

THESIS

THE NON-PROFIT NEWS EFFECT: A THESIS ON THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF
NEWSROOM CULTURE AT AN ONLINE WEB OUTLET

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

THE NON-PROFIT NEWS EFFECT: A THESIS ON THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF NEWSROOM CULTURE AT AN ONLINE WEB OUTLET

As the media landscape continues to undergo changes, this study examined the decision making process, culture, business model and values of a non-profit media outlet and how those areas might differ from a traditional for-profit media outlet. Patterned after Herbert J. Gans' ethnography that was the basis for his 1979 book *Deciding What's News*, the observational study lasted the course of five weeks and featured extensive interviews with key decision makers and other employees from the non-profit outlet. The non-profit outlet was part of a larger non-profit media corporation, which allowed greater opportunity for collaboration – specifically internal collaboration in what was a unique setting. Findings revealed that journalists continue to rely on a great deal of independence in the decision making process and that collaboration of print, television and radio outlets coming together could be a successful model for the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Over 30 years has passed since sociologist Herbert J. Gans' book *Deciding What's News* was published. Gans based the book off lengthy participation-observation studies he conducted in the 1960s and 1970s at print-media outlets *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines and broadcast-media outlets CBS *Evening News* and NBC *Nightly News*. Gans' 1979 book still is actively studied, but there is no denying that the culture within the fourth estate – journalism – has undergone rapid and radical changes within the past 35 years.

Traditional media outlets such as daily newspapers have undergone radical changes as evidenced by the cutbacks and closings that have been a trend this century. The emergence of the internet, meanwhile, has led to the startup of more and more online outlets. Some of those have fallen under the nonprofit umbrella, which vastly differs from the traditional for-profit model.

The purpose of this proposed study is based off Gans 1979 *Deciding What's News* book in which the study would consist of conducting a mini-ethnography study on a Western nonprofit media organization. This organization is a nonprofit news outlet that is partnered with a major nonprofit media corporation. The proposed study specifically will look to evaluate and answer the following four research questions.

- 1. How does the Western non-profit media organization's decision-making process regarding news content differ from traditional outlets, such as the ones examined by Gans?**
- 2. How is the newsroom culture at a nonprofit, web-based media outlet different than a traditional, for-profit media outlet?**

- 3. How does a nonprofit media outlet fulfill the role as public watchdog compared to a traditional for-profit outlet?**
- 4. What are the effects of collaboration that non-profit organization's like the studied one have on journalism culture?**

There are multiple reasons why this proposed study should be viewed as one of importance. The most obvious reason is that the media has undergone a radical transformation since Gans' observations were documented in *Deciding What's News*. Technological advancements now allow media outlets to operate around a 24-hour news cycle. Furthermore, less manpower is needed because editors and reporters can do so much more with the equipment – laptops, cameras, recorders, email – that has been developed over the years. All signs indicate that media convergence is here to stay, which means media outlets need to be more flexible and able to adapt more than ever before.

Amber knows this trend as well as anyone. Her longtime journalism career, which included being a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, became in jeopardy when the former media outlet she worked for, a major western for-profit daily newspaper, closed down in February of 2009. Later that year, with her career in flux, Amber helped launch this nonprofit new organization, which has undertaken a vastly different model than her former employer. Not only is it a nonprofit outlet, it is one that uses convergence and adaptability to its advantage in that it has established partnerships, is collaborative and, in some ways, entrepreneurial in its operation.

Arguably, the most significant reason why this proposed study should be deemed important is because, while *Deciding What's News* has been widely studied, there have not been the number of research studies patterned after Gans' research that one might expect given the

duration of time that has passed since the book was published. This proposed study will not be nearly as in depth – Gans observed four different major news media outlets – or lengthy as his – his research spanned parts of two decades – but it is one that will be credible and different, as evidenced by selecting a nonprofit news organization to observe.

As a former reporter of 11 years, who still regularly freelances for multiple print-media outlets, I also have witnessed firsthand just how much the industry has changed within a very short period of time. The longer I worked in the field, the more cutbacks that took place. In 2004, I survived the first-ever layoff in the history of the *Tulsa World*, and I survived sometimes two or more per year at the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* between 2005-2010. Even when layoffs were not taking place, there were significant cutbacks that took place – ranging from required furloughs to reduced hours during the workweek. Needless to say, staff morale was extremely low at both outlets.

The proposed study could indeed unveil that morale is high at this nonprofit organization. It is my prediction that current employees, who came to the nonprofit outlet from a traditional for-profit media outlet feel better about this model of journalism and are in better spirits than they were during the end of their stints at traditional for-profit media outlets. That is not to say that the nonprofit model of organization does not have challenges and hurdles to conquer in the future. Amber has said that the organization operates under the four-pronged approach of: 1. Grants and donations. 2. Partnerships. 3. Underwriting. 4 Products and services – all of which means this outlet constantly is scrambling to come up with funding and ways to make its product – nonprofit journalism – more viable, relevant and mainstream.

The accompanying literature review will seek to better examine the benefits, challenges and trends of this nonprofit model of journalism, as well as identify some of the benefits, challenges and trends of for-profit journalism. Because Gans' study was an in-depth observation, the chapter on methodology will focus on ethnographic studies that were qualitative in nature. I will focus on the various different techniques – such as different types of interviews – and other methods that would be best for this proposed study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Charles M. Sennott only had one request after working for the highly-reputable *Boston Globe* for 14 years. Simply put, Sennott did not want a rectangular sheet cake. The 22-year newspaper veteran, instead, wanted to gather at a local Irish pub. Hard to argue with Sennott's request on numerous fronts – the most notable being what those rectangular sheet cakes had come to symbolize to him in regards to the newspaper industry during Sennott's final few years with the organization.

There are far too many goodbye parties in newsrooms like the Boston Globe for employees like me who are taking buyouts, the severance packages offered by management to reduce labor costs amid plummeting ad revenues. Brian McGrory, a friend and the *Globe's* managing editor for local news, remarked that that the rectangular sheet cake sliced and served at these maudlin affairs for the departed are “starting to look like little coffins” (Sennott, C., 2008, pp. 118-119).

As Sennott said, way too many newsrooms – big, small and every size in between – all too frequently resemble morgues. The life has or is rapidly being sucked out of them. There is not one overarching factor that has led to the present state because if that were the case, the industry would be fixed or at least on the way to recovery. Instead, it is what almost seems to be a never-ending combination of challenges that have led to the industry's decline, which includes everything from plummeting advertising sales to Craigslist to all other things internet related as being major contributors in circulation rates hitting a 62-year low in 2008 (Mutter, 2008).

To further evidence these issues, consider the following excerpt from Allan Mutter's *Reflections of Newsosaur* blog. “Though circulation has fallen back to pre-Baby Boom levels, the population has more than doubled since 1946. If you divide circulation by population, you will find that fewer than 18 out of 100 Americans today buy a daily or Sunday newspaper. Back in 1946, 36% of the population bought a daily paper and 31% took a Sunday edition” (Mutter, 2008).

Nicholas Carr wrote in his book *The Big Switch* (2008) that 73 percent of people between the ages of 18-24 reported reading a daily newspaper in 1970. Compare that to 2006 when 36 percent of people the same age said they regularly read a newspaper, and it is clear that the industry has undertaken a big in hit in the past 40 years (Carr, 2008, p. 152). If that is not a vivid enough description consider that between the 2007 and 2009 time period, newspaper circulation in the United States decreased by 30 percent and 25 percent in the United Kingdom (Hoffer, 2010). As many would expect, the significant loss of readership has led to countless layoffs at many newspapers. At the 2010 State of the New Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism, it was reported that between 2001 and 2009 “roughly a third of the newsroom jobs in American newspapers are now gone.” What may be most telling, however, is the approach that many publishers and editors are taking in dealing with loss of readership and a newsroom reduction.

Quantity over quality appears to have more and more become the mission statement of many newspapers. Those with a front-row seat to take in all of this are the reporters. And those reporters still around have seen their jobs undergo a rapid transformation in the past five years. Newspaper reporting no longer is just about writing and reporting about the news. Now it is about blogging, twittering, posting and reposting for the Web and even standing in front of a video camera. All too often it is about quantity ahead of quality. The quantity over quality notion traditional media outlets like newspapers have incorporated in recent years was well documented in Dean Starkman’s 2010 article for the *Columbia Journalism Review* that took an in-depth look at how newspapers are asking more out of their reporters despite newsrooms continually shrinking in size. In fact, Starkman begins his article, “The Hamster Wheel: Why running as fast as we can is getting us nowhere” with nine excerpts from a number of different publications. The

first one “Newsrooms have shrunk by 25 percent in three years (*Project for Excellence in Journalism*, “State of the News Media 2010”).” The second excerpt Starkman included was even more telling: “A large majority (75 percent) of editors said their story counts ... had either increased or remained the same during the past three years (*Project for Excellence in Journalism*, “The Changing Newsroom,” July 2008).” Starkman, a former editor, goes on to discuss how the *Wall Street Journal*’s story count a decade ago hovered around 22,000 per year. In 2010, a shrunken *Journal* staff of reporters produced 21,000 stories in the first six months of the year (Starkman, 2010, pp. 24-28).

When it comes to news – more is more, I say. Even though our readers are all supposed to be super busy, so in theory it makes no sense – at all – to be *increasing* the volume of random items for these hurried people to sort through. You’d think we’d be *decreasing* our volume, and making sure each thing offered to readers is really good. But, like I said, I’ve got no problem with volume, in theory (Starkman, 2010, pp. 24).

The “Hamster Wheel” that Starkman discusses in detail is comprised of six parts. They are: 1. The Wheel is real, 2. The Wheel is not inevitable, 3. The Wheel infantilizes reporters, strengthens PR, 4. The Wheel never sets the news agenda, it only responds to the agendas of others, 5. The Wheel isn’t free, and 6. The Wheel pays the bills or does it? Starkman best describes “The Wheel” in the following manner.

The Hamster Wheel isn’t speed; it’s motion for motion’s sake. The Hamster Wheel is volume without thought. It is news panic, a lack of discipline, an inability to say no. It is copy produced to meet arbitrary productivity metrics ... But it’s more than just mindless volume. It’s a recalibration of the news calculus. Of the factors that affect the reporting of news, an underappreciated one is the risk/reward calculation that all professional reporters make when confronted with a story idea: How much time versus how much impact? This informal vetting system is surprisingly ruthless and ultimately efficient for one and all. The more time invested, the bigger the risk, but also the greater potential glory for the reporter, and the greater value to the public (can’t forget them!). Do you fly to Chicago to talk to that guy about that thing? Do you read that bankruptcy examiner’s report? Or do you do three things that are easier?

Journalists will tell you that where once newsroom incentives rewarded more deeply reported stories, now incentives skew toward work that can be turned around quickly and generate a bump in Web traffic (Starkman, 2010, pp. 26).

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Alex S. Jones wrote in his acclaimed book *Losing The News* (2009), that newsroom budgets will be hit so hard if they have not already been that “resources that would in the past have been used for serious news will be diverted to something quite differently – the creation of ‘content,’ meaning whatever will draw eyeballs” (Jones, 2009, p. 171). If this trend continues, Jones believes whether or not newspapers ever flourish again is insignificant “because they will be just another business. Reporting the important news – telling the truth, even while you love your community – has been the principal demonstration of a covenant that newspapers have with their readers” (Jones, 2009, p. 157).

While the Internet has helped pave the way for a 24-hour news cycle, it also has created what Nicholas Carr has called “the great unbundling” – a theory Carr talks about at length in his book *The Big Switch*. Carr’s theory examines how the hard copy of a daily-paper rapidly is becoming a relic of the past. In fact, Carr said the number of people who get their primary news online jumped from 19 million in 2000 to 44 million in 2005, and all signs point toward that number being much higher today. At the heart of Carr’s “great unbundling” theory is that as a newspaper continues to become more of an online product, it gets read in a different way (Carr, 2008).

When a newspaper moves online, the bundle falls apart. Readers don’t flip through a mix of stories, advertisements and other bits of content. They go directly to a particular story that interests them, often ignoring everything else. In many cases, they bypass the newspapers “front page” altogether, using search engines, feed readers, or headline aggregators like Google News, Digg, and Daylife to leap directly to an individual story. They may not even be aware of which newspaper’s site they’re arrived at. For the publisher, the newspaper, as a whole becomes far less important. What matters are the parts. Each story becomes a separate product standing naked in the marketplace. It lives or dies on its own economic merits (Carr, 2008, pp. 153-154).

From a sociological perspective, internet journalism also has sparked questions over whether newsroom culture and the dynamics of the newsroom have changed with newspaper websites now taking on such a dominant role in journalism. Susan Keith and Leslie-Jean Thornton sought to examine this question in a 2011 *Newspaper Research Journal* article. Keith and Thornton concluded “Web operation has not yet found a predictable plane in the organization of newspaper companies” (Keith, Thornton, 2011, p. 131).

Of even greater importance, perhaps, was what Keith and Thornton suggested from their national survey of managing editors, editors and online editors from daily newspapers with weekday circulations of 25,000 or more. Based on the responses they received, Keith and Thornton said that “some newspaper companies may still view their websites differently from their print editions, conceiving of them as primarily tools for marketing and promotion – functions usually controlled by newspapers’ business sides – rather than as platforms that are equal, journalistically, to print publications for the dissemination of news” (Keith, Thornton, 2011, p. 131).

