

'It's like a family!' - The Unity and Community of Journalists

**On connections between newsrooms and how
journalists share a community of practice.**

Working Paper for
The EASA Media Anthropology Network's 55th e-Seminar
www.media-anthropology.net

Line Hassall Thomsen,
Aarhus University, Denmark.
LHT@dac.au.dk

Abstract

To journalists at traditional broadcast media these are times of insecurity and opportunity, rapid change and ever-growing competition. In the face of growing pressure, the unity and community of journalists employed at traditional broadcast media is increasingly strengthened. This paper explores the strong practice-community bonds existing between journalists employed at competing traditional broadcast media. Drawing on a two-year period of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the newsrooms of BBC News, ITV News, TV Avisen and TV2 Nyhederne, the paper presents an anthropological approach to studying journalists at work. During fieldwork, the study found journalists at competing newscasters to be working in very similar ways, while expressing a strong relational bond. In order to explore this bond, it is examined what is core and what is periphery to the journalists within the newsroom. One of the key findings is that each newsroom is very much connected to competing newsrooms by way of everyday practice-communities, both real and imagined.

Keywords: Journalism, practice communities, competition, professionalism, shared ideals, newsroom studies, ethnography.

Recently, after over thirty years working for Danish public service broadcaster DR, a well-known journalist and presenter was let off his job. He was one of over 650 staff members from DR who was made redundant due to economic problems at the broadcaster. However, this particular journalist, whose name is Niels Lindvig, decided he did not want to leave. Instead, he chose to keep doing his presenter and journalism jobs for the broadcaster. "As long as I don't get thrown out of the building I will stay working here, because I like my work," says Lindvig (Lindvig in *Journalisten*, 6.10.2014). Lindvig is not alone in his denial of management decisions. Outpours of support have come from journalist colleagues from competing news organisations across Denmark. As this paper is being written, journalists from competing news organisations are supporting a nationwide petition for Lindvig to stay working at DR, stating that: "Niels Lindvig is an extremely

good journalist, who makes an incredibly thorough, in-depth job" (according to the petition text, Skrivunder.net, 10.10.2014). This week (13.10.2014), Lindvig was told by his superior to leave the building. This instantly caused his colleagues at DR's program Orientering, and number of other DR programme staff to go on a day-long strike. After this strike, they have called the Executive Director of DR for a meeting in which she should explain the values behind making a good journalist redundant. Further, a competing radio station, *Radio 24 syv*, have used Lindvig as a guest-commentator.

Lindvig's case highlights some of the key findings I made during my recent study of journalism culture: journalists share a bond, stronger than any bonds created by management rules and organizational competition. One of the key values within the practice community of journalists is that of being a Good Journalist. When the practice community sees their core value as being threatened, journalists unite in order to protect their practice community and their profession.

A Study of Four Newsrooms

In January 2013, I finished a long-term ethnographic study of four newsrooms at Public service television broadcasters in Denmark and the UK. The study began in 2007. For a period of 18 months, from May 2007 to October 2008, I worked alongside TV news journalists at *ITV News* and *BBC News* - and in Denmark at *TV2 Nyhederne* and DR's *TV Avisen*. After the initial fieldwork, I returned to each newsroom for day-long visits and interviews, and throughout 2013 and still today in 2014, I keep in contact via email or phone with journalists inside the different newsrooms.

It was the aim with my study to research and capture the everyday working life of TV news journalists at national news broadcasters in Denmark and Britain today. More specifically, I was keen to find out what values guide the choices, selections, judgement and everyday work of TV journalists today.

Coming from a tradition of anthropology, I approached the reflection on professional values from various angles: Observations, participation and interviews with journalists at work. When analysing fieldwork, I focus on journalism as a profession, as this approach suits the shared ideals I encountered during fieldwork.

TV news workers in public service broadcasters and at the two largest commercial broadcasters in Britain and Denmark are the focus of this research. In this sense, the setting for my research was not a pre-given place. Geographically, this took me as a participant observer to TV newsrooms in two different countries, a multitude of sites, events and journeys where news workers go in order to bring news back to the newsroom and to places where they go in their time off work – such as the smoking room, the canteen or the pub.

On the first day of fieldwork, in each newsroom I was given a pass so I could enter all the doors that other news staff could, I was given my own login to their computer system so I could enter the shared virtual network, and then I was told to find a desk. But as none of the staff inside the newsroom have their own personal desk, neither did I. Rather, every day I arranged to work alongside a different person in the room and follow his/her daily work, either while working on a screen or out of the newsroom to cover stories. When it seemed there was less interest in being observed, or when the journalists I was observing was primarily waiting for news to happen, I would find my own desk in the newsroom. I made some arrangements with reporters to follow them on set days, but generally I did not pre-arrange who I would be working along with on a given day, as the unpredictable nature of news work meant that staff did not feel able to pre-arrange a time or place they would be in beforehand.

Seeking out Collegial Recognition

While studying everyday work inside the four newsrooms, I found journalists at all levels being constantly corrected, controlled and watched over by editors. At first thought, this observation suits the findings presented by Breed in 1955, in which he concluded that:

The newsman's source of rewards is located not among the readers, who are manifestly his clients, but among his colleagues and superiors. Instead of adhering to societal and professional ideals, he redefines his values to the more pragmatic level of the newsroom group.

(Breed, 1955:335)

While I found news workers to be aware of their employer's policy, I did not find this awareness to be the primary factor guiding their everyday work. Rather than working towards getting rewards from *both* colleagues and superiors, as suggested by Breed above, I have found that news workers first and foremost aspire to get rewards from journalism colleagues. Though mission statements and the broadcaster's policy were important to how news workers expressed their difference in working styles across news divisions, I found what Breed refers to as the 'ethical journalism norms' (1955: 326) to be most important in the everyday work. In the following, I explore the notion of professional norms emerging from practice communities across news divisions, broadcasters and broadcast policies.

