects the tensions that earlier ethnographic studies noted between a sober mediation of 'reality' and the medium 'needs' for emotion, personality and spectacular pictures (Dornfeld, 1998; Elliot, 1972; Silverstone, 1985).

Today, of course, these ideologies have developed even further, not least as new media have opened up for more consumer influence, interactivity and participation. These different journalist ideologies are at the root of different factual genres.

However, another feature was equally important in determining the way the original proposition developed. The leadership of the department took the initiative: they argued for the establishment of a series of documentaries. The fact that the staff refused to accept this proposal indicates how little control the management had over their employees. Of course this was a major problem when these public service organisations encountered real competition in the next phase. For the NRK this was when TV 2 started its broadcasts in 1992. The kinds of internal adaptations that Flagship represented were not enough to gear the organisation up for the new situation. As the new situation affected the whole organisation, the only solution was to start a profound reorganisation. This was done in 1990-91 when the departments were regrouped, the broadcasting schedule were redrawn, an internal market was implemented, and all employees had to apply for a position (Syvertsen, 1997). This can be considered a ‘disruptive innovation’ (Christensen, 1997, p. xv) at the corporate level, and it also meant the end of the Enlightenment Department, although it was then resurrected as the Factual Department.

In hindsight, the fear that the new situation would result in less factual programming within public service broadcasting was real in the first phase but unnecessary in the long run. In the first phase after TV2 was established, Høst notes ‘a skewedness of the general programme consumption with less culture and specific information, more entertainment and sports’ (Høst, 1996, p. 10, cited in Syvertsen, 1997, p. 235). Today, however, the situation is different. The proportion of the schedule taken up by programmes of the kind the Enlightenment Department produced in the 1980s increased from 14 per cent in 1986 to 17 per cent in 2011 on the main channel NRK1, and 25 per cent of NRK2 (Medie-Norge, 2013). When we look at where different programme genres and journalist ideologies are situated in today’s NRK, we see that all of them are present, but in different departments and with different editorial boards. The prestigious long-format critical documentaries that the leadership of FOLA supported are today produced as a weekly programme by the *Brennpunkt* editorial board under the Factual Department. Other society programmes are also produced by the Factual Department, but they are more dominated by lifestyle and consumer items and reality formats. Cultural programmes, with a mixture of an explanation of what is happening in the arts and a critical approach, are produced in today’s Culture Department, while science material is produced or commissioned by the Entertainment Department and by one of the regional offices in Trondheim. Current affairs programmes and debates are, in their turn, produced by the News Department today.

Conclusions

Innovation processes are fuzzy, and they are normally more complex than indicated by the theories. I have shown that following a programme through the different layers of decision-making that it meets on its way to realisation can expose the forces that influence its development. This ‘programme genesis and development’ approach is not new (see, for example, Puijk, 2012; Dornfeld, 1998; Elliot, 1972; Silverstone, 1985). In particular, programmes that are considered as innovative by their makers are fruitful to study (see Kjus, 2007).

A case study approach can show how macro developments (in our case the deregulation of broadcasting and the changing power relations in both society and the NRK)

connect to activities on the micro level, that is, how contexts are interpreted and dealt with in practice. However, at the same time these changes in context are accompanied by more permanent processes that change only slowly. Basic production processes, relations between different professions, relations with sources, and different ideologies continue even though adaptations are made to the new situation.

One of the advantages of this kind of ethnographic study is that it reveals the different relations, values and interests between the different professions and departments in an organisation. Theories on innovation presuppose that leadership has control over the departments and that the members of an organisation share values. In the 1980s differences within and between departments were a factor in an internal rivalry between different departments vying for prestige, in part connected to different genres. The viewers often do not know which department has produced which programme, but internal demarcations and separation were (and are) important.

McQuail (2005, referring to Engwall (1978)) points to the fact that media organisations contain different work cultures (management, technical and professional) and that these may have different interests and points of view. Of course this may be the case in many organisations (cf. Martin, 2002) and in the NRK it is not only a thing of the past. Although the separation between producers and technicians has lessened in recent years, the introduction of the Internet has resulted in a new hierarchy between different media. In his study of news production in the NRK, Erdal (2008), for instance, notes a hierarchy of prestige, with television on top, radio in the middle and online news at the bottom. I have also observed the same hierarchy in one of the editorial boards of the Factual Department (Puijk, 2012).

Today the management of the NRK has gained more control over its reporters and producers by introducing a broadcaster model, while orienting itself to constant innovation and creativity by adopting more flexible forms (Hedemann, 2010; Sundet, 2008). By using a project-based organisational form, the NRK has gained more flexibility, but this does not necessarily rule out the possibility that different routines become segmented and impede the development of new and creative programmes. Insight into organisational processes and how they relate to programme content – which in the final analysis is what is important for the viewers – is important in discussions on whether and how public service organisations fulfil their societal obligations.

Note

1. This article is not a reinterpretation of my data. I use the same data as in my thesis, but combine different parts of the thesis into one article in English so that this material will be accessible to non-Norwegian scholars.

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