Journalism professor CW Anderson took Keith and Thornton’s work a step further when he conducted an ethnographic study in 2008 that sought to analyze “the shifting, cultural, and economic conditions inside both traditional and non-traditional Philadelphia-area newsrooms” (Anderson, 2011, P. 551). Anderson completed over 300 hours of observation during his three-month study that also included a series of open-ended interviews with journalists at the largest daily newspaper in New Jersey – the *Star Ledger*. Much of Anderson’s work focused on journalist-audience relationship – specifically how audiences were affecting journalism during the digital age. Anderson, who patterned much of his 2008 study off Gans’ findings in his 1979 book *Deciding What’s News* wrote that:

According to the vast majority of newsroom-based studies journalists and audiences, journalistic responsiveness to audience wants and desires has been leavened by journalism's professional self-conception and its deliberate, technologically enabled ignorance of audience wants. (Anderson, 2011, p. 553)

In his study Anderson wrote of Pablo Boczkowski's discovery in a 2010 study in which he concludes that "online journalists are increasingly aware of the news choices made by consumers of their sites (and) experience a tension between the overall preferences revealed by these choices and dominant occupational values ... they tend to stick to these values in the face of dissonant consumer preferences" (Anderson, 2011, p. 554). As Anderson stated, the biggest difference he saw between the journalism ethnographic studies that took place in the 1970s and the present ones taking place now was that "whereas reporters were once surprised by reader feedback, it seems that they now expect reader feedback, even if they do not like it, agree with it, or see it as enhancing their ultimate journalistic product" (Anderson, 2011, p. 558).

Whether or not reader/consumer feedback enhances journalism does not seem to be the issue. What is unmistakable, according to Anderson's study, is that readers, to an extent, are affecting the type of journalism that is being produced in Philadelphia and around the world. "One of the most interesting things about working at *Philly.com*, a company executive told me, was that 'you get constant feedback on your work ... and I don't mean emails I mean constant exposure to traffic'" (Anderson, 2011, p. 558-559). Web metrics are so precise that editors, reporters and other newspaper/web site higher-ups can directly see how many hits a story generated and how many times a page/section was visited. One reporter Anderson interviewed went as far to say that: "We're probably headed toward a model where reporters get paid by clicks" (Anderson, 2011, p. 559).

What this means for daily paper's like the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Philadelphia Daily News* and traditional mainstream journalism in general is that important watchdog stories now could take a backseat to more entertainment-based stories. Consider what one editor said to Anderson about the state journalism after an important series reported that special eye virus had brought back sight to the blind. "It was an amazing story, or rather, it was an amazing whole package of stories. But it bombed. It got no traffic. And it was then that I realized we're in a new world. The data shows that our sports page is really our second homepage" (Anderson, 2011, p. 560). Findings like this beg one to question whether or not journalism is better off going down this road and whether or not the public is better for it?

In his 2013 article, *Hearst's Magazine, 1912-14: Muckracking Sensationalist*, researcher Jim Landers noted that journalism achieved what could be considered golden era from 1903 to 1912 in which the profession – national magazines specifically – devoted itself entirely into crusade for economic, political and social reforms. Referred to as "Muckracking" by historians, Landers wrote:

Magazine Muckrackers documented collusion and connivance between public officials – especially Congress and state legislators – and private businesses to enact favorable laws, such as tariffs to protect prices for domestic products, and prevention of regulation by federal or state governments. An estimated two thousand expose' article appeared in national magazines from late 1902 to 1912 (Landers, 2013, pg. 222).

Toward the latter part of that era, many, if not most, magazine has changed editorial tones or all by eliminated expose' pieces. Publishing icon William Randolph Hearst tried to revive expose' journalism or "Muckracking" with *World To-Day*, but the same journalistic techniques employed by magazines of the time like: *McClure's* and *Cosmopolitan* were not incorporated into the *World To-Day* doctrine. "An examination of Hearst's Magazine for 1911 to 1914 must

conclude that despite its purported purpose of crusading for the American public, the magazine's serials primarily were sensationalism, not authentic muckracking" (Landers, 2013, pg. 230).

Much of Anderson's findings seem to be a direct contradiction of journalism icon Joseph Pulitzer's vision for the profession. Pulitzer wanted ... "the object of college to make better journalists, who will make better newspapers, which will better serve the public" (Bro, 2010, p. 38). Peter Bro wrote in a 2010 article that Pulitzer's vision of reporters better connecting and serving the public helped pave the way for what Jay Rosen deemed "public journalism" (Bro, 2010, p. 39). But as Bro wrote:

What is more important for Pulitzer and contemporary news reporters, editors and owners is the fact that history in very direct ways affects the actions in newsrooms here and now, since it offers journalists concrete precedents to steer away from – or towards. Writing in general, about journalistic conventions, Timothy E. Cook has noted that much of their development is by accretion. Particular isolated decisions serve as precedents for later choices, which may quickly become ensconced as the way to get things done within across organisations" (Bro, 2010, p. 39).

Pulitzer said "the public good" is "the supreme end" (Bro, p. 40, 2010). Bro noted, however, that, while aware of, Pulitzer did not choose to focus on the external factors in the "future training of journalists" (Bro, 2010, p. 40). Whereas Anderson cited that sports homepages drew more eyeballs than a watchdog story on humans regaining eyesight (Anderson, 2011, p. 560), Bro noted that one of the most alarming indictments on journalism today is "that public journalism is indeed a profit-centered strategy embraced by managements to service the commercial interests of media owners and advertisers" (Bro, 2010, p. 42).

While technological advancements have no doubt made it easier for journalists to be more versatile and, in a sense, become a mobile newsroom, media convergence has not come without a price or resistance. Wisconsin professor Sue Robinson conducted an ethnographic study of a newsroom that was shifting from print to a hybrid one that incorporated both print and

digital platforms in a 2011 journal article (Robinson, 2011). Robinson discussed at length the culture and relationships between journalists of this particular Midwestern newsroom, and the “spatial realms of media production – physical (the actual newsrooms), virtual (the places online where the work is produced ...) corporeal (the presence of bodies within space ...) and the more abstract symbolic spaces (the space for newsroom culture, mindset of employees ...)” (Robinson, 2011, p. 1124).

... When a newsroom loses a laborer or adds equipment, those who remain accommodate the differences. The culture and scale of these spaces are notoriously ambiguous; when spatial dynamics change, so too do associative networks of those properties, process of production and any resulting product (Robinson, 2011, p. 1124).

As beneficial as new technologies have become for journalists, Robinson wrote that “new technologies cannot flourish without the labor dynamics that evolved with the preexisting ones” (Robinson, 2011, 1125). The technological advancements, Robinson said, made the culture of this particular newsroom more impersonal. She added that the control structure of a newsroom went from being one of corporate to “more horizontally organized” (Robinson, 2011, p. 1125).

By being able to control their interactions with others, people can abolish the unpredictable face-to-face exchanges that are part of a complex society, making for less intense interactions that are less meaningful, structured, and communal as well as more disembodied. Implications include a ‘waning legitimacy’ of managers and a digital ‘replacement environment’ (Robinson, 2011, 1125).

One of the more intriguing findings Robinson reported on was that a 2009 survey of journalists proclaimed that “a majority (57%) think the Internet is ‘changing the fundamental values of journalism,’ including a ‘loosening of standards’ (45%)” (Robinson, p. 1125-1126). Robinson’s findings included that something as minute as rearranging the physical newsroom triggered feelings of discomfort. The rise of a digital platform also brought forth newly created positions such as online editors. Robinson said: “Print reporters felt threatened by online ‘techies,’ the online staff tended to disregard the brand and its standards” (Robinson, 2011,

1129). The convergence, Robinson said, “diminished the traditionally chaotic-but-close-knit newsroom environment” (Robinson, 2011, p. 1132). Robinson also noted that the convergence, coupled with state-of-the-art technologies journalists were now equipped with, impacted reporters in such a way that they felt like they had to be “connected” at all times. These new tools served two functions: they enlarged the traditional journalist’s work-plate. Instead of having to just write for the daily paper, Robinson said the journalists she observed also had to maintain blogs and write for the website. The other function Robinson observed was:

Media owners used the digital technology as an excuse to cut staff: The observed newsroom laid off or bought out two-thirds of its photography staff; when one reporter asked an editor about the visual components to his story, he was directed to a drawer where the video camera was kept.

Reporters felt torn between the two worlds, uncertain of how much time spend in each. They expressed angst at where they were supposed to “be” and what they were supposed to be doing in those spaces, even as they felt empowered by the possibilities (Robinson, 2011, p. 1130).

Perhaps what was most troubling about the integration of new technological platforms was what was reported in 2010 article in the *European Journal of Communication*. Surveys of “239 journalists working for 40 of the most-read outlets in 11 European countries” offered compelling reports that many journalists surveyed viewed being out of touch and unaware of their organizations future plans multimedia initiatives as being the biggest obstacle toward implementation of new media practices (Sarrica, 2010, p. 417).

... Journalists manifest a certain resistance to new editorial strategies that demand trans-media knowledge and competence. ... First, journalists’ professional identity remains strongly anchored to print newspapers and their self-definition as journalists – print, online or print/online – remains problematic. The second indicator is the serious communication deprivation which journalists experience, since their knowledge of the editorial initiatives of their various is rather vague and thin (Sarrica, 2010, p. 420).

In addressing the research questions for this proposed study, media sociologist Michael Schudson wrote that “political institutions and media institutions are so deeply intertwined, so

thoroughly engaged in a complex dance with one another, that it is not easy to distinguish where one begins and the other leaves off” (Schudson, 2011, p. 147). Schudson discussed how politicians have come to rely more and more upon public opinion for confirmation, nomination, approval and passing of bills and measures. As mass media has grown over the years, there are more platforms for politicians to seek out to get their message covered. Schudson’s analysis directly ties in with the third research question of this proposed study: How does a nonprofit media outlet fulfill the role of public watchdog compared to a traditional for-profit outlet? Schudson wrote how “foreign policy decisions are often made in interaction with public opinion” (Schudson, 2011, p. 152). He also cited back to the Vietnam era, and how some Swedish media outlets – because of the country’s lack of population size – had unbelievable influence on public discourse (Schudson, 2011, p. 152). In addressing the above research question, one of Schudson’s most important findings stated the following:

Nothing has worried media analysts more during the past few years of severe economic crisis among metropolitan daily newspapers than the problem covering local politics. Only the metro dailies have invested significantly in local political reporting and now, as many of them reduce newsroom employment by a third or a half or even more, local political coverage has declined (Schudson, 2011, p. 154).

Randal A. Beam, another professor who has spent much of his years focusing on the social and economic influences on the news, expanded on Schudson’s observations with an organized study he helped conduct with three other colleagues. At the core of the study was journalism and public service. Beam’s findings suggest that “public-service journalism” remains an essential value of the journalism profession. In fact, Beam wrote that “more than nine out of 10 journalists in this survey still believe that it is quite important or extremely important for news organizations to do journalism that serves the public interest” (Beam, 2009, P. 747).

Public-service journalism appears to be at the heart or, at the very least, a major driving force behind the creation of nonprofit journalism outlets like the Western Organization that will be studied. Beam's study did go on to suggest that "a news organization that is perceived to have a strong journalistic orientation is likely to be one where public service is important. An organization perceived to be profit driven tends to get lower evaluations on its public-service commitment" (Beam, 2009, p. 748). In addressing how audiences factor into the role of journalists' or a media outlet's decision-making process, Schudson offered the following: "Journalists often write as much to impress their colleagues as to influence a broader audience" (Schudson, 2011, p. 167). In fact, Schudson wrote that while many may think that it would be better if journalists had a better understanding of what their audiences wanted, you could make a strong argument for the exact opposite -- "the less they know the better" (Schudson, 2011, p. 166). Conclusions like those directly relate to the first research question of the proposed study, which states: How does the Western non-profit media organization's decision-making process regarding news content differ from traditional outlets, such as the ones examined by Gans?

Schudson cited Gans in his book when he referenced the sociologist by writing "reporters and editors at U.S. newsmagazines and network television programs had little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected feedback. They typically assumed what interested them would interest the audience" (Schudson, 2011, p. 167). But almost immediately after that citation, Schudson counters Gans' analogy as being outdated -- in that, as fewer and fewer Americans routinely watch the news and read the daily newspaper, journalists and their editors have no choice but to be more cognizant of their audiences' media consumption habits (Schudson, 2011, p. 168-170). Perhaps, a big reason for this transformation -- other than a decline in readership and viewership -- is that audiences have better access to journalists, through email and comments

sections, than ever before. They also have a larger spectrum and platform of outlets that are more specialized to choose from, the proposed Western Organization for the study included.

In examining how the newsroom culture at a nonprofit, web-based media outlet different than a traditional, for-profit media outlet. Schudson does not completely go into the difference, but he offers provides plenty of unique observations that would indicate the cultures between non-profit and for-profit media outlets could very well be different. Many of Schudson's observations center on editorial staffs at traditional outlets and how their reporting falls into a variety of forms.

News is not one literary form but instead a set of literary forms. Some news forms are as predictable and formulaic as the unfolding of a mystery novel, a romance or a limerick. Others are more complex and neither the practitioner nor the reader is entirely conscious of what the aesthetic constraints are (Schudson, 2011, p. 178).

Schudson also noted that a major "cultural distinction in journalism separates news into departments: local, national, and foreign; or general news, business, sports, and features" (Schudson, 2011, p. 183). Non-traditional outlets such as the proposed Western Organization for study predominately are more specialized in that they have fewer departments and less manpower, meaning those respective outlets could provide unique and different atmosphere than their for-profit brethren. Because this Western Organization is centered on investigative journalism, Schudson said that type of journalism should take on a call-to-action type of tone (Schudson, 2011, p. 175).

Investigative reporting seeks not a spitting out of the coffee but a sputtering: "There ought to be a law!" The investigative story seeks to evoke moral outrage. As media scholars, Theodore Glasser and James Ettema have shown, it carefully constructs an innocent victim and a guilty party, and it provides both a cognitive ordering of events for the audience and a moral ordering of responsibilities (Schudson, 2011, p. 175).

While Beam documented in a study that while more than nine out of 10 journalists still believe that public-service journalism is extremely important to their field, those same respondents found that “about 75 percent” of owners and managers value public-service journalism in the same light (Beam, 2009, p. 747). How then might journalists at non-profit organizations view their owners and managers’ commitment to public-service journalism? In another study Beam conducted based on a survey of 1,149 U.S. journalists from a variety of media outlets that centered on what factors influenced journalists’ job satisfaction, his evidence emphatically stated that journalists are much more likely to “enjoy their work if they feel that their employer values it” (Beam, 2006, p. 180).