Following Connections between the Newsrooms

During fieldwork, I noticed how management staff within each newsroom often visit each other in order to get inspiration and learn about the latest newsroom trends. These trips were one of the first connections between newsrooms and newscasters that I took note of. Having found this connection between the four broadcasters, I decided to look out for any other connections, follow them, enquire about them and concentrate my research on the similarities that had at first so surprised me.

Following the different relations between newscasters, I thought it helpful to map out the boundaries between those inside the practice of news work and those outside it. In doing so I was particularly inspired by the idea of mapping relations in complex societies introduced by Wolf (1966) and the onus of focusing on boundaries put forward by Etienne Wenger (1998a: 253-5). In Wolf's discussion of friendship relations, he notes that the formal structure of large institutions or a state 'exists alongside or intermingled with various other kinds of informal structure which are interstitial, supplementary, parallel to it' (Wolf, 1966:2). I find Wolf's use of the term 'interstitial' interesting in relation to the ties of friendship particularly. Apt for describing the important, yet mostly unseen connections, which the different broadcasters gain through friendship links, is this medical term referring to that which is not seen with the naked eye but exists within or in relation to parts of an organ or between groups or cells.

From this perspective, the mapping of relations existing across different media and different broadcasters is crucial when wanting to view the full structure of each broadcaster's news division. As I found that friendships construct a boundary between those inside the community of news workers and those outside of it, I began to explore these friendships across broadcasters. In time, I came to view journalists' friendships as community builders *as well as* border makers for those outside of the profession. As I will illustrate in the following, looking out for connections between the broadcasters meant that I came to see many more ways of reaching across the different newsrooms and broadcasters than merely management going on inspiration trips to see each other's newsroom designs.

'It's Like a Family!'

It was during lunch hour in the early summer of 2007, as I was walking through the Danish parliament with one of DR's reporters, that I first took notice of the warm friendships existing between journalists from rival networks. At every corridor we passed, another politician or reporter would greet us, some politicians shared a joke, and some reporters shared a story or gave a tip to a political story of the day. Then, as we reached Snapsetinget, which was introduced to me as the canteen where DR staff had lunch, I noticed that all political journalists as well as politicians on all levels were using this as their canteen too. As we had our lunch, different DR journalists, editors and cameramen came to eat with us and have a chat, as did journalists from both print and TV news. When I asked a DR reporter the reason why there did not seem to be a very strong boundary neither between journalists from rival networks nor between the different politicians, he told me:

We are a little family here. We know each other so well. And then of course, when journalists go on holidays with politicians, that relationship is strengthened. (...) Those at TV2 are all friends of ours. The only fight we have with each other is about being first with the questions and pictures.

DR Christiansborg reporter in conversation.
At the Danish Parliament, Christiansborg
after lunch in Snapsetinget, 21.06.2007¹

At Christiansborg, I met another reporter from DR, who had worked both at TV2 and the Danish broadsheet newspaper Berlingske Tidende, who expressed a similar opinion when I asked him about "DR's culture":

There is no DR culture. We are all the same, journalists, who I have worked with in many different newsrooms in Denmark.

DR Reporter in interview.
Christiansborg, Copenhagen
6.6.2007²

The time I spent at Christiansborg, DR's political bureau was my host, but the people I met and talked to were journalists, reporters, camera men and editors from across all the different news media in Denmark. The friendly and intimate relationship among journalists and politicians, much akin to the descriptions given by Krause-Kjær (2003), was new to me. What was also new to me was to see so many different journalists across different media platforms working together in such a friendly, collaborative and united way. Though the friendships with politicians did appear genuine, with journalists telling me that they often met with politicians socially, the community feeling between all the different journalists seemed even warmer and more collegial. During fieldwork, I waited hours outside meeting rooms in the large, long corridors of Christiansborg for the Prime Minister and his spin-doctor to exit a room. On such occasions, which could take hours, a group of about 15 news workers from both radio news, the news agency Ritzau, TV2, TV2 News, DR and sometimes all the print news journalists too were gathered, and there did not appear to be any limit to the camaraderie, and the sharing of both journalistic advice and ideas but also technical equipment such as leads between all journalists present.³

1 DR notebook, page 117.

2 DR Field book 1, page 10.

During these moments of waiting, there would be general banter between all news workers, only broken by a reporter from TV2 News making a ‘live update’ from outside the closed door. This TV2 News reporter would, as soon as she had a break from live broadcasting, often get friendly, internal jokes and encouraging comments from journalists employed at rival broadcasters – such as: “you’re getting better and better at talking about what might be happening behind this closed door!”, or sharing tips to what else the reporters could include in reports from Christiansborg today. It was occasions such as these that made me first notice the connections, friendships and collaborations between news workers in their everyday work.⁴

When Colleagues feel like Siblings

The notion that a community of journalists is akin to a family unit was one that I heard not only among the political journalists at Christiansborg, but from many different groups of journalists. The crime reporters of BBC told me that they saw the group of crime journalists from different media as a small family in which members often meet and of course help each other on the job. Likewise, I met correspondents and war-reporters from ITV and DR who spoke of their friendship with other correspondents whom they meet when out on a job in ways that one would describe family or kinship relations – such as another correspondent being ‘like a brother to me’ or describing very private relations of sharing hotel room, dinners, stories, translators or camera equipment when in a warzone with correspondents from other broadcast networks.