The more news workers perceive their organization as profit-driven, the lower their level of job satisfaction ... In general then, we found credible evidence that when journalists believed that their news organization cared a lot about professional goals and priorities, their job satisfaction was higher (Beam, 2006, p. 177).

Beam’s study also notes that journalists’ feelings and views varied by job role, but he also wrote that editors, managers and supervisors “were more affected than rank-and-file journalists when they sensed an imbalance between profits and journalism” (Beam, 2006, 181). It would be interesting to hear the perspectives from journalists working at non-profit outlets such as this Western Organization and whether they had different outlooks on their career when working for a for-profit media outlet.

Charles Lewis pointed out an alarming trend in a 2010 journal article titled “New Journalism Ecosystem Thrives.” Because there are less people to report, write and edit original stories, fewer and fewer people in power are held accountable. Simply put the watchdog role that has long been associated with journalism is fading into the background, and, as Lewis said this is a “very sobering perspective” (Lewis, 2010).

... At the same time of the historic shrinking of newspaper, radio and television newsrooms across America over three decades starting in 1980, the number of public relations specialists and managers doubled from approximately 45,000 to 90,000 people. As Robert McChesney and John Nichols have written in their recent book, *The Death and Life of American Journalism*, ‘Even as journalism shrinks, the news will still exist. It will increasingly be provided by tens of thousands of well-paid and skilled PR specialists ready and determined to explain the world to the citizenry, in a manner of that suits their corporate and government employers’ ... The impact of newsroom contraction is obviously that certain public and private activities by those in power are no longer being covered (Lewis, 2010).

Media conglomerates such as Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, Viacom Bertelsmann “own most newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, and radio and television stations in the U.S.” (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 3). Because media ownership is becoming more and more isolated, McChesney believes journalism, as a whole, has become handcuffed by these conglomerates (McChesney, 2008). “The media giants are not interested in pursuing dangerous stories that cost a lot of time and money to pursue, promise little financial payoff, and can antagonize governmental authorities with whom the media barons desperately want to stay on good terms” (McChesney, 2008, p. 404). McChesney also went on to say that the “journalism provided by these giants tends to be deplorable. “When a journalist actually attempts to maintain a higher standard, she quickly learns that she does not fit into the new media landscape” (McChesney, 2008, p. 404).

This is not to say that the “new media landscape” is not without hope. In fact, Lewis discusses at length a rising trend that could help preserve the watchdog role of journalism. In his 2010 journal article “New journalism ecosystem thrives,” Lewis wrote that a new type of journalism has emerged that is more collaborative, non-profit, specialized, and, to a degree more entrepreneurial than the more traditional for-profit model (Lewis, 2010).

Lewis identified 60 non-profit organizations at the root of this movement. Of those 60 organizations, 38 were started in 2006 or later. Lewis reported that between the 60 organizations studied there were 658 full-time employees of which two-thirds of those 658 had previous journalism experience. Lewis also points out that 28 of the 60 organizations have won awards for reporting, “which means that the profession of traditional journalism has gradually and increasingly begun to acknowledge the good, original work being published” (Lewis, 2010). Furthermore, Lewis added that 14 of the 60 organizations are located at or near a university, with eight being part of universities. This helps fall in line with Lewis’ overarching theme in the article that these studied non-profit organizations are better equipped to serve public interest than perhaps more traditional media outlets, which have led the public interest charge for so many years (Lewis, 2010).

At the same time, it is also well understood that by far the most extensive, substantive, public-service journalism in America the past century has been initiated, supported and published by the nation’s newspapers. And so the specific impact of the current and continuing newsroom carnage on the capacity to actually do investigative reporting — one of the most time-consuming (i.e. expensive), difficult and unpredictable genres of journalism — has been and continues to be dire. Investigative reporting teams, “I-teams,” have been dismantled, and numerous overseas and domestic bureau staffs have contracted or disappeared altogether. Only a few newspapers still employ full-time foreign correspondents; investigative and international reporting increasingly have come to be regarded by management as high-risk, high-maintenance, high-priced impracticalities (Lewis, 2010).

With more and more newspapers changing their tones and making investigative journalism less and less of a priority due to layoffs and the loss of advertising dollars, these nonprofit journalism site/outlets, Lewis speaks of, have popped up with the goal in mind of becoming a viable replacement to the investigative, in-depth and enterprise reporting that has been on the decline at traditional, for-profit media outlets. These nonprofit journalism outlets are predominately funded through grants, foundations and donations.

Foundations see their growing involvement as compensating for newsrooms' diminished coverage of civic issues. They're stepping in because "the traditional news business is not investing as much as it needs to ... in getting reporters out to cover stories," (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation senior vice president Matt) James pointedly notes. "We as nonprofits have a duty to figure out: Is there a role for us, in increased training, in direct partnerships with news organizations or even in creating a news service to fill that void?"

"What we're talking about is supporting real journalism, not advocacy," adds James, whose foundation already partners with National Public Radio, USA Today, the Washington Post and other news media on public opinion research projects. "We're big believers in the role of journalism in democracy. We believe it's important for nonprofits to find ways to support it" (Guensburg, 2008, p. 28).

Mary Walton provides a good example of the kind of specialization, collaboration, public service and impact nonprofit journalism can provide in a 2010 article she wrote that was published in *American Journalism Review* (Walton, 2010). In the article, Walton cited a report spearheaded by the Center for Public Integrity about on-campus assault written by Kristen Lombardi and Kristin Jones that was published in 2009 and 2010. The series became somewhat of a prototype for how nonprofits can work together and "catapult an issue onto the national stage" (Walton, 2010).

"NPR piggybacked its own stories onto the investigation, which was also a natural for the country's campus-based public radio stations. Five nonprofits developed stories based on additional reporting" (Walton, 2010). Out West, the proposed nonprofit organization for localized the issue in a report by unveiling that local university officials refused to name a fraternity "allegedly linked to date rape drug use" (Walton, 2010).

The final numbers posted by CPI said that the on-campus assault series was featured by a combined "49 newspapers and magazines, 56 broadcast outlets, 77 online outlets, 60 student newspapers and college-related outlets and 42 NGOs. According to one source, "Forty million people saw, read or heard some part of it" (Walton, 2010). The collaboration associated with the

on-campus assault series, coupled with sweeping changes in technology, is a prime example of how the scoop has changed according to this Western Organization founder and former major for-profit daily newspaper investigative reporter Amber in a 2010 story by Michael.

Technology has changed the scoop – not the mentality of it, but the mechanics. I used to write a story for the (*The Daily Globe*), and maybe the Associated Press might pick it up, and other papers might run some version of it – and other outlets might be tempted to not touch the story, because someone else had done it first. But now, because of technology, a story can go viral immediately. And that’s changed the way we do things. Before, getting the news out was really the focus. Now, it’s communicating about the news, and watching where the story goes after it’s been released (Michael, 2010).

Gans speaks prominently of “multiperspectival news” in his book, which he defined as being different from the type of present-day news he studied in five ways: “1. It is more national; 2. It would add a bottom-up view to the current top-down approach; 3. It would feature more output news; 4. It would be more representative; 5. It would place more emphasis on service news” (Gans, 1979).

Ideally, the realm of “multiperspectival news” that Gans discusses would not be “designed to gain supporters for any specific political cause” (Gans, 1979). “Multiperspectival news” instead would allow people to acquire news “relevant to their own interests and political goals, if they have any. In the process, the symbolic arena would become more democratic, for the symbolic power of now dominant sources and perspectives would be reduced” (Gans, 1979).

The non-profit model of the proposed Western Organization for study differs significantly from how Herbert J. Gans viewed “journalistic efficiency” in his 1979 book “Deciding What’s News.” Gans said, though important, journalistic efficiency could not be calculated because profits from for-profit journalism come from “the sale of advertising rather than the product itself” (Gans, 1979). The efficiency Gans spoke of depends on three things: “staff size, air time or print space and production time.” Gans went on to say that at the time of

publication (1979), journalists could not ignore “commercial considerations,” but if they could then “news could be supplied without advertising” (Gans, 1979). If that were to happen, funds for journalism production would have to come from the government, but the proposed Western Organization for study model has been one built off grants and donations, and, most importantly, through acquiring 501c3 status, which designates the organization as non-profit (Gans, 1979).

METHODOLOGY

When it comes to comparing quantitative and qualitative research methods, the former often is held in higher regard than the latter because it is considered by many to be the more scientific because of its objective approach. However, in terms of conducting a study on the culture of a newsroom, conducting a qualitative or subjective approach that aligns with the Gans' study is one that should be considered the most advantageous of the two research methods. Qualitative analysis "relies mainly on the analysis of visual data (observations) and verbal data (words) that reflect everyday experiences" (Wimmer, Dominick, 2011).

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005).

Upon reviewing the two above definitions, it makes even more sense to utilize a qualitative study in the proposed research study, primarily because a qualitative study/method would allow the actors or employees of the proposed studied organization a greater chance to elaborate and expand on their experiences within and, to some extent, outside their work environment. One of the most attractive qualities of a qualitative study is the fact that the researcher can utilize a variety of different methods in the proposed research study that, effectively, can keep it more open ended and nuanced.

“Qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence, there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study” (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005).

That will hold true in this proposed study which will take the form of an overt, participatory observation, specifically an ethnography that also will be comprised of numerous interviews and informal conversations. The duration of this proposed study would last 120 hours in which the researcher would spend eight hours during each of the days inside the organization’s newsroom unless he went out in the field with an employee.

While at the site and setting, the researcher would have a notepad within reach at all times so that he could be able to quickly take down scratch notes whenever needed. The researcher also would incorporate the use of a digital recorder so that he could dictate what is happening in the setting or more formally interview the organization’s employees. At the end of each day spent at the organization, or early the following morning, the researcher would transfer those scratch notes and interviews into field notes, which are documents/notes that help bring more finality to what transpired (Lindlof, Taylor, 2002).

The overarching reason for utilizing an overt, participatory observation in this proposed study is because “field observation is useful for collecting data and for generating hypothesis and theories. Like all qualitative techniques, it is concerned more with description and explanation than with measurement and quantification (Wimmer, Dominick, 2011).

The reason why overt observation is preferred to covert observation is because the researcher would like to be identified before the study begins, and also so the workers in the newsroom will know they are being observed for a study. It should be duly noted that the study will be completely confidential, in that there will be no use of names at all for any of the subjects and actors in the study. The overt, participatory observation specifically would take the form of an ethnography. An ethnography “does not imply any single method or type of data analysis, although participant observation is a strategy that nearly all ethnographers employ,” which, as mentioned, would be the case for this proposed study (Lindlof, Taylor, 2002).

The benefits of an ethnographic approach, particularly in a study such as this proposed one, are numerous. Jason Burke and Andrea Kirk suggested in a 2001 article that ethnographies employ the following benefits: 1. “An ethnographic study is a powerful assessment of users’ needs” 2. “It uncovers the true nature of the system users’ job” 3. “The Ethnographer can play the role of the end-user” 4. “The open-minded and unbiased nature of ethnography allows for discovery” (Burke, Kirk, 2001).

Ethnography is in itself not so much a method as a category of human-computer interaction research. This kind of research has been adapted from sociology and anthropology, where it is a method of observing human interactions in social settings and activities. It can also be described as the observation of people in their cultural context. A culture is defined by Massey (1998) as being “...made up of certain values, practices, relationships and identifications.” Thus, one can describe a workplace as a culture, filled with work standards, business practices (both formal and informal), and relationships between coworkers and between workers and managers (Burke, Kirk, 2001).

More specifically, an ethnographic participatory observation allows the researcher to, to a degree, take part in the actors’ activities so that the researcher better understands the processes involved (Burke, Kirk, 2001). In essence, the most logical way to achieve an in-depth understanding of the culture within the organization’s newsroom is through ethnographic

participatory observation. “Valuable data can be discovered through ethnographic methods that might never be found through interviews outside of the workplace” (Burke, Kirk, 2001).

Ethnographic studies have been used to uncover and discover a number of different phenomena. *The New York Times* published a story in 2009 about “gossip episodes” and how two, with different viewpoints on the matter, each spent extended periods of time “observing the gossipers in their natural habitats” (Tierney, 2009).

Some corporations also have implemented ethnographic studies into business strategy as a way to better gain understanding of consumers and their respective business(es). Ken Anderson wrote in a 2009 *Harvard Business Review* article that corporate ethnographies are so “beneficial” that they “will spread widely, helping firms in every industry truly understand customers and adapt to fast-changing markets” (Anderson, 2009).

Ethnography is the branch of anthropology that involves trying to understand how people live their lives. Unlike traditional market researchers, who ask specific, highly practical questions, anthropological researchers visit consumers in their homes or offices to observe and listen in a nondirected way. Our goal is to see people’s behavior on their terms, not ours. While this observational method may appear inefficient, it enlightens us about the context in which customers would use a new product and the meaning that product might hold in their lives.

Ethnography at Intel initially focused on new markets. The company had provided products only for the workplace, but in 1995 managers wondered whether users at home would become a distinct market. Ethnographic research showed so much potential that Intel set up a business unit to concentrate on processors and platforms for home use (Anderson, 2009).

Ethnographic studies can be so diverse and all-encompassing that German sociology professor Ole Putz performed a participant observation, ethnographic study on security checkpoints at nine different airports in which he analyzed “how bodily proximity influences interaction” (Putz, 2011).

One ethnographic study more in line with the one being proposed, is the one David Ryfe performed at a mid-size daily American Newspaper that took place during parts of 2005 and 2006. The daily newspaper Ryfe performed a participant observation at had hired a new managing editor that incorporated some unusual newsroom tactics that included telling reporters that “he did not want to see three kinds of stories: government or political process stories; daily, or incremental stories; or soft-feature-type stories” (Ryfe, 2009).

Ryfe said that the new managing editor wanted reporters to instead concentrate on enterprise or investigative reporting and not to “publish anything that doesn’t have a conclusion” – the idea being “to explain so well what is about to happen that the newspaper sets the public agenda – it makes the news and becomes a player in town – without having to cover meetings themselves” (Ryfe, 2009). Not surprisingly, the reporters Ryfe observed said they had a much more difficult time covering their respective beats while trying to incorporate the managing editor’s new policies. “By the sixth month of the new regime, many reporters shared Short’s sense that the new way of producing news did not feel right” (Ryfe, 2009).

Ryfe’s study may best be summed up by one reporter who told him that during his newspaper career in which he worked for four dailies, executives at “every one of them had a plan for reviving the newspaper. And at every stop, Henson ignored the plans. To him, doing journalism, was simple: he went out in the world and found ‘good stories’. If he knew his craft well enough, the stories would come through and the audience would follow” (Ryfe, 2009).

Ryfe’s study is a good example of why qualitative research, composed of an ethnographic-observation with interviews, can help unleash a better understanding of a particular culture – such as one inside a newsroom. Because qualitative research is more open-ended,

numerous interviews would take place during the stint of the proposed observation – that is proposed to last 120 hours over two months.

For the proposed study, the researcher would come up with interview guides for each of the subjects being interviewed and likely will have already established some sort of rapport with each subject leading up to the interview (Lindlof, Taylor, 2002).

The proposed number of subjects interviewed for this study would be no more than 12 employees at the organization and with its corporate partner. These prospective interviews would fall under the category of informant in that each subject would be recruited from the site and setting. “These people are called informants because they inform the researcher about key features and processes of the scene – what the significant customs and rituals are and how they are done, which people exercise the real power and so forth (Lindlof, Taylor, 2002).

The interviews, which also could fall under the name intensive interviews (Wimmer, Dominick, 2011), would last between one and two hours and would take place in the private room of a location (restaurant) away from the business. The proposed interviews will be held at an off-campus site in hopes that the subjects/actors would have an easier time opening up about their journalistic experiences. The researcher/interviewer would seek to learn what each interviewee thought about the identity of a non-profit journalism outlet, along with the joy and challenges of working at a non-profit journalism outlet. The interviewer initially would go off his interview guide for each interview, but would have the freedom to ask a mixture of both directive and non-directive questions. Each interview would be digitally recorded and with all subjects being granted 100 percent confidentiality (Lindlog, Taylor, 2002).

CULTURE

Because of its sheer size, there are a number of scheduled tours that take place in the modest-basement newsroom at this large non-profit media corporation located in a large Western Metropolitan area. One such tour in the summer of 2013 found itself downstairs in a makeshift newsroom of sorts in which four media outlets simultaneously work aside one another. Despite what many might believe to be a fast-paced, hectic newsroom, one tour on-looker had this to say about the dynamics of the downstairs room: “Wow, it really is quiet in here.”

Don’t perceive the lack of noise for a lack of journalistic work not being done or taking place. In fact, quite the contrary is actually happening. It’s just the work being done within those walls is not the kind that you would see inside a traditional for-profit newsroom. At the very core of this 12-person newsroom is a five-person staff of former for-profit journalists, who specialize in investigative, analytical and computer-assisted reporting as a non-profit Western organization in a metropolitan area paired with a non-profit media corporation. The stories they turn around take time. In fact, the package they put together and were able to in January of 2013 took 18 months to complete. The package was centered on how different minority groups falling even further behind their white counterparts in employment, education and poverty than they were decades ago in the state during the heart of the civil rights movement.

As Les stated, the overarching intent of this organization is not to chase daily-breaking news like a typical for-profit media outlet.

Being a small shop, we are not out there covering breaking news. We do try to play off of breaking news, on occasion. The (natural disaster) history story, the (earthquake) stories and stuff like that are all examples of that. I think I miss a little of the day-to-day (breaking news), but I would much prefer to be doing this in terms of big projects and trying to identify journalism that matters, as the slogan goes, and contributing stories to

stories that no one else is doing. If it was an either or thing, I would definitely do what we're doing.

Added David, who is member of this five-person organization, "All three of us came from a newspaper background – newspapers where all you really thought of was meeting the afternoon deadline."

Throughout the observational period, many members of the observation referred to the taxing pressures of meeting constant daily demands typical of a more traditional for-profit media outlet as "feeding the beast." Stated David during an interview,

All of my experience prior to this had to do with daily, the pressures of daily newspaper journalism and feeding that beast. You know, in the beginning feeding the beast every single day and toward the end feeding the web beast around the clock. Um so that's, as you know that's a very different um experience where you have to think of everything in terms of what you can publish right now. So the experience here is very different because while it's true that I think, you know, I would hope that we can be nimble and agile and jump on things as they happen, um I also am feeling "freed" by not having to worry that we need to have something up on the web by 3:00. You know I'm watching these (fires) ... I've covered a million of these fires over the years and I'm watching this in sort of a different way now I'm thinking about what we might write that would add something to the discussion that other people aren't covering. It's just a different mindset.

That much was apparent when David offered the following analogy one day in passing in July of 2013, "For almost 26 years, the ambulance went by the window, and I felt like I needed to figure out where it was going. Now, I'm sitting here thinking, you know, how many ambulances go by the window, and what does it mean, and how is it affecting health?"

Though this organization falls under the non-profit umbrella, it was started up in 2009 as not just a place to work for three of these five former for-profit journalists, but also to become a sort of go-to spot or hub for a certain type of journalism that was increasingly becoming more and more ignored by many for-profit media outlets because of layoffs, cutbacks and reduced newsroom budgets, as Les stated out during an informal interview.

Obviously, the classic for-profit model newspapers, up until about 2000, were making money hand over fist. And the ones that liked to make money and do good things had the wherewithal to spend money and do really good work. For many papers those kinds of things are much harder to do now. The proliferation of non-profits is a response to the decline of for-profits. These small investigative newsrooms sprouted like mushrooms around the country. But they tend to be intensely focused, like on investigative or data driven reporting or however they're set up. They face a similar challenge to the for-profits: Being able to sustain themselves.

David expanded on Les' analysis by stating the following during a formal interview in which he dwelled on his past daily newspaper career, but provided insight as to why the non-profit world of journalism appealed to him.

I gave a presentation the other day, and I said that for-profit news is about selling a product. It's about selling today's newspaper. Non-profit news is about selling an idea. I mean, I loved covering breaking news. You know I really enjoyed it and even to the end when I was city editor at (a major metro daily) last summer when the Canyon (disaster) was going on and I directed that coverage and so you know that was a very challenging but also um exciting mission and so this is different. I mean this is just, you know, I don't have that: 'we've gotta get it now, we've gotta get it now, um anxiety that you do with a daily production but, but this is exciting in a different way because I feel like we're building something here that might you know prove to be sort of part of the way journalism is going to be in the future.

While there are other non-profit media organizations out there that have varied in success, what stands out or is different about this organization is that it shares a newsroom with three other media outlets – two of which are non-profit (radio and TV) – within the newsroom in this major non-profit new corporation. The other is a for-profit outlet that offices out of the non-profit organization.

Savannah, who previously worked in for-profit broadcast journalism before switching over to non-profit broadcast journalism 17 years ago, said the dynamics and culture of this particular newsroom, particularly since the arrival of this five-person organization, is unlike anything she has ever experienced in her non-profit journalistic career. "Probably the best thing about this is the fact that you're working in a newsroom with people that you can call over and

say: 'can you help me with this or whatever.' I have not had that before here because I have sort of been this one-(person) band in my office for a long time so I'm really glad to get back to a newsroom culture.

Charlotte, who worked alongside Savannah, in the television outlet portion of the non-profit corporation, has worked in for-profit print journalism and for-profit and non-profit public relations before moving on to her current role as a producer within this corporation. She advanced on what here colleague Savannah said about enhanced culture of the corporation now that this more traditional investigate print journalism team has partnered up with it.

It's absolutely a different kind of journalism. To me I regard this whole thing with (us all partnering up) as a great experiment that I'm happy to be a part of, and I think most media outlets, particularly print outlets but almost all media outlets are struggling to find the answer with all these new technologies. What's the profit model and the not for profit model? And I think really I think everyone's scrambling which is partly why (one radio) outlet, you know and everybody's trying these things. To me, it's just really interesting to watch it evolving and feel like I'm a part of it, but I'm not so invested that um I'm going to live or die by its success or failure.

Charlotte then expanded on that by stating this during a follow-up question during a formal interview session,

I think there are a lot of benefits, and what we're seeing right now with this in-depth investigative journalism which is sort of dying in the other media outlets because of the cost and the labor intensiveness of it ... So the model I think is great here, and it does seem so far like other media outlets are happy to use this work because they can't afford it themselves. The big question to me is how, this, over time this is going to be financially sustained. You know right now I think there's a lot of interest and excitement and, you know, getting grants that I think there's some momentum currently on our side. But in three or five years if no one's won a Pulitzer or if no one's you know um really had a ... if we're not really well known ... It's a growing evolving uh organization and I, my own personal concern would be just the economics of it over time.

During this observation period, it became clear that nearly all of the organization's five-person staff were torn between having both empathy and hostility toward the daily newspaper industry. One morning in the newsroom, David spoke of a conversation he had with a former

colleague, who still was working at the major metro daily he previously worked for before arriving at the non-profit organization. “They are not filling two metro reporting openings, and they are laying off two other people. They want 12 positions out of the newsroom, and they’re shrinking the size of the paper – again.” Right after that remark, Matt said, “I remember when the old paper used to be like a (freaking) kite.” Those comments brought the four former daily for-profit journalists into a brief nostalgic conversation about the old days. In fact, on multiple mornings during the observation, the four would talk about the major metro daily’s edition that day. Said Dennis, “I see (paper) mis-identified someone on the cutline.” David countered by saying, “That’s what happens when you only have four copy editors.”

The constant daily pressures and demands of producing content and daily deadlines ultimately led Matt to feel this way about the chain of command and pecking order of the former major-metropolitan daily newspapers he worked at alongside, Amber, David, Les and Dennis. “You know, when I was shooting for the (major daily), I felt like I had two bosses I had to please. As long as they were happy, that’s all that mattered.”

While this organization chooses longer, more in-depth reports as its primary journalistic focus, there is beginning to be a shift toward adopting the more traditional philosophy of getting some stories and reports turned around quicker. Said Matt: “We are doing more. There are just these sort of expectations now for the amount of content we need to be generating. We went from doing half a dozen pretty major stories a year to where we now put out four in two months.” During the observation, there definitely was a push to have the organization produce more content on a more frequent basis. In fact, Amber lamented multiple times during editorial meetings and around the newsroom throughout the month that she wanted to see some sort of daily update on the organization’s Website. “I would like to get that going right away. I want

people to come with a plan. We want to have a plan laid out to say: ‘alright if we took (story on minority falling farther behind), how many day of content could get out of that? We could get a hell of a lot.’”

Ideally, Amber would like that content to come from previous stories in which they could take tidbits out of or use information that did not make the story, and put it on the Website in the form of updates or blogs. David, however, played devil’s advocate during a staff meeting, saying that these updates should not be forced. Amber, though, was adamant that these updates will inevitably happen, and she would like them to be posted on the corporation’s homepage, and then linked back to various social media sites. “It can be anything we want. I just want to have something up (daily) on the homepage.” The daily updates proposal is revisited at the following week’s staff meeting to which Amber said, “The biggest challenge to all this is to not have it suck up all our time.” Matt interjects and said that the best strategy in handling all the updates would be to have system in place in which they could “backlog” updates.

Though small in stature, it became apparent early on during the observational period that this organization’s five-person staff was very serious and confident about their journalistic work and abilities – especially when discussing how a traditional for-profit outlet might handle a similar scenario or story. At the first news meeting a couple of days after a natural disaster happened in the state, David said he wanted to hop on story about how a certain scenario would play out if the natural disaster hit a particular site in the metropolitan area. He then quantified what he and the organization could do with such a story. “I think we could do a story nobody else could do in a week.” David further qualified that comment in a formal interview by stating this,

I think that part of the shrinkage of traditional media in recent years is there are fewer people at the city council meetings, there's fewer people digging through the budget, there's fewer people pulling files in courthouses and looking up public employees expense accounts and that sort of thing, and so I think that um part of our mission, you know, lends itself to the idea that we can spend the time it takes, and that's the reason there's less of that. Right? Because it takes time. And it's hard to devote time to stuff like that when you've got to feed your printed daily paper or your 9:00 newscast or 10:00 newscast and your web publication, and so I think that that's an important part of our mission and role is to be a watchdog.

During a two-part formal interview, Amber explained that the package on minority groups falling further behind their white counterparts, which was published in January of 2013, was originally supposed to be just a six-month project instead of the 18-month one it turned into. "It ended up taking 18 months, but that's what we wanted to do." Amber then went into much further detail about really what she believes to be the ultimate cultural differences between the non-profit outlet she runs, and the for profit model she spent so many years working in.

Like I said, we don't have those other pressures on us. All we have to do is find what in our journalistic judgment are the most important stories and do them in the most thorough and broad way. No one is walking up to these journalists and saying: "Hey can you come off of your big project and go cover the car crash on the corner?" Or, where we have the summer festival insert that we need you to write three stories for. That's not happening here so we're very laser focused on those public service journalism projects.

They (for-profit outlets) haven't made a choice strategically I don't think to say: "All right, well, we don't care about public service journalism anymore." But by default when you see the contraction of the newsroom and the increase in demand so you have half the journalists you used to have and then instead of just having one produce at the daily newspaper or a daily newscast you have the newspaper or the newscast plus the hourly web updates, the tweets, the Facebook's, the blogs, and there are only half the people to meet more deadlines, right? So you just can't find a body to take off of that daily grind to do that in-depth stuff. Now, I'm over generalizing to some degree -- there's some newspapers in the state are certainly doing some enterprise reporting. It's not as if it has totally disappeared but the amount that they are able to do is a fraction of what needs to be done.