Through sharing practices, obstacles, threats and dangers of working in a war zone, these journalists appeared to form particularly close bonds, which far outweighed the fact that they were employed by rival networks. Adhering to the metaphor of a family, through listening to the stories of shared experiences from correspondents covering shared subjects such as war, crime, sport or politics, news workers define themselves as connected across networks through a blood relation, which is stronger than the allegiance demanded by the individual employer.

Communities of Practice and the Imagined Colleagues

At all broadcasters I visited during this study, news workers had their own shared language, a shared history and certain shared definitions of what good practice is. When I asked journalists, I was told that working at the same broadcaster, is much like ‘sharing a nationality’. In time, experiencing friendships and community between staff from rival broadcasters, such as the ones described at Christiansborg, I came to wonder whether there was another relation that made news staff across broadcasters perceive there to be a bond much stronger than that of sharing nationality. Thus I came to reconsider the idea, expressed by one of TV2’s anchormen among others, that staff perceive there to be a shared nationality feeling by employees working within the same broadcaster:

It is a bit like a nationality feeling, you know? You see, if you live in Denmark, you are Danish, and then you can begin to decipher what it means to be Danish. If you are employed at TV2 then you are a ‘TV2-national’ one way or another.

TV2 anchor man
Interviewed in news studio just after presenting the news
9.6.2008

3 At times, print journalists would be allowed to attend meetings where broadcast journalists were not allowed, as talk during the meetings were allowed to be quoted in tomorrow’s papers but not broadcast on the day.

4 DR Field book 1, page 113.

During fieldwork, I found each news worker I worked alongside to have a sense of belonging to the rest of the colleagues in the newsroom akin to what the TV2 anchor man above describes as a ‘nationality feeling’. Though reporters, cameramen and programme editors may spend long hours working alone, outside of the newsroom or inside a small, dark editing room they do not consider themselves to be working alone, but as an important part of a wider community. This community, as I see it, consists first and foremost of the perceived community of all people working in journalism. On a more physical and practical level, however, news workers’ sense of belonging is connected to all news workers employed at the same broadcaster, then with news workers outside of the broadcaster. Within this entire community, much like a nationality, members of staff have their own shared language, have a shared history and share definitions of what good practice is. This type of belonging is not dissimilar to Etienne Wenger’s definition of *communities of practice* (1998a), which has at its core the mutual engagement and ‘shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc)’ (Wenger, 1998b:2), which only a shared practice can bring about.

A map of perceived communities of practice

A community of practice in Wenger’s definition, comes into being when a group of people share learning practices, such as the practice of editing, the practice of working for the news, the practice of eating lunch together or sharing a certain hobby together – common to all these practices is that they matter to the people doing them, and from this starting point, a group sharing practice is produced (*ibid.*). Some communities have a name; others do not. But most importantly, according to Wenger, the community of practice creates bonds that are stronger than those of the broader organisation or group of other people with whom one has not physically shared the practice. At the strongest level of connection, Wenger’s definitions of a community of practice resemble the description of friendships across broadcasters, which journalists have described in terms of strong family relations.

Thus, using Wenger’s theory, I find it worthwhile to consider what he terms a ‘community of practice’ to be a practice community that has the ability to generate a close, family-like relation. Consider each individual news worker in a newsroom: One could view the news workers from one newsroom as sharing practice, and thus being in a community of practice with the fellow news workers in the room. This general sense of belonging can be said to create a home for identities and making the people within the group experience a nationality feeling akin to the description provided by TV2’s anchorman above. These local identities, however, like the practice of work, are closely linked to the global identity of one’s practice, in a constant ‘local-global’ interplay (Wenger, 1998a:161-163) – such as the interplay of being a news reporter working inside a particular BBC newsroom and that of working as a journalist. According to Wenger, the local-global interplay is an important aspect of the work of any community, as it connects a local practice to a broader context in which practice is located.