As Les repeatedly said over the course of the observation, arguably the best thing about switching over from a more traditional for-profit media outlet to a start-up non-profit media outlet was that there is greater freedom to pick and choose than ever before.

I guess I would say that it's in the ability that we have to pick our shots. If you are a commercial enterprise you have little choice but to be out there doing daily stuff that isn't terribly significant in the scheme of things, feeding the beast kind of journalism. Being able to step back and be a little bit more reflective and kinda pick the shots is a good thing. But at the same time you want to be relevant. That's one thing that I think that we are trying to figure out. I've been really gratified at how the for-profits have used our material.

As the practical joker of the group, Matt never shied from expressing his opinions on the state of the media industry, much less about the cultural differences between working for a for-profit media outlet and a non-profit media outlet. When describing the chain of command at the former outlet, Amber, Les, David, Dennis and him worked at, he stated this,

My director and executive editor – those were the two people I worried about. Everybody else was just sort of random editors and (unintelligible). You know as long as those two are happy on an ongoing basis that was fine. If I'm pissing off some line editors and things go along or disappointing them or something, you know, (screw) it -- move on. I got four more assignments to do. But you knew what was expected out of you. We had really high standards, worked hard and wanted to do really good work. There was a lot of competition so I think you know one of the things that is a challenge (here and today) is delivering these sort of differently calibrated (multi-media) pieces. We have this original story or project and we're spitting it out in different ways.

While Les said that an inherent advantage that this non-profit news organization had in comparison to a more traditional for-profit, daily media outlet was the ability to carefully and strategically pick its projects, Matt countered by saying that there still were some built-in disadvantages that non-profit outlet might have to endure – most notably being in conflict of interest. “You know here you feel like there is a lot of people you need to make sure are satisfied with what you're doing. We have all these partners so you want to make sure that the

journalism's good, the delivery mechanism is good, and that they are getting the parts and pieces that they want, the way they want them.”

Because this organization is an arm of a major non-profit media corporation and receives the majority of its funding through grants and donations, the potential of there being a conflict of interest down the road is something that is not lost on Matt. In fact, he went so far as to suggest that some of the packages that the organization produces are directly related to a funder, foundation or donator's area of interest.

He stated,

You know we've got a health foundation that said you can hire health reporter here is the money. So we do health stories. Now I would argue, you're sort of saying that the judgment of this health foundation is that there's not enough health coverage made by this entity who has the cash. And we're agreeing with them saying: 'yes, there needs to be more health coverage.' I mean, I think there needs to be more everything coverage because it has been wiped out. We've got this LJI coming out with energy coverage, and then there's the Center for Public Broadcasting with money saying you know: 'we'll pay you if you do this news coverage.'

You would hope that for the sort of the overall what's good for democracy, what's good providing information to the public – that those values are being shared by these foundations and these money centers. (Hopefully) we don't wind up covering stuff that just because the Colorado Health Foundation has a huge amount of money you wind up with a lot of health coverage and maybe there's not a lot of coverage someplace else.

Even during the observation's infancy, it was quite obvious that the organization's five people and the other seven that worked in the newsroom not only worked well together, but also enjoyed each other's company – both in and out of the work place. Overall, the corporation did a good job of promoting morale. A prime example of this came every Friday when corporation employees would walk approximately 100 yards after work to the neighborhood bar for a cold beverage or two. Josh would actually buy the first round for each employee. It was during these

types of gathering that many of the organization's five employees would often open up and disclose some profound thoughts reflect on how they industry once was and how it now is to them.

Stated Les,

One thing that you do think about, particularly if you're like me and have worked for daily news organizations of 35 years, is you feel like you've kind of lost the sense of immediacy that always goes with the news. A lot of us are like dogs at the fire station. The bell goes off, and we want to jump on the truck. But you have to get over that because that's not what we do, and that's not terribly negative either. There are things that happen that I feel very fortunate that I'm not running the story or having to run out the door. Believe me, I've done plenty of that – enjoyed it back in the day. But being a little more thoughtful and reflective is a good antidote for losing this sense of immediacy.

COLLABORATION

External collaboration

In assessing the type of collaboration that takes place within this studied organization, the findings showcased that both internal and external collaboration were prominent. The organization used external collaboration to promote its outlet and better spread its journalistic stories and packages through outside outlets. Nowhere was this more apparent than on June 22 when a story produced and written by the organization, documenting how common a particular type of natural disaster was within the state, landed on the front page of three different daily newspapers. Dennis, who researched and came up with the data and numbers that were used in the story, said that ideally this is how the organization would like to see its stories and reports featured. “We are always looking to see how we can take the story or the data and make it regional as well as state wide. We are in effect telling (these cities and towns), here’s how this story can affect you locally. So, I think that’s one of the biggest changes in sort of how we do business.” The organization published another story earlier in the year, which highlighted the state’s most violent neighborhood that received extensive play in one of the state larger dailies. Les said he hopes that as the organization continues to prove itself, that it will lead to more frequent collaborations with outside outlets and to its stories and reports receiving better play.

He stated,

Well, I would hope that we could do even greater collaborations in the future. We’ve really directly collaborated with (that daily) better than anyone else, but I’ve also enjoyed talking on the phone (with many other outlets). We’ve collaborated with all those newspapers, and we’ve enjoyed strong collaboration with (major television news networks). We try to do these stories in a way that allows for local reporting. Our partners can take our numbers and do what they want in terms of localizing. The (“Most Violent Neighborhood”) was a great example of that. We worked closely with (that city), but then Dennis had the whole state broken down by census tract so we could give any newspaper

their county or counties to localize. Some people do a really good job of that. Hopefully we can grow in terms of being collaborators with the wider world, as well sometimes just sending stuff out the door and hoping for the best.

One thing that did work in the organization's favor when it first opened is that several outside print outlets were willing to try different and more unconventional way of getting news out because of staff cutbacks and reduced page counts. Amber said the idea of telling various outlets that they would have access to a particular investigative story her organization would produce all at the same time initially was a tough sell, but "because competition was so less important than (ever before) because of all the shrinkage that happened," they ultimately "were willing to try it."

External tensions and challenges

Though the external collaboration the organization has experienced with outside media outlets has been both rewarding and satisfying, it does not come without its sets of challenges. Because the organization is its own outlet, the reporter writing the story frequently has to shorten the main report to better fit the confines of the various outlets and wire service that might pick up the story. Typically, that same reporter will produce a longer story for the outside outlets and an even longer story for the organization and partnered corporation's website. Les stated that there are many factors the organization must consider while working on a story and when ultimately submitting it.

One of the infamous areas of shrinking resources for traditional media, including newspapers, and one of the things that's diminished is the size of the news hole and the ability to print long news stories and that kind of thing. We want our work to be accessible to as wide a market as possible. Don't get me wrong, the papers have really been great in working with us and appreciative of what we do. But one thing that happens is we end up with a story that has been heavily reported and there's a lot of data to it. The dilemma from our point of view is, we want something that reflects the quality of our

effort, but, at the same time, it has to be short enough to be useable. What we've done in some circumstances is sort of a compromise.

David, who penned the story on the state's most violent neighborhood, said he understood the process and rationale for why a daily may need a shorter version of a particular story. But he also said that there is a learning curve with the type of collaborative reporting that now is being asked out of his organization and him to fulfill. Simply put: There are more mouths to feed and editors to keep happy than before when he was a reporter at a more traditional for-profit media outlet.

In terms of thinking about that story in particular, you know, we want to do right by our media partners who have done right by us. And you know, (that) paper, for example, has been a really good partner and has run a lot of our stuff and has provided us with content that we can share. So, I felt strongly that they deserved to have something more than the shortest version of the story that was shipped out for the state. I also felt selfishly that I wanted to write the longest possible story – not the longest possible story, but a story that did justice to the amount of reporting I did. So that's how we ended up with three versions. Part of that is there's collaboration in the office when I ask Les or Dennis or Matt or somebody for an idea or talk to them about something. Then, there's collaboration with our partners. In that case, it was talking to (that daily) and saying sort of this is what the story is and what do you sort of see in terms of length you can handle and all that sort of stuff. So that's how I'm doing that and I'm happy with that. I'd rather not write three stories every time. But, on the other hand, if we spend a lot of time on something we think is really important, I think it's worth doing.

The organization, however, often feels like it is being put between a rock and a hard spot when approached by some outlets, leaving their values and overall mission in question. Nowhere was there a better example of this coming into play than when one of the state's largest television news networks approached the organization to see if it would be willing to produce and assist with two investigative stories per month for the outlet. While it is unclear what decision the organization took, the potential collaboration was a major talking point at three consecutive news meetings during the month of June in 2013.

Amber introduced the possibility of collaborating with the television network on a more frequent basis by saying: “Channel (15) wants a closer relationship. What would we do for them that would be special? What would we do for them that would be financial? Channel (15) said they would give us exposure, blah, blah – money never came up. Can’t get more rock bottom than that.” This prompted Dennis to say that “their definition of data base is something that could be looked up on line. These are stories that we really shouldn’t be doing.” The potential for greater exposure for the organization, and non-profit media corporation as a whole prompted the president to make an appearance in the group’s news meeting two weeks later. Though Josh was intrigued by the possibility by forging a greater relationship with the network for increased exposure, he ultimately said: “I’m worried that (we) will be taken off (our) mission ... Stay on stories and things that matter systematically, not personally.” In regards to the decision-making process of dealing with offers to collaborate, Amber had this to say during a formal interview.

Well, really, we-we make the decisions. The decisions rest with us but we listen to what our partners say so if they’re saying, “Hey you know this fire season is really bad, have you got anything?” We can, you know, reach into our bag of tricks and pull out something. But all the decisions are made in this newsroom. So...we’re independent in that. Although, we want to know what people really want to try to do. Because, it’s like any giant newsroom, kind of, it’s kind of like a giant newsroom. These reporters out there have ideas that they can’t get to. Well, if we know and can help get at that then it’s important for (our state) to know. If nobody’s going to be able to do it if we don’t do it, then we’re going to do it if we can.

Still, as Les indicated, once the organization generates a story, it has very little control in how it is used or how it is packaged by outside media outlets – something that he still has not gotten quite used to.

This is not a complaint and it’s probably not even a negative, but based on a long career in newspapers there are times when I would like to say: “Here’s the way we’re going to lay out this page and this is going to lead the paper, or we’re going to print a special section around this story.” That’s out of my hands. We control content to the extent that

we try to make it as good as we possibly can, but we don't control its ultimate use, except on our Web site.

Internal collaboration

Amber initially thought external collaboration would be how the organization would make a name for itself when she launched it in 2009, but its opportunities for internal collaboration have arguably been more frequent and even more successful over the past year. This likely stems from the fact that the studied organization, along with a public radio station, formally merged with a major public media corporation in February of 2013. Prior to the merger, each outlet had worked out of the corporation's newsroom. Additionally, there is a separate independent news agency that also offices from within the corporation's newsroom. Though, this outlet was part of the internal collaboration process, it was not part of the merger. While it might all seem a bit like a three-ring circus, Amber stated that there have been some tremendous benefits that have come with being able to partner with a major non-profit public news organization.

It's really good because it's so good for both. It's kind of the perfect marriage. It's so good for both sides because public media wanted to be doing public service journalism. They realized: "Wow, look at the impact (we) have been having." They saw laws that have changed and policies that have changed directly related to our content. They looked at that and said: "Wow, we want to be able to have that kind of impact on our community, but you know rather than starting it from scratch let's just merge with (them). And for (us), we looked at public media and said: "Wow, we'd like to have 60,000 members and we would like to have a fundraising department and we would like to have this kind of network, so let's merge with them."

Amber also was quick to point out that the merger was able to take a lot of the fundraising pressures and responsibilities off of her plate. "Here's the thing. If we were still a stand-alone organization of five people, and I was trying to raise a half million dollar budget by myself ever and do all the other things plus grow in some way (by trying) other revenue streams and (just) do all these things. That's a hell of a lot for one person to year after year."

By partnering with this large corporation, Dennis said the organization was able to achieve more rapid relevance and credibility than if it had not merged. “I think being associated with (this organization) give you sort of instant credibility. It’s a well-respected name. I think when we started no one knew who in the hell we were. So, I think that helps.” The merger has allowed the organization to take great advantage of the corporation’s recourses, which have included, but have not been limited to, broadcasting and promotion of various packages the organization has produced. One such package on poverty featured a main bar, numerous sidebars and multiple audio videos. With all of this built-in synergy in place, the package on poverty was cross-promoted on the corporation’s weekly public television show and on its radio station. David, who helped write and report on the poverty package, said the internal collaboration and cross-promotion the organization takes part in reminds him of a previous job he held at a major-metro daily newspaper in the same city.

He stated,

The culture’s pretty collaborative, which is what I like. That was something that was unique about (previous metro daily) compared to all the other papers I worked at. The culture of collaboration (there) was greater than any other place I’ve been. So, I didn’t have like any responsibilities on (this package’s) work, but I had some input because we would come in here and sit down and preview the video or talk about the story or talk about reporting and I could throw out some ideas and stuff like that, and I like that. It’s the same the other way. I mean, everybody will speak up and say I’ve got an idea about this. You know we’re still – I feel like we’re still – sort of figuring out how it’s all going to work with Courtney in arts district and Charlotte and Savanna (on the weekly TV show), and how we’re all going to work together. My contributions to (the TV show) so far have involved basically going on the show. Or in one case, we did some research that we gave Savanna that she used you know on the air, but there might come a point where I’ll have or we’ll have more of a role to play just in terms of maybe conceiving an idea for a show. And similarly, you know we’re all meeting as a big group now –now there’s a chance for Savanna and Charlotte to have input on stories we’re doing so that’s all kind of interesting.

That more voices have a chance to be heard at a weekly news meeting, during an impromptu meeting or just in passing is one of the biggest benefits of collaboration on the internal level. “Well you get a wealth of different perspectives and experiences going into a story and, you know everybody here has got background knowledge on different things,” David said. “It’s great to be working on a story and have Dennis say: “By the way, did you know blah blah blah” or whatever. I just think that collaboration is really important.” One of the corporation’s younger reporters is Courtney. She reports on the arts for corporation’s radio and broadcast branches. She said just being able to engage and observe some of the more experienced reporters in the office have helped her better figure out ways to go about producing or covering a particular story. “The newsroom here is so different because there are so many different people doing different things. But it’s, you know, great to have a newsroom where you can bounce ideas off each other for how to handle a story or whatever. It’s nice to hear that’s the way they are approaching this story.”

While it is much too early to know how productive the merger between this organization and major non-profit corporation will end up becoming, Matt does believe that this merger could ultimately serve as a blueprint for other non-profit organizations and corporations. “I hope it gets expanded. I hope people explore it, and, you know, for a town (our) size to have a newsroom our size attached to (this corporation) is pretty cool. I would think there would be other places that would do that.”

Internal tensions and challenges

While the benefits of internal collaboration may be well-documented, there also are some drawbacks to taking this kind of journalistic approach. As Matt stated, “here you feel like there a

lot more people you need to make satisfied with what you're doing. You want to make sure that the journalism's good, the delivery mechanism is good – that they're getting the parts and pieces that they want the way (they) want them.” Matt continued, “You've got to calibrate what you do to please all these people. The drawback is just I don't know if you can generalize with what we're doing because we've kind of got this unique model of being this sort of newspaper, journalism core transplanted into a broadcast outlet and a public television broadcast outlet. I think they'll admit that's why they brought (us) on because there was a limited amount of journalism being done here.”

With over 35 years of journalism experience, Les has more experience than anyone else in the building. He believes the roles of everyone in the newsroom will be more clearly defined and that future projects all three outlets collaborate on will only get better. “We've got these three islands bumping up against each other but hopefully we become more fully integrated, and I think you're starting to see that happen. It's a good culture. There haven't been any problems so far. I think the future is wide open. Josh has been great about being inclusive in terms of inviting us to be larger participants in the overall (corporation).” Unlike competitive for-profit media outlets, Josh considers ongoing and continual collaboration to be the heart and soul of a non-profit media outlet's mission.

He stated,

The newspaper was going to go out (of business) you know and really did – 10 years ago. Candidly, most people were getting their information from the newspapers, magazine, print and that began to deteriorate because of the financial model that was pursued. So we think about the creation of that core content in collaboration with others and we also think about its distribution. Collaboration is hard. It's easy to go down to a newsroom where you control the printing press and tell somebody to do something. You have to spend a lot of time on your collaboration, phone calls, informal work, making sure that the communication is sufficient to build trust and diminish fear. And I think that's one of those things – where most news organizations have grown to be fiercely competitive – one of the differences we think that has to be part of the non-profit newsgathering is that you want to be sharp, but you want to be collaborative. If the objective is to serve the public that means a variety of different outlets for your content have to be available. And that the idea of creating a sense of ubiquity in the long run leads to the change that you, not the change, foster change, but the exposure of the fact base that you want.

Charlotte, who helps produce the corporation's popular weekly TV show, believes that there are no doubt financial incentives to be gained through collaboration. "Synergy, I think is a very economic factor – not so much principal because, again, if you have one story, and it has a lot of legs, you can send it all over the world. You can cross it over in TV, radio, print, the international market. And if you can do that with these 12 people from this little room then that's really learning how to use technology and new media in a cost effective way."

BUSINESS MODEL

In order to keep a non-profit organization afloat and sustainable, one must come in with a solid business plan. Amber thought she had one when she helped launch the organization in 2009. She said during a formal interview in her office, “The original business plan was like four-legged stool. Grants and donations were the seed money – the big start-up money. Then underwriting, like what (this corporation) does for (other) corporations and businesses and then earned revenue from partners and products like summer camp and pilot-project curriculum kinds of things that we’ve done.”

While Amber admitted to the latter two legs being weaker than the grant and donations ad underwriting legs, she did believe that the journalistic services her organization could provide outside, for-profit media outlets would pay off, even with her organization initially offering its services for free. She stated, “The idea was we were going to give it away for free in the beginning and tell them it’s not always going to be free because if it’s valuable to you – you need to help support it, and everybody was on board with that. So the plan was to start charging for content in 2012.

One mid-sized daily relayed to her that it had set aside \$10,000 in its 2011 for the organization. Amber then went to the state’s largest daily. She was informed that it had set aside \$40,000 in its budget for 2011. That daily also wanted Amber and her staff to hold some investigative reporting training shops in its newsroom. She stated, “It was a good deal for them because they couldn’t have hired half an investigative reporter for \$40,000. Now, they get the work of three investigative reporters for that amount. And it was a good deal for us because,

well, the cash. Unfortunately for her organization, the agreement was never fulfilled after that daily took a \$1 million hit to its newsroom two weeks later.

In the same interview, she stated, “It was like all those newspapers were going through a second contraction. It was like 2009 all over again. It took two years for it to kind of level out, and then it dropped again. I think it’s going to (be) two more years for it to level out, but I am less reliant, less hopeful really about that bringing in significant revenue because I think the trend lines are in.”

That being the case, Amber has become more vigorous in her pursuit of grants and donations. Her organization was in the process of landing a significant two-year grant in the summer of 2013 that would allow Amber to add three more people to her newsroom. She stated, “Part of it is figuring out how you sustain it after that because that’s a pretty big increase in personnel, which is our major cost. We really have a very low overhead. We really put all our money into our personnel because this wouldn’t work without those specific people, who have really wide ranges.”

The organization was able to attract a small, but respected and talented staff of journalists, which left major for-profit entities because of Amber’s contacts and reputation and also because she of her fundraising efforts. She was able to lock up \$400,000 in the first year off of two major grants and donations her organization was awarded from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation and from the Knight Foundation.

She stated, “We got very lucky with those grants. We had \$400,000, which was good enough for us to operate for three years, with three people. That’s why I was able to hire Dennis and Matt because I could say we are operating for three years, even if we don’t raise another

dime. And I was pretty sure I could raise more dimes. That gave us a runway that a lot of the other places have never gotten.”

She added, “I think you’re gonna see a lot of them fail this year (2013) because they’ve kind of run out of their first major grant and didn’t get a second major grant.”

Les, the organization’s managing editor who worked with Amber at a major daily for a long stint, said other non-profit organizations also were at a disadvantage because they likely did not have someone on their team like his direct boss Amber.

This is definitely her baby. She started it and she was like the one woman band in the beginning. I came back up here in the winter of 2010 after (our paper) closed in 2008, and I was working at the AP and I came up to do a presentation for the press association. Amber was out there at this press convention with her (organization) banner. Her tenacity and her willingness to hang in there during what I’m sure were some very hard months was amazing. I feel a lot of gratitude and a lot of admiration for what she’s done. In her role, she definitely separates us from having to worry about money, or grants, or going after that end of it. We’re news. She was always a good reporter and a good investigator but I mean she’s really.....Yeah, showing skills as an entrepreneur, starting this business.

As Amber also was quick to point out, the organization also would not work without the backing and support from the non-profit, public-media corporation it became partners with in February of 2013. She stated, “Yeah, I think we were an attractive entity to public media because they really need some way to strengthen their relevance to the community for their longevity. And we really need infrastructure for our longevity.”

Whereas the organization got its leg up by initially acquiring nearly half a million in big grants and donations, now that is part of the overall umbrella of its partner and much larger public media corporation, which had a well intact infrastructure already in place.

Amber stated,

It's huge. They've got the infrastructure. They've got the brand, but that means they've got the infrastructure. So "I News" went through this whole series, we've got um, strategic planning, and we decided we really need five thousand small donors to support the core mission. So, building a five thousand member membership base from zero is much harder than saying: "All right, we're now a part of (this organization now), we have sixty thousand members and we're gonna add five thousand to that." That's a much easier thing to do. It's completely doable.

Stated Les about the partnership, which had been in the works for a while,

When I heard about it I found it exciting and for a lot of reasons. Obviously, (this organization) is a great brand. It's been here for decades. And I appreciated the fact that Josh and the others in leadership wanted to do something to pump a little fresh life into it, fresh blood. The fact they thought that we could help do that was gratifying. If we can figure out how to make a go of this, if there's a stability about this that we can help sustain, and being a part of the larger organization, a respected organization, it gives us an entry into the broader world and gives us a better shot at being sustainable ourselves.

As the CEO of the corporation, Josh had the following to say during a formal interview outside his corporate office about non-profit media, and what he believes should be its ultimate mission:

"My favorite line about non-profit is the stock market is built on a balance of between fear and grief and greed, and I think that non-profits are built on the balance between fear and aspiration – that our primary responsibility is to serve the public. And that we think of the realm that we're in as one of information not affirmations. Affirmation theory tells you that by giving, by managing the point of view that's going to correspond to the audience you're able to grow a bigger audience and commercially be more successful. That's acceptable in commercial media because both the legal and moral responsibility of somebody in commercial media is to maximize or overvalue. That's their first responsibility. They may do it by having strong editorial integrity or they may do it by other ways but that's their responsibility. Our legal and moral responsibility is to maximize community impact. So I'm fond of saying that's the dumbest business model ever. Because unless in a week, a month, a year, unless you have perfect information, we're going to alienate a donor. Because they're point of view is going to be challenged, and so we have to be explicit in our communications to our donor base and our member base that we're not going to give you your point of view, we're going to give you the best fact based journalism we can provide because of service to the broader world.

While there are a number of big organizations that have donated or will donate to the corporation, Josh said, during a formal interview, his corporation is not predicated on singular-big donations. “You have to think about where we are – that 60 percent of our revenue comes from people giving us \$100 or less (per year). What happens is we have such a small proliferation of donors that any one thing doesn’t impact us. It’s not like we piss off the automotive dealers and 20 percent of our revenue is at risk.”

Still, when there is a chance of a big, singular donation being made, Josh said he is quick to tell the donor and, or organization that they will have no impact in the corporation’s editorial policy. “The biggest donor I’ve ever had was the (Grant Foundation). And in the course of the conversation, when it was clear, they were going to give us the gift, I had to stop the conversation and say: ‘You know that if you do this – if you make this gift – you’ll have no impact on our editorial policy or editorial integrity.’ I was nervous, but the guys said: ‘We wouldn’t want it any other way. That’s why we’re making the gift.’”

Josh later stated during the same interview,

To some extent the public understands the role that we’re seeking to play. It’s like a university, it’s like a library district -- that there are certain categories and then we have to manage that trust appropriately, which means we can’t be extreme in what we do unless the facts lead in that direction. And we think the standard, you know they talk about universities as being “a cathedral,” the utterance of a professor in public or private settings should be in accordance with the integrity that he has as an academic. We feel the same applies to us – that our utterances should be based on the responsibility to be balanced.

When it comes to traditional, for-profit media, Josh was quick to point out that the majority of outlet's personnel want to do a good job, but he also was quick to point out that there are some distinct differences between the two media models of for-profit and non-profit medial. He stated during an interview,

I think the reporters in 90 percent of most newsrooms are trying to do the right thing. That has been a good part of the business model. But when you look at what represents itself as (for-profit) media today, whether its MSNBC or Fox, it's definitely slanted for a reason, and so I think that what we try and do is we try and be disciplined about the business model we have, which is different than the business model that they have. We're not covering every story. We're not so deeply invested in politics as the core function of what we do that it shapes everything else. Culturally, we don't want to be personality driven. We want to be institutionally driven. We want to be system oriented.

In terms of the business model, Les is not so sure there is much difference between the non-profit and for-profit – each faces challenges in staying afloat and staying relevant in the public eye.

That's something that hasn't changed across the models. You have to be able to sustain yourself, whether it's selling advertising or soliciting memberships, gifts and grants. One thing about what Amber was able to do in terms of getting (us) off the ground was to get really good grants from highly respected organizations, journalistically and otherwise. I'm no expert on the business side of it for sure but getting people involved and growing this organization with the corporation's brand, growing membership, hopefully it's a win-win for everyone. We hope to create more interest for them and they're the big umbrella for us. But, we'll see. I'm optimistic but don't think there's any way anybody can be absolutely certain. I mean, every day it seems like the (Metro News) is laying off another group of people. Hopefully, we can all be sustained. But that's what everybody's trying to figure out.

With housing multiple media outlets in one newsroom under one big non-profit media corporation outlet, Josh is hoping that the model he has helped construct is not just cost effective but also viable and sustainable.

The per capita cost of delivering content has to go down or you can't do it. So, it's the intentionality of the business structure, I mean that's why what's unusual here is that you have (the vice president) and me on the one side who are always looking at what's the distribution model and product sense. We have a service sense because of the organizations we run, and how you create value for the public by lowering the per capita cost of content. So, if (our radio station), who is serving (the northern part of the state) can then also have its content distributed by our corporate TV network, with its reporters known. If we together can have all of the content distributed to the players in our community radio over time, then you change the dynamic. A story that cost you \$10,000 to create you might have only got an audience of 5,000 people and so they cost you \$2.00. If you can take a story that cost \$10,000 to create and get an audience of 40,000 people you're down to \$.25 per capita in the content. So it's sensible and the potential impact is great. We only chose stories that we think, you know, I don't like "the news you can use" sort of stuff because that's sort of silly, that is impactful. Our story selection is built around things that will change the way you behave or the way you understand policy because you haven't been exposed to that.

That stated, the system in place is underdeveloped, specifically from a digital platform.

On one June day, the entire newsroom took part in a training seminar designed to teach them how to update the corporation's website. Stated Matt about the program a couple of days before the training session: "(It's) like this little sick kitten dropped off at our doorstep that we can't do anything with." There was merit to his analogy. The training turned out to be very unorganized and confusing. In fact, one of the trainers admitted to the fact that they did not "even have official format instructions."

The other trainer, in an effort to show the impact of making online updated to the website, said: "What you do will be shown to the world and that is currently 50,000 visitors per month. No small potatoes."