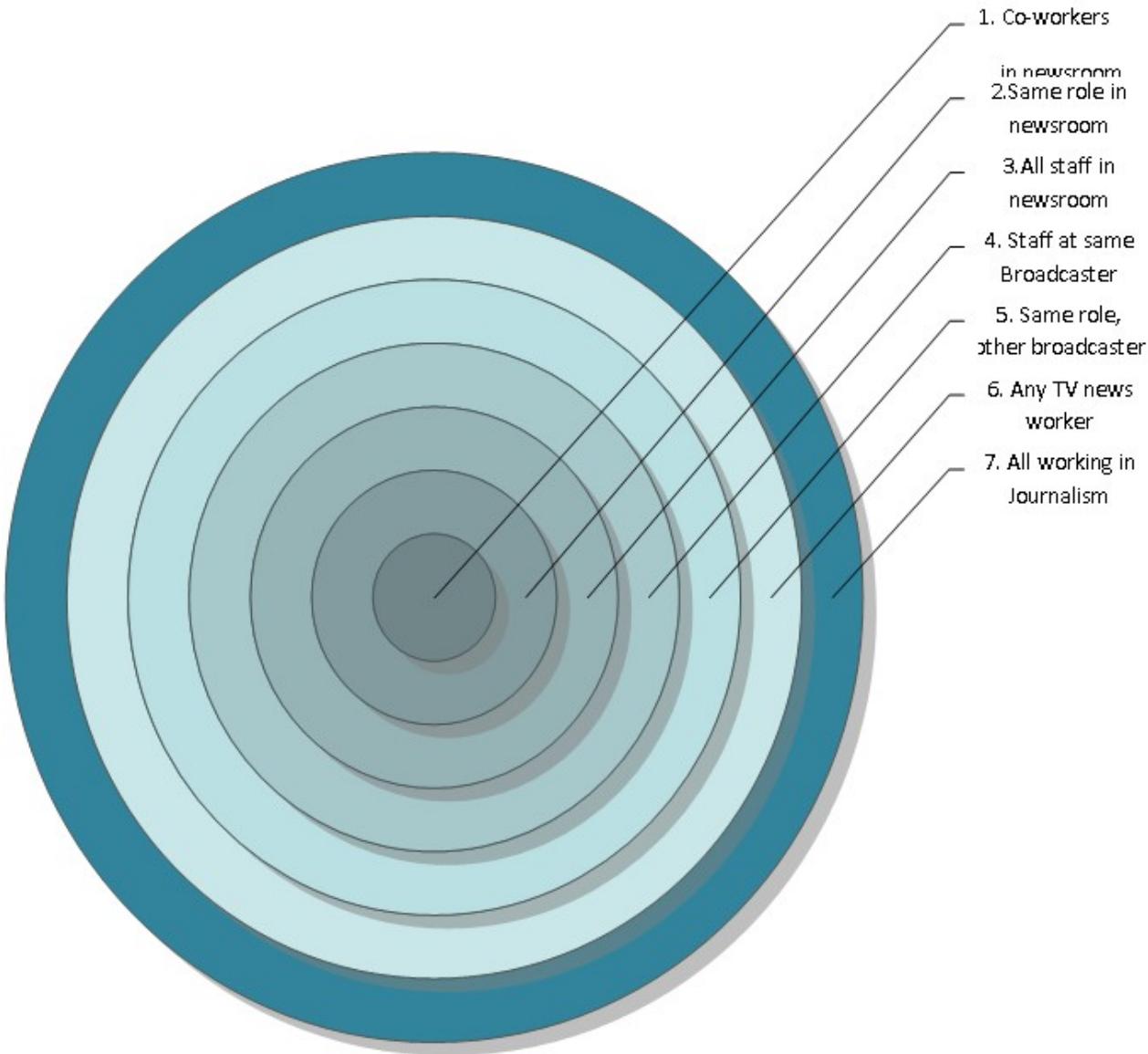
In this sense, from Wenger’s perspective, the local, i.e. the newsroom, is equally important to that of the global, i.e. belonging to the journalism profession. Thus, I find Wenger’s theories interesting in order to explore how the community feeling among journalists goes much further than the newsroom they are working in. Among journalists, I have found the Global to be at times more important than the Local. That is to say, I have found news workers to primarily identify themselves with their Global identity, of being ‘A Journalist’, or ‘working in news’. Thus, I have found the interplay of the two categories, which Wenger terms the Local and the Global, to be led by the least tangible and less physical of the two.

I find particularly fruitful the idea of connecting the local and the global in defining the work of journalists, as I see journalists as never only engaged in creating media but also always engaged in producing themselves as social persons in relation to others. Peterson (2003) has aptly described the

many layers of connection a journalist has: ‘Media production always and everywhere involves epistemologies, heuristics, competences, and aesthetics, as well as social organizations, hierarchies, rituals, and technologies, and all of these together constitute the worlds in which these producers live and work’ (Peterson, 2003: 162).

In Wenger’s definition of communities of practice, the imagined communities, such as those of other workers doing a similar job, in a similar profession are important. This connectedness with a greater mission, a greater role in society, a shared ideal of the journalism profession I have found to be present among news workers at all levels in the four newsrooms. News workers within one newsroom thus feel a connection with news workers at other broadcasters with whom they may never have worked. This connection can be viewed as a community of practice shared with imagined colleagues. Adding the importance of imagined communities to news workers’ identity feeling, the sense of belonging to a nationality, is just one of many multi-communities of practice to which news workers have a sense of belonging.

In order to attempt an illustration of the communities of practice in which I have found news workers participate, ranging from the Local to the Global, at least seven different layers of communities of practice should be highlighted. These seven different layers consist of groups, such as ‘Co-workers in the newsroom’, ‘All staff in the newsroom’ and those in the ‘Same role, at another broadcaster’, and above all, ‘all working in journalism’ – all groups that news staff talk about as important parts of their community. In exploring the way members of staff talk about their community in the everyday, I have found there to be seven such groups working in a constant closely knit interplay among all news staff. In the seven layers illustrated below, level 1 and 2 encompass the Local, level 3-6 consist of the global on a physical level and the seventh level encompasses a less tangible factor, namely the entire journalism profession comprising shared crafts of journalism:



Mapping of the primary layers of communities that each news worker perceives a belonging to.

It is of course not possible to map the entire group of people that news workers may experience a sense of community with, as a sense of community feeling is a personal matter, which is different to different people. Female journalists, for instance, may feel a sense of community with other female journalists, just as news workers from a particular journalism school may experience a sense of community with those who have graduated from the same school. The above figure should only serve as an illustration of some of the primary connections that I have heard news workers express in their everyday work – connections which, when perceived as being particularly strong, were described as akin to family bonds.

Studying the above attempt at mapping the levels of belonging, it is interesting to note how many of the levels are imagined (i.e. not physical or tangible). It is also interesting to see the extent to which each individual news worker connects to global others, such as news workers at different broadcasters (level 5), and those employed at different types of media, such as print and radio (level 7). From this illustration, it is only the first four levels of staff that the TV2 anchorman describes as

a nationality. Staying with his metaphor, the next two levels (5 and 6) can be referred to as *the world*, and the last (level 7) can be viewed as the *entire universe*, in which news workers see themselves and their shared larger community of belonging. I do not see all of the levels as connecting staff in family-like ties, but have found that across each of these perceived communities talked of as family-like, ties may develop which are much stronger than those of any of the individual first 1-6 categories of practice-communities.