While recalling the training session, and that particular comment, Matt stated this during a formal interview session,

I'm just like: 'you understand that we used to have 400,000 people a day see what we did (at major metro daily). I understand the importance. You know, it's gets you the flavor of some of the intensity of the way we do things and the speed of it. I came in today, and I look at the front page of the website, which is supposed to be a big deal, hadn't been updated to reflect that (a major story) is being broadcast. It still points to the press release, and we're talking about something that happened today, but it actually happened yesterday. I don't know if it's frustrating, but you see if that happened at the (old major daily), it would have been frustrating. I would have been pissed at whoever the web guy is. Like you got to pay attention to this shit. Somebody's got to be in charge of taking control of that, and maybe that's us (organization).

Amber realizes that both her organization and the corporation its fall under needs to do a better job of promoting itself online. In fact, Amber made it a point during an early-summer staff meeting that she wants some sort of daily post on the corporation's website to begin as soon as possible. Matt said that he believes they could backlog and build a bank of updates they could just pull from. David, however, counters by saying that the mission of the organization isn't too have a daily presence like more traditional for-profit media outlets.

Amber understands David's argument, but during a formal interview said she ultimately saw it this way.

There is a delicate balance. We want people to know that we're out there, and we want them to become members so they can support (us). But if we only show up every 18 months, that's not going to happen right? We've got to figure out a way to keep on the mission, doing these big-important stories, but have it be more of a drum beat so that there's some regularity, some predictability that people say: 'Oh yeah, there's another (organization) story.' We're looking for ways that we can keep the presence out there without taking away from the mission, and so we don't want to do daily news. The commercial media can do daily news. That's what they're good at. That's what they ought to be doing. We don't want to do daily news, but we do want to figure out ways to take these really in-depth, really complex stories and keep feeding the information out. Sometimes it's going to be stuff that didn't make it in the stories, but other times it's going to be stuff that was in the story but might have gotten overlooked or might deserve having its own 15 seconds.

To Amber's credit, she said that 95 percent of the funding her organization receives goes back to her staff. She stated during a formal interview, "We don't have a nice big travel budget. We're not spending money on a lot of things you might have seen in a newsroom. We've made a

very conscious decision to be very lean on everything else and try to put as much money as could into personnel so that we could get something like, a Dennis or a David.

Amber's employees are all thankful that practically all of the organization's funding goes back to them. And while they are all optimistic that now being partners with the corporation should greatly enhance their organization's chance for financial sustainability, at least some of them can't help but be a little skeptical and uncertain as to what the future may hold.

Stated Matt during a formal interview,

I mean, my concern is not whether I want to be here for five years or for ten years or however long you know. My concern is just is the funding going to be here. You know as much as I'm this sort of "Swiss Army Knife," I'm probably the one most likely to get replaced because they have a web team, they have a videographer, they have a radio reporter. Basically, the only thing they don't have that I do is still photography ... So you know, I keep an eye on the door not because I'm headed to the door, but I'm afraid that financially if someone's got to go, and if you looked at it really objectively, that's my ass out the door. So yeah, I'm in grad school just to try to help pump, help keep things up. I freelance occasionally to keep my name out there. I still shoot a little bit for the AP to keep my name out there.

VALUES

In terms of observing and approaching the values associated from this non-profit Western organization, one of the initial observations that immediately stood out came from the weekly staff meeting the newsroom would hold on Mondays. This one came in early June. David expressed that how whether working for a non-profit or a more traditional for-profit media agency, there needed to be some level of objectivity maintained by employees. “It really bothers me that someone has a press plate and an Obama sticker on their car. We need to revisit some of those core values.” Another person in the meeting offered this, “perhaps it’s just an education thing.”

Some of the values that stood out when observing this group of non-profit journalists and the corporation they worked from with included: the value of public service journalism, the value of independence and discipline and the value of sustainability. The group’s strong moral compass was another trait that stood out during the study.

Public service journalism

Though journalists have no formal certification as a doctor or lawyer would, there is an educational, on-the-job training that goes hand-in-hand with the profession, as David stated: “Journalism leads to a deeper understanding of issues, of politics, of people – you know a deeper understanding of our culture and our society. I think that it’s really important for people in our culture to realize the value of you(r) thought-provoking journalism.”

The mission of public service journalism has long been a cornerstone to the profession of journalism. That said, so too has been meeting the daily demands that come with the territory of the job. When observing and evaluating the journalists from within this studied non-profit news

organization, one thing that stood out is that they all were making a transition from meeting demanding deadlines of a traditional for-profit newsroom into producing more spread out, long-term projects. Simply put: while the constant rush of meeting the daily demands will never subside, they are being suppressed by the desire to go after the “bigger story.” That much was evident when David offered the following analogy one day in passing in July of 2013. He said, “For almost 26 years, the ambulance went by the window, and I felt like I needed to figure out where it was going. Now, I’m sitting here thinking, you know, ‘how many go by the window, and what does it mean. How is it affecting health?’”

As the organization’s figurehead, Amber said that she felt because non-profit media outlets do not have the burden of producing or generating as much content to meet daily deadlines, she feels that organization’s like hers are better able “to just focus on the pure mission.” She also added that she was not so sure that there was a difference between the types of values that are incorporated at her present job compared to previous stops. She stated that the profession of journalism tends to incorporate the same kinds of values across the board. “I think we’re still operating on those very strong journalism ethics. Journalism values are we get the facts. We put them in context, we are fair to people, we get to the bottom of things, we check and we re-check, and we get to the most truth that we can get to.” Still, she did add that there is something to be said for regularity because it breeds familiarity.

We want people to know that we’re out there, and we want them to become members so they can support us, but if we only show up every 18 months that is not going to happen. So we’ve got to figure out a way to keep on the mission by doing these important stories, but it has to be more of drum beat so that there’s some regularity, some predictability so that people say: ‘oh, there’s another story (from these guys). We’re looking for ways that we can keep the presence out there without taking away from the mission so we don’t want to do daily news, but we do want to figure out ways to take these really in-depth, really complex stories and keep feeding the information out.

Because of the organization's name, there are some out there that associate the organization with being a total and complete purveyor of "watchdog journalism." While the outlet has exposed societal problems – most notably with its package on minorities falling further and further behind – the organization's ultimate mission is not to "expose corruption," which is how "investigative journalism" has often been defined. Amber chooses instead to define the type of work that her staff does as "public service journalism".

She stated,

Some people hear 'investigative journalism' and think that's the 'gotcha' jumping out of the bushes to ambush somebody. It's 'public service journalism' that is a service to the public because it tells them something they need to know in order to make a decision or to change the way things are – whatever needs to be done. 'Watchdog (journalism)' is another word for it, although that kind of has connotations for other people. 'What do you mean watchdog? Who the hell are you to be a watchdog?' But that's what it is – or 'accountability journalism' some people call it.

Amber then further elaborated on what she thought the definition of 'investigative journalism' is, citing what she tells aspiring journalists who are in high school that she presents to at a yearly high school camp.

Here's my definition of 'investigative journalism.' It's very simple. This is what we teach our high school kids. 'Investigative journalism' looks at the way things are supposed to work and then looks at the way things are actually working. And the gap? The gap is the story. People see that gap and say: 'we need to fix that. It ought to be working this way, and it's working that way. We want to fix it.' So that's 'Investigative journalism. It's something that's not clearly lying out there that everybody already knows. There's some, sometimes, often times, a degree of there's somebody out there who doesn't want people to know about this.

Part of the values that are in place within this organization are embedded from the overall decision-making process and beliefs of the corporation as a whole. When describing one of the first conversations that he had with Amber about the expectations of the type of journalism that would be produced, Josh, the corporation's president, said that of three recent Pulitzer Prizes

awarded, he only believed that one of the three was an example of the type of journalism the group should perform. “We thought that was the only one we wanted to be engaged with because you’ll always be able to go after politicians personally, but it’s the system that we want to use. There’s a watchdog role that you have, and, sure, its part about the financial propriety of people, but it’s not always the personal propriety of people. You have to really look at the realization of it. If you’ve got a corrupt politician, it’s how that corruption manifests in policy that you want to be alert to.”

Josh then went on to make this compelling statement about the type of reaction his organization seeks to evoke with its packages. “Dialogue that leads to action. We’re to some extent indifferent about the action. We just want to inspire action because the belief is that over time that action will lead to democracy.”

Independence and discipline

Part of the allure of the profession of journalism is the independence that the industry projects in regards to the creative and decision making process. Because this organization is affiliated with a corporation that is funded through grants, donations and endowments, the potential is there for a donor to influence what kind of packages and stories that are produced.

Like his other colleagues, Dennis also entered the world of non-profit media from the for-profit media world. He, like Matt and Charlotte, also said there could be a potential conflict of interest in regards to some of the stories that the corporation and organization decide to produce because of funding through donations. He did also go on to say that for-profit media also has its own set of challenges in regards to story production in the form of high-dollar advertising.

I mean, it's weird because our whole approach is that as long as we do complete disclosure of where our funding comes from we should be OK so that people can make the decisions. You know, we're getting money from the (state) health foundation. That's a totally legitimate and well-respected foundation, but, you know, people could say: 'hey, you know, you're doing maybe more health stories than you should be doing' – that type of thing because you're getting funding. It's very similar to advertising (in for-profits). It's just (we) deal with sponsors instead of advertisers.

Much like what Dennis said about there being a potential conflict of interest in play for a non-profit news organization such as this outlet because of outside influence caused by special interest grant and donations, Charlotte also echoed those same concerns. In fact, she had this to say about the subject: "It's not uncommon at all for someone here to say: 'we want to do a show on battered women because we've heard of someone – a philanthropist – who might give money.' You know, that innuendo is always there. Sometimes it's more blatant than other times. Sometimes it comes from the top: 'I met so and so at a luncheon, and I think we should have her as a guest on our show.' Sometimes it's more subtle, but I think it's a constant source of conflict here."

She went on to say that the 5-person print news team within the corporation probably felt even added pressure when it came to potential conflict of interest because the print arm of the organization dealt more with "hard news" or analyzing news trends that might have come about from breaking news. In regards to Charlotte's take on what the organization brought to the corporation's overall media packaging, she stated this,

As an old-schooler, I like the idea of watchdog journalism. I think it has an important place, and I think the fit for (the organization) and (the corporation), in that respect, is really good because, you know, I think (this corporation) is trusted. Every year it comes out as the most highly trusted public institution in country. I think people from parents to viewers of all kind just have trust in the integrity of (our corporation). You know, it's obviously a generalization, but I think it's something that all of us who work here hold near and dear. So, I think that really fits well with (this organization).

Matt believes there is not any noticeable difference in professional values when comparing his experience working at a non-profit to working at a for-profit media outlet, but he did expand on Charlotte's take about how the print and broadcast arms of the corporation differed in their respective news gathering approach. He said, "ethically, I don't think anything's changed for me. I'm still a real purist, but that has been a bit of challenge because broadcast ethics are a little bit different, and even documentary film ethics are a little different than still photography ethics. I'm not saying ours is better than theirs. They have a little bit more latitude in controlling things and applying a point of view."

As with anyone who deeply cares about doing a quality job at work, there is a drive – a discipline – to succeed on a personal level. This is no different with any of the organization's five journalists. They all appear to take their work very seriously. Said Matt during an informal conversation: "I think where I get my biggest stress and where I get the crankiest is when, you know, I feel like I'm not living up to expectations. Lately, things have been getting more intense in terms of just trying to keep track of everything. I think one of my plans for the next 100 days is to try and help figure out a tracking system." This not only reinforces the discipline that journalism projects, it also reiterated a level of independence that comes into play from within much of the industry. Part of the drive that went with starting up this organization was the fact that Amber kept thinking that there were more important stories that not only needed to be told, but that needed to be finished. "I was thinking we have got to figure out a way to get them out there so that people can be informed."

Dennis brought up an interesting point one day about the professional values from a personal level that his colleagues and he have tried to follow since making the switch over from the for-profit media world to the non-profit world. He said that, if anything, the transition from

for-profit to non-profit has only helped further solidify his views on the traditional values that he has always tried to incorporate in his day-to-day work. “They’re really not a lot different. I mean, we’ve probably been the exact opposite in that we’ve tried to make sure that we keep those same values that we had (before at major metro daily newspapers).”

It became apparent during the observation and just through talking with the organization’s five members that they all had high expectations for themselves both individually and as a group. That is not to say that there has not been a shift in priorities over the years for some.

Part of that might be a result in the more normal 9 to 5 setting that this non-profit organization employs, along with the fact that the type of work these journalists are asked to produce does not involve meeting daily or maintaining hourly deadlines that a for-profit media outlet often demands out its personnel. When comparing the pace of work between his previous for-profit media employers and his current non-profit one, David stated this: “I feel like we all work hard here, but it’s also not driving me to the ground like it would be (at a major metro daily). I mean, I could work those hours when I was younger, but as I’ve gotten older, it’s like you know – what kind of husband I am and what kind of dad I am is more important than what kind of journalist I am, and that tradeoff for the nice salary just wasn’t worth it.”

Charlotte, who works as producer in the corporation’s broadcast arm, came to a similar conclusion several years earlier when she worked as a print journalist for a major metro daily newspaper before moving on accepting a job in public relations. “Most of my changes or career moves have been based on my family’s need and my kids’ need. I mean, I love this job right now, but the (metro daily reporting) job was the best job I ever had. I gave it up because I

couldn't do it anymore because of family constrictions. You know, I was going to heart transplants in the middle of the night at CU and things like that, which were so interesting but not practical for me at that time, but I want to make it clear that I really feel lucky to have landed here.”

Sustainability

As a long-time, established journalist, David frequently gets called on to speak or present at various professional luncheons. It was at one such luncheon in 2013 when David offered his audience this analogy when breaking down the difference between for-profit news and non-profit news. He said, “for-profit news is about selling a product – it’s about selling today’s newspaper. Non-profit news is about selling an idea.”