As illustrated in my figure of perceived levels of practice communities above, the one overarching practice community within which all define themselves is that of ‘working in journalism’. During my time within the newsrooms and within editorial meetings, I have found this shared category to be used in arguments of how to behave, act and work in the everyday. Spending time with journalists and news workers it was not uncommon to hear members of staff explain their behaviour with the fact that they belong to the profession of journalism: ‘I had to do it, I am *a journalist*’, a news worker would say to explain why she had to interrogate her boyfriend upon returning home late at night. Similarly, a reporter at DR told me that the way she talked to her friends was mostly with a lack of patience as she was preoccupied with the ideas of a news story in her mind, for as she said: ‘I am *a journalist!*’

As the illustration above conveys, I have experienced staff to feel a sense of belonging in multiple layers, which links the individual workers to many more people than those they meet in the everyday, thus having what Wenger would term ‘multiple modes of belonging’. Being with news workers I have found all the different layers to be important for the everyday work, but one overarching layer, that of ‘working in journalism’ (level 7), is talked about in the everyday much more than all the other layers together. As ‘working in journalism’ is a description which all the news workers I have studied use to categorise their work, this is a practice definition that they all share. Often, I have found this shared category to be used in arguments of how to behave, act and work in the everyday. I shall return to this issue shortly. First, I would like to illustrate the above figure through a case study.

Case study: a BBC Crime Reporter’s communities of practice

In order to describe further the above figure of layers of community, I will illustrate the connections perceived by a reporter at BBC News, who specialises in crime stories. First, the reporter experiences a sense of belonging to those in the newsroom whom he works with and shares practice with on an everyday basis, much like Wenger’s definition of communities of practice. These colleagues may be producers, editors, runners, cameramen and other reporters. Together they share a vocabulary, e.g. related to the BBC News Division’s mission statements, and at the end of the day it is their collaborative practice, which creates the news bulletin. As some members of this community repeatedly share working practice and history of practice, this bond may begin to be perceived as forming ties that are referred to in metaphors of family relations.

Additionally, a BBC crime reporter experiences a sense of belonging to the group of reporters with another specialism, such as health, sport, politics or entertainment. These fellow reporters do not work together physically, but they have the same challenges in their everyday, sometimes they meet after work to discuss work, they share practices, vocabulary and everyday traditions.

Apart from the sense of belonging he feels with those employed by the same broadcaster, the BBC crime reporter experiences a sense of belonging to a specific group of crime reporters from other broadcasters and from the newspapers that he often meets near crime scenes that he reports on around the UK. These reporters share vocabulary, they help each other and discuss their practical work, again much like Wenger’s definition of communities of practice. Though these reporters come from different media platforms and different newsrooms, during repeated sharing of practice

they may form strong bonds of friendship, which they perceive as being as close as they believe family bonds to be.

However, this BBC crime reporter feels a sense of belonging to at least two other groups that he never or rarely meets in the everyday, namely the entire group of people working for BBC and the entire group of people who work as reporters and journalists, not only in the UK but worldwide. Being employed at BBC, the reporter feels a sense of belonging with staff from the entire broadcaster. Therefore, should he meet a person employed at BBC's drama department, the two may connect in sharing what it feels like to work 'for the beeb'; thus sharing a community of practice between them, which is imagined as it is not experienced in the everyday. Similarly to the other communities, the communities of all staff working for the BBC to a certain extent help each other and share a language and history.

Another group of people that this BBC reporter feels an imagined sense of belonging to is even less tangible, namely the entire community of people who work in the same profession of journalism, worldwide. This group of people consists literally of any person, who works as a journalist, and the reporter feels a strong sense of belonging to this group and he defines himself according to this group at all times. When this BBC crime reporter goes on holiday and happens to meet a person who works as a journalist, he will instantly sense a feeling of belonging to a shared community. Particularly if the journalist he meets is a TV journalist working for an established national broadcaster, our BBC crime reporter will feel a bond of practice and identity. Though he has never before met this journalist, he will find that they share a vocabulary using the same British words in the everyday such as 'OB', 'VO', 'ATTACK' and 'SYNC'. Also, these two journalists have similar operational values such as the importance of making a 'Good News Story', and the BBC crime reporter expects to be helped and feels happy to help this person as they are in a shared professional community. If interested, the BBC reporter will be invited to visit newsrooms and broadcasters that he meets on holiday. Indeed, during fieldwork, I found many journalists to return from holidays saying that they had met other journalists on their holidays and therefore had gone to visit another newsroom on vacation.

As illustrated in the example above, the practice of work, working together or working in relating fields all foster a community between the journalists and news workers across different broadcasters. From this perspective, I find Wenger's definitions of communities of practice apt for illustrating some of the core connections and boundaries that I have observed among news workers. According to Wenger's definitions, shared practice works as an exclusive and excluding connection, as 'Participants form close relationships and develop idiosyncratic ways of engaging with one another, which outsiders cannot easily enter' (1998: 113). I have discussed this particular type of boundary making elsewhere in descriptions of the challenges in getting access to study news workers (see Thomsen, 2013 and Thomsen, 2014). Just as I have experienced that the shared working practices act as a boundary keeping others, such as academic researchers, out, I have seen the shared working practice working as a boundary for keeping staff in. It is this strengthened practice community that journalists describe using metaphors of family relations. Keeping those sharing the practice in and others out is a key element in Wenger's notion of communities of practice. According to Wenger, the mechanism that keeps participants inside the community is constantly reinforced – as the repeatedly shared practice reinforces the shared language, strengthens practice-based relationships and further deepens communities of practice (*ibid*, 114: 253-254).

The feeling of always being at work

As illustrated in the figure of perceived levels of practice communities above, the one overarching practice community within which all define themselves is that of all staff 'working in journalism'. I have found the shared role of 'working in journalism' to be an identity, which all the news workers I have studied see as central to their life both in and out of work hours. Thus, the role of 'journalist' is

one that staff members appear to take on at all times. As a journalist who had presented the news at TV2 for the last ten years told me:

The problem for a journalist is that you never hang up your brain on a hook [as you leave work], and say 'I am non-existing to the world'. One is always a little at work.

Anchorman at TV2
interviewed at his desk in the studio right after the news bulletin
9.6.2008

The idea that staff should always consider themselves at work was often talked about among journalists. They shared these stories of never being out of the role of a journalist both among each other in the everyday and with me in recorded interviews. It appeared that most of the news workers I studied had stories of how they give high priority to their role as a journalist in their everyday lives. They told me how they would be on holiday and come across a news story, or how an experience they had had outside of work was made into a news story. The staff members who told these stories appeared proud of how they used their time off work to do journalism. As such, the stories appeared to work to share the ideal of being in a closely knit community with all others working in journalism; a community in which all share the idea that once one works in journalism then one is always a journalist.

These stories were encouraged, laughed about and appeared to be prestigious to share among colleagues. For instance, during a lunch break, one DR reporter told me and a few of her colleagues of how she had had to cut short this year's New Year's party as a story had emerged near the venue for her New Year's party. During the festive dinner at her friend's house, she had heard noise from the street. The noise came from a group of youths throwing bricks they had collected from the pavement. Soon the police arrived and the youth hurled bricks at them. Resolutely, the DR reporter had left the party, called her newsroom and within minutes she was reporting live from the clash between youth and police to all DR's media platforms. Thus, the story of the DR reporter's off-duty live reporting was suggestive of her giving high priority to the role of being a journalist rather than that of being a private individual and friend celebrating New Year's Eve.

In the vein of the story from the DR reporter, staff at all four broadcasters likened their duty to be always at work to a doctor's oath, in that they felt obliged to work on a news story at any time they saw a 'good news story'. When I asked staff what their partners thought of this priority, some told me that if friends or partners did not understand this obligation to journalism they would have to leave. Others, suggested that if their partners did not understand how much journalism meant to them, then they did not understand each other – thus hinting that the profession of journalism had become a part of their very identity. During fieldwork, I did meet a couple of reporters who had recently started a family, who expressed frustration with the fact that working in news made for such unstable working hours – thus contradicting the ideal of thinking oneself always a journalist and always potentially at work. The staff members who told me of their frustrations with the idea of constantly being at work told me so always in privacy and never in the newsroom with other colleagues able to hear.

Management often encouraged staff to collect news stories when outside the work place. At ITV, a news editor told me that it would be ideal if all staff would go to their local pub and collect stories from the people, and listen out for what stories people cared about. At DR, the head of news encouraged his staff to look for stories when on holiday (according to news staff). The head of news at TV2 told me in a recorded interview that for a journalist it is crucial to 'open up one's ears when at confirmations, silver weddings and weddings and funerals and whatever one attends.' To him, being curious at all times is the journalist's 'damned duty and privilege'. To him, this duty to always

be at work is not just one that he expects the TV2 news staff to take on, as the duty is one which *all* working in journalism have.

When I visited the private homes of some of the news journalists I studied, I found the decoration of their homes to revolve around TV sets. Some had TV sets in the bathroom, the living room and the kitchen. Most journalists I visited subscribed to international news channels at home. When I asked why there was so many TV sets in their home, journalists would tell me that they felt they ‘had to be updated’, and ‘didn’t want to miss a story’. The tendency to decorate ones home with TV-sets is closely linked to the journalist trait which I have termed The News Junkie (see Thomsen, 2013). Furthermore, staff told me that it was important for them to be constantly updated, as they were always preparing to go to work the following day. In this sense, the fact that TV sets take up so much private space in the homes of news workers illustrates how these members of staff consider their role of a journalist to be constant; they are at work even when at home. Though staff did not talk of their many TV sets in their private homes as work-related, the presence of TV sets illustrates how staff perceived their role as a journalist to require that they be *always at work*, and *always preparing for the next news story*.

As social outings were common at most of the newsrooms I spent time in, during fieldwork I was soon invited to join staff for a drink after work. Though other more personal topics of conversation would arise during a night in the pub with journalist colleagues, and though journalists would share drinks with other pub goers who were not journalists, there was always a sense that the journalists were at work, planning and scouting for good stories to be worked on the following day. Thus, if a fellow pub-goer mentioned something that the journalists present considered a good story, however drunk the journalists might appear, they would swiftly begin taking notes on notepads brought along for that purpose, or take phone numbers for leads for a story. I witnessed a few news stories emerge through this practice, and many more stories were inspired from such conversations in the pub. In this sense, when journalists went out after work, it appeared they were still journalists at work, together in the search for new stories and new insights to topics that engaged the public. In this way, I noticed that news workers defined themselves, their private homes and their actions by their profession, whether at work or outside of work. Such practices made me regard the journalists as always perceiving themselves to be at work, and sharing an identity feeling, which goes beyond the newsroom and the broadcaster and is made up of ideals of what it means to be a journalist.

Effects of family-like bonds across broadcasters

As illustrated in my description of the communities of practice, which a BBC crime reporter may experience, I see the networks of community of news workers to be much stronger and more extensive; the network extends further than just to the colleagues they meet every day. To illustrate the closeness among news workers, who are not employed at the same broadcaster, I find the metaphor of a family interesting. At first sight, the community feeling may appear to only comprise those in the near vicinity, such as the journalist’s colleague’s, and the broadcaster for which s/he works, particularly considering the fact that the members of staff who I have worked alongside appear to be so proud of the specific broadcaster they work for. However, when a specific group of cameramen from TV2 regularly meet a specific group of cameramen from DR when out filming, these cameramen soon form a friendship shaped around their shared work and shared practices of work. Similarly, when the same war correspondents from different broadcasters find each other doing similar reporting jobs in warzones around the world, these correspondents soon develop a bond, which often grows to be close friendship and a shared community of practice, which extends beyond their being employed at rival broadcasters.

I have found these different connections, made across broadcasters and across media platforms, to be very important in the everyday life of news staff in many ways. Among those employed within the news division as journalists, with whom I have spent most of my fieldwork, I have experienced

the contact and connections with journalists of other media to be crucial to the work produced. First, the many friendships established across newsrooms mean that journalists in one newsroom are very aware of what stories journalists at other newsrooms are working on or take an interest in at any time. If one broadcaster has a journalistic scoop one day, journalists at the rival broadcaster will find out about it before the story is broadcast. Such information would often arrive at one newsroom through a journalist receiving a text message or call from a friend working at another broadcaster. Attaining this knowledge of the other broadcaster's work influences the journalists' judgment of what stories should be considered important. Other studies of news making have focused on such connections and mutual inspiration among newsmakers from different news divisions as a 'striking routine reliance on other media', with strong tendencies toward 'pack' or 'copycat journalism' (Preston, 2009:57). Introduced by Timothy Crouch in 1973, 'pack journalism' is seen as synonymous with all that the journalism profession aspires not to be: Homogeneous, unoriginal and non-exclusive. Studies of 'pack' journalism have pointed toward consistency as a 'distinct and unspoken industrial routine and norm whereby copycat news making minimises risk and uncertainty in defining what is newsworthy' (Preston, 2009:57, see also Shoemaker and Reese, 1996:123-125).

In her study of terrestrial TV news culture and content, Harrison (2000) describes how the similarity in planning processes and a similar everyday working routine makes for a homogenous product. However, among journalists, the very notion that the similar ways of working generate similar content is seen as 'toxic' (Porter, 2005). The close connection between journalists and the apparent agreement with the ideals of the journalism profession, which I encountered during my research, stands in stark contrast to the occupational myth of originality and exclusivity. As American newspaper journalist Tim Porter writes: 'Pack journalism is toxic. It is an addiction to faux news and lazy reporting. But it is also easily corrected because it requires no additional resources, news hole or time – the Holy Trinity of rationalizations for why newspapers don't change. To kick the pack, all that's needed is the will to do it' (Porter, 2005, emphasis also in text). The argument that journalists should stay critical and open-minded in order to constantly combat the critical effects of journalists being and working in similar ways is one that I frequently encountered when discussing the everyday work of journalists.

Apart from the risk of pack journalism, I have observed a second impact that friendships and contacts between broadcasters can have on individual journalists, namely that friendships across broadcasters can become a closed forum for sharing, testing and confirming whether a news story is good. This sharing may inform their work and help define what is newsworthy, while also strengthening the shared notion of professionalism among journalists. In his study on professionalism, Freidson (2001) describes the sharing of knowledge among practitioners as crucial to strengthening the profession. The alternative, according to Freidson, is destructive. As he states:

It is even more destructive when knowledge or technique is withheld as a legally defined and protected trade secret rather than becoming part of the common body of knowledge held by all practitioners. Secrecy is the anathema to the growth of knowledge and technique (...).

(Freidson, 2001: 219)

The trouble with family-like practice communities

(...) journalists are in an underdog position compared to editors, owners, and sources. This underdog position, coupled with a firm belief amongst journalists that they are (and should be) free and autonomous agents, cause tensions within the organisation.

(Melin, 2008: 24)

Above, Melin describes how the idea of being an 'underdog' compared to editors, owners and sources conflicts with a shared ideal among journalists of being free and autonomous. Among the news journalists I have worked alongside, I have found a similar tension between being asked to do tasks by an editor they do not consider good and their own ideal of being a good journalist. Due to some editors or producers not being considered good among their practice sharing colleagues, I have thus experienced journalists to intentionally neglect to do what an editor has told them to do. In this way, journalists negotiate the type of tensions described by Melin above.

As I have experienced the different communities of practice among journalists, it is when a practice community is perceived to be particularly strong that staff members begin to describe relations to be as strong as family relations. I have found this depth in relations to be gained by repeated sharing of practice by the same group of people – a definition akin to Wenger's notion of deep relations within practice communities.

That staff members care about practices is no doubt in the interest of the broadcasters and news divisions at large. When the interest in practice makes staff become closely connected across broadcasters, this may also be in the interest of the broadcasters, who can learn from the deep connections with other staff and other news stories from other media. However, when in time these connections become strong practice communities, which may be perceived to share bonds as strong as those of a family, this may not be in the individual broadcaster's interest. Indeed, the close family-like bonds may become stronger than the bonds perceived to exist between individual staff and the broadcaster, and what these communities define as good practice may not necessarily be the same as what the broadcaster defines as good practice. Similarly, it is likely that not all practice communities will agree with the editors employed to manage news staff.

The trouble with communities of practice becoming so closely united that they may describe their connection like that of a family, is that the practice community may begin to exclude or distance itself from those outside of the group. This fragmentation within a news division or across a larger group of news workers is what Wenger has discussed as the coupling of an 'organisational asset and organisational liabilities, but in complementary ways' (Wenger, 1998a:256). To Wenger, the organisation will benefit from the created boundaries between different practice communities, as boundaries become learning opportunities. Wenger's research of practice communities is centred on fieldwork he has done among medical claims processors operated by a large US insurance company. Among these professionals, the idea of boundaries being a useful learning tool may be relevant. However, regarding journalists, I have found boundaries and ideas of certain individuals not accepted as 'good' among specific communities of practice to be problematic and at times obstructive to the shared work.

Though the boundaries defined by a specific group of people may function as a fruitful tool for learning about what is defined as 'good' and what is seen as 'bad' news work, I have at times seen the boundaries of a group as compromising the everyday work and create unproductive fragments and divisions within the newsroom. When one group of reporters does not accept a specific editor as part of their community, or when an anchorman does not like the work of a certain scriptwriter, this is not advantageous to the everyday work. For Wenger's more positive idea of boundaries between practice communities to be considered, it would be worthwhile for journalists from the different communities to openly share what they define as good work and what they define as bad – thus openly discussing the internal disagreements with certain news staff, rather than keeping them secret within the closely knit groups of news staff.

Conclusions

Throughout this paper I have illustrated some of the many connections and relations existing across media platforms and broadcasters. As has been illustrated, at all levels within the newsroom a close

contact and connection is constantly at work with other colleagues in the news business. I have explored some of the specific connections between newsrooms and introduced the idea that when news workers across different broadcasters are connected and constantly in touch with one another, it influences the way they work. Returning to the notion of a nationality feeling among staff employed at the same broadcaster, I have introduced a bond stronger than that of a nationality, which is shared among news workers across broadcasters, namely that of being in a shared family. I introduced this unity as connected to a shared pride in working as a journalist, a pride that both unites all staff and distances them from those outside of the journalism profession.

Across different newsrooms, journalists and news workers in general meet when out covering stories, and at these meetings staff form friendships that they describe through metaphors of family relations. I have argued that these imagined bonds of blood relation are perceived to be much stronger than the bonds established between employees of the same broadcaster. Using Wenger's definitions of communities of practice I have illustrated how news workers from one broadcaster recognize a relation to many different groups of news staff across broadcasters and media platforms. It is when these communities of practice are perceived to be particularly strong that staff may consider the relations to be as strong as they imagine family relations to be.

I have described the friendship relations across broadcasters as affecting the way staff work, and the way the community of journalists may stand together against pressure from those outside of the profession. Additionally, I have highlighted some of the problematic consequences of strong bonds perceived to be family-like within practice communities for the news divisions. I have identified the central challenge for the news management to be the potential that bonds between news workers can become stronger than those between employee and his/her broadcaster and management. The current controversy surrounding DR journalist Niels Lindvig being made redundant have made public the many practice-community bonds existing between broadcasters. The case is particularly interesting as it has made news journalists openly declare that they see a mismatch between management ideals and the ideals of their profession.

References

- Breed, Warren (1955): 'Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis' in *Social Forces*, 33 (4): 326-35.
- Freidson, Eliot (2001): *Professionalism, the Third Logic: On the Practice of Knowledge*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Harrison, Jackie (2000): *Terrestrial TV news in Britain: The Culture of Production*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Journalisten (16.10.2014): 'Fyret Nils Lindvig nægter at blive væk fra DR' by Kerstin Bruun-Hansen in *Journalisten.dk*. See: <http://journalisten.dk/fyret-niels-lindvig-naegter-blive-vaek-fra-dr>
- Krause-Kjær, Niels (2003): *Den politiske landsby - om Christiansborg, journalisterne og politikerne*. Aarhus: Forlaget Ajour.
- Melin, Margareta (2008): *Gendered Journalism Cultures: Strategies and Tactics in the Fields of Journalism in Britain and Sweden*. Malmö: JMG, University of Göteborg.
<http://dspace.mah.se/dspace/bitstream/handle/2043/12450/Inlaga%20final;jsessionid=35319A9C0A02348C7CE7ADF67D101EA2?sequence=2> [accessed 5.5.2012].
- Peterson, Mark A. (2010): 'Getting the News in New Delhi' in Bird, Elizabeth S. (ed.): *The Anthropology of News & Journalism: Global Perspectives*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Peterson, Mark A. (2003): *Anthropology & Mass Communication: Media and Myth in the New Millennium*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Porter, Tim (2005): 'Kicking the Pack Journalism habit' in *First Draft by Tim Porter: Newspapering, Readership & Relevance in a Digital Age*. April 06, 2005.
<http://www.timporter.com/firstdraft/archives/000433.html> [accessed 5.12.2012].
- Preston, Paschal (2009): *Making the News: Journalism and News Cultures in Europe*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Shoemaker, Pamela J. and Reese, Stephen (1996): *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*. New York: Longman.
- Skrivunder.net (10.10.2014): http://www.skrivunder.net/niels_lindvig
- Thomsen, Line Hassall (2014): 'Ethnographic Fieldwork: Studying Journalists at Work' In *SAGE Research Methods Cases*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Ltd. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/978144627305014539108>. [Link to abstract here](#).
- Thomsen, Line Hassall (2013): *New Struggles, Old Ideals : The Everyday struggle towards being a 'Good Journalist' inside public service TV newsrooms in the UK and Denmark*. Aarhus: Aarhus University. Institut for Æstetik og Kommunikation, 2013. 350 p.Ph.D.thesis
- Wenger, Etienne (1998a): *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Wenger, Etienne (1998b): 'Communities of Practice Learning as a Social System' in *Systems Thinker*, June, 1998. <http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml> [accessed 20.10.2011].
- Wolf, Eric, R. (1966): 'Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies' in Banton, Michael (ed.): *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, 1-22. Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph, London: Routledge.