Just how well this “idea” is received will have a lot to do with whether or not these relatively new non-profit news organizations can be sustainable. Stated David, “the idea is quality, impactful journalism matters and that it should be supported financially. I think that we will find out in the next couple of years whether fully integrating (with this corporation), and their fund raising drives if that can wholly sustain us or whether we’re going to continue to rely on grants from large foundations.” While David went on to say that the grants have been very beneficial in helping launch and, to a certain point, establish this non-profit news organization, the fact of the matter is that some of them can be renewed, while others cannot, meaning the stress of finding the next grant is always present. Non-profit or for-profit, Les believes media outlets will always endure the pressure of financial sustainability.

He stated,

That's something that hasn't changed across the models. You have to be able to sustain yourself, whether it's selling advertising or soliciting memberships, gifts and grants. One thing about what Amber was able to do in terms of getting (this organization) off the ground was to get really good grants from highly respected organizations, journalistically and otherwise. I'm no expert on the business side of it for sure, but getting people involved and growing this, growing membership, hopefully it's a win-win for everyone. We hope to create interest for them and they're (corporation) the big umbrella for us. But we'll see. I'm optimistic, but I don't think there's any way anybody can be absolutely certain. I mean, every day it seems like (this big daily) is laying off another group of people. Hopefully we can all be sustained, but that's what everybody's trying to figure out.

Both the corporation and the organization are hoping that the business model, which features print, television and radio mediums, that has been organized as one will lead to greater audience appeal and sustainability. Amber may have provided a glimpse into the future when she was selling the idea to others of her organization. "I told them the silver lining is that they were going to be a part of this conversation, not on the outside of it. There's going to be a long tail to it because people are going to pick up pieces of the story on radio, television and in the newspaper, and that's going to benefit them because the audience is going to be able to get the story from them." Les expanded on what Amber said by adding this about the dynamics of the organization's business model: "We've got these three little islands bumping up against each other, but hopefully we will become fully integrated, and I think you're starting to see that happen. It's a good culture. There haven't been any problems so far."

Charlotte embodies how the overall corporation functions in its ability to produce media packages on a variety of different platforms – having worked in print journalism, public relations, television production and even radio. While she believes technological advances have made things easier in the industry, she also said it has led to many media outlets being more reckless in reporting information and news. "I think I'm old school. When I was at the (major

metro daily) in 80s before this huge burst of technology, you never reported a rumor. You know, you were fact checked all the time. You just had these principles that I still feel very strongly about.”

Dennis believes the model the corporation has in place with print, radio and television mediums each collaborating together to put out various in-depth media packages is something that is not going to go away and will only grow because, arguably, the corporation’s biggest non-profit rival is primarily limited to just radio broadcasts. He foresees there being a time when the two corporations will come together and collaborate together. “I think you’re probably going to see more joining forces between those two because I think (our corporation) and their (corporation) see that there is a gap as far as more analytical in-depth, investigative-type stories because of the cutbacks (at) for-profit news operations, and they think they can fill that gap, which will give non-profits (like ours) more security, as far as continuity goes.”

Stated Matt,

I think it’s a good fit for journalism. I mean, it’s the core of journalism – investigations, features and watchdog reporting. You know, break away from the sort of screaming matches that you see on CNN, Fox and all those places. I would hope that having a little more “commercialish” journalist would help raise the profile here – just make things more interesting. One of the knocks on (this corporation) is that it’s a little bit of a snooze fest. We’ve been with (this corporation) now for six month, and I think we’re finally starting to become integrated with their operation. I think the next six months will be really interesting to see if we can raise our profile and what kind of effect it will have on membership and maybe our relationship with the rest of the media world. You go to a news event or you go out somewhere and people sort of do a double take when you say: “I’m with (this corporation).” It’s like, “shouldn’t you be filming ‘This Old House’ or something.” I think the next six months is going to be really interesting and maybe what the next six years will be like.

Morale

As the elder statesman of the newsroom, Les said journalism will never be misconstrued as being in the military or some other harrowing occupation; there is a sense of loyalty that is a by-product of working in a traditional newsroom at media outlet. This likely could be derived from the daily deadlines, department teams and day-to-day banter embedded in a traditional newsroom. “I feel very fortunate to have spent my career in the newsroom. There’s nothing that I would rather have done. I’m very grateful. The people my age say: ‘well, you know, if we were 10 years older, we would have been out of here before stuff started going downhill for newspapers, for journalism. But if we were 10 years younger, we might be part of the future. But that’s the one cool thing about this – it does feel something like being part of the future.’”

In regards to the current staff he now works with at this Western non-profit news organization, Les said this: “I feel like I can depend entirely on each person out there. As an editor, I’ve always said: ‘You’re only as good as your reporters.’ I’m never hesitant to ask question about anything. Everybody will tell you that I’m certainly willing to suggest where I think the stories could be better. But in terms of the trust that we have in each other, and knowing we’re all going to do the right thing – I mean, that’s an amazing relationship to have.”

Dennis does not remember morale being so great during his last stop at a major metro for-profit daily before joining this current organization. “It was pretty dysfunctional, and I think there were a lot of people who do not like each other. There’s no question, they were great to me, and they let me generally do the stories I wanted to pursue, and that type of thing. But you saw people who didn’t like each other and who didn’t want to work together. It just wasn’t a real friendly place.”

Amber and Dennis never did work together at that particular metro daily, but the two did work together at another major metro daily for several of years together before it closed down in 2009. Before the daily closed for good, Amber had a very successful and long tenure at the for-profit media outlet. During a formal interview, she was adamant about the fact that she would not have walked away from the for-profit media world had her former employer not closed down. “I was very happy with where I was, and what I was doing. It was a really good job. So, I never would have done this. But even though, I’ll never say I’m glad the (major metro daily) closed, I think this (non-profit organization) is a really powerful thing.”

That Amber, Les, David, Dennis and Matt all spent numerous years working together at major daily is not lost on any of them. In fact, even with their former employer closing down, a strong case could be made that the biggest reason why the five are working alongside each other again is because of their past work history together.

The organization incorporates a lot of data analysis and computer-generated reporting. Providing detailed analysis in the form of census reports is Dennis’ primary responsibility within the organization. To say his value is great would be an understatement. In fact, Matt called him the organization’s “lynchpin,” going so far as to say he was the most organization’s most important employee. Because of his skill set, Dennis had one of the more high-end jobs at his former employer’s for-profit metro daily, and he was considered to be a big hire by Amber. Though many colleagues likely considered the venture over a risky move, Dennis never saw it that way. “Not really because frankly, I’m near the end of my career, so I can take chances. It really wouldn’t impact me one way or the other, and I really wanted to try non-profit (journalism). The other part of it, which I still would like to see us get into, would be a bigger role – like training journalists.”

Les echoed a very similar sentiment – in that he would like this organization to be his final career stop. “If possible, this is where I would close it out. I’m content – not content – but I’m hoping we can do something here.”

Several times during the observation period there would be routine conversations that would come up in regards the youth movement of journalism. As more and more cutbacks have been made within the media industry, there has been a proliferation of journalists taking on important positions at some very well-known media outlets – quite often these come at the expense of more seasoned news veterans because their salary demands are much higher than their younger and greener counterparts.

Stated Matt,

Nothing against new journalists because I was once one, but you lack that institutional knowledge. You don’t know where the bodies are buried, you don’t, and you can get that fairly rapidly. You look at Dennis and David, and that’s, you know 150 years of journalism experience. Dennis knows so much about (this city) and so does David. Les is a little bit newer (here), but he’s got all this institutional knowledge. That helps because you can connect the dots and you can, you know, refer back to well, we know this and this person used to be here, and now they’re here. So, there’s something that could be going on because they’re, you know, that guy used to do that 10 years ago and also x, y and z. When you are doing the sort of watchdog stuff there can be a little more nuances involved, I think a little more sophisticated that just you know (so and so) misappropriated funds, which you know that’s legitimate because the guy’s not using the money as he’s supposed to be. But I would hope our stuff is a little more robust.

One does not have to get know Amber long to find out how much admiration and respect she has for the other four members of the organization’s staff. In fact, she said the former major metro daily she worked at before starting this organization would be extremely proud of the portfolio her news team of four has been able to produce. “You could not have picked just any four journalists, and it work out this way. You look at the list of stories that we’ve done, and the impact that it has had – if you were at the (Daily Globe) and had a 200-person newsroom and a

\$20 million budget, we would have been proud of this record. We did this with a five-person newsroom, and not even a \$500,000 budget.”

Amber further expanded on Matt’s theory about there just not being any substitute for experience, particularly when one is trying to do so much with such a small newsroom. “It’s not that, you know, 25-year old journalists are bad. We were all 25-year old journalists. You just can’t replace experience. There’s no replacement for experience. It makes a difference.”

Amber’s emphasis on experience was indicative when she first started the organization and made a conscientious decision to hire proven and experienced journalists away from larger and more established traditional for-profit media outlets. “We made a very conscious decision to be very lean on everything else and try to put as much money as we could into the personnel so that we could get something like a (Dennis or Kevin). They are amazing to watch aren’t they? ... I think this is a really powerful thing.”

That still remains to be seen, but multiple visits from large local news networks to the corporation to interview various members of this five-person news team during this observation period about certain news happenings provide further insight that this non-profit organization is one that, at the very least, is held in high regard by its media peers. “I think we’re going to do something really revolutionary. Is revolutionary too strong a word? We’re creating the evolution of journalism. We’re doing something different here. It’s not recreating the (Daily Globe), and it’s not recreating the kind of journalism we used to have. It’s creating a new kind of journalism and I think if we do it right a better kind of journalism.”

ANSWERS to RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How does the Western non-profit media organization's decision-making process regarding news content differ from traditional outlets, such as the ones examined by Gans?

There were two things which really stood out when examining the decision-making process of this studied nonprofit organization as when compared to the more traditional for-profit organizations that Gans based his study and observations off of in the 1970s and the present ones of today.

The first item that merits considerable consideration is the fact that unlike its for-profit brethren, the majority of nonprofit news outlets, this organization included, does not operate on 24-hour news cycle. As all of the organization's five employees stated at some point in the evaluation period, it is not a news outlet looking to cover breaking news. As opposed to "feeding the beast," one editor said the organization's ability to "pick its shots" was what separated it from more traditional for-profit outlets. This was reflected in the duration of the amount of time the staff generally would spend on the majority of its packages – one of which took 18 months to complete. Before entering into the nonprofit world of journalism, each of the organization's five employees had previously spent their entire journalism careers working at for-profit organizations. Unlike their previous employers, this organization did not face the daily-deadline pressures or story-count pressures that more traditional for-profit organizations – major metro daily newspapers in particular – did.

A second factor that needed to be strongly weighed in responding to this question is that because the organization was a non-profit organization, a great deal of its decision-making process was based in what was good for the overall corporation and in large part by where grants and donations came in from – an example being a health organization. Because the corporation's newsroom also featured television and radio nonprofit outlets, those mediums would often

piggyback off one another. For instance, when the organization would produce or write a story, a radio package would transpire and the topic would be featured on the corporation's popular television news discussion program where the reporter(s) who wrote it would be interviewed. In terms of grants and donations, these elements did not seem to play a large factor in the decision-making process of what story or package to produce, but it did influence the overall topic the organization would seek out to report on. An example of this could have come from teens and drug use, and how the group could spin it back as a "health story" to a particular funder of the organization. Overall, the researcher believes that the studied organization's decision-making process differed, to a varying degree, from the more traditional for-profit outlets because it did not have to deal with the urgency of covering breaking news.

RQ2: How is the newsroom culture at a nonprofit, web-based media outlet different than a traditional, for-profit media outlet?

After observing the organization and corporation at work and interviewing several workers, the researcher did not believe there to be a real substantial difference from a personal standpoint between a traditional for-profit medial outlet and the non-profit one being studied. This rationale for this likely stems from the fact each one of the organization's five news employees spent their entire journalism careers at a for-profit outlet before switching over to a non-profit outlet. Additionally, excluding the organization's intern, each of the other workers that worked in the corporation's newsroom worked in for-profit media at some point in their respective careers. Because only 12 people worked in the newsroom, it had a much more intimate feel than a large newsroom. But the conversations and interactions were much the same that you would find at any large for-profit newsroom. The researcher uses the term "large for-

profit newsroom” because nine of the newsroom’s journalists had acquired numerous years’ experience working in a large newsroom and, or, working for large for-profit media outlet.

When addressing work flow and output, the researcher believes the culture between the studied nonprofit outlet and a more traditional for-profit differed because, as mentioned in the first research question, the expectations for this organization were not to cover breaking news. It was to take on longer-term projects, which took away from the immediacy of the newsroom itself. Because greater emphasis was put on long-term projects and reports, employees believed these types of projects were necessary to provide the needed information to drive important discussions, which would lead to greater dialogue and democracy. Furthermore, it was by doing long-term projects like the one published in January of 2013 on minorities falling farther behind than whites, the organization was able to fulfill its mission of public service journalism. Additionally, the values of independence and discipline that go hand-in-hand with journalism, were perhaps better put to use in the non-profit vehicle because each employee was able to dedicate more time and energy into one or two projects as opposed to having to chase down daily news, which likely would have been the case at a for-profit media outlet.

RQ3: How does a nonprofit media outlet fulfill the role as public watchdog compared to a traditional for-profit outlet?

In accessing a response to this question, the researcher factored in some of the citations used in the literature review, specifically from professor Randall A. Beam, whose research findings for one study led him to suggest that “public-service journalism” remains an essential value of the journalism profession. Beam, though, did go on to suggest that for-profit organizations were not committed to public-service journalism. That analysis likely could be

centered on a couple of items: the shrinking newsroom staffs at number of traditional for-profit media outlets such as large daily newspapers, and the influence advertisers now have on major corporations that own several media outlets. Whether or not that is the case, the creation of many of the nonprofit media outlets, like the studied organization, that have recently emerged, were started up to produce more consistent in-depth journalism.

Another important factor the researcher considered in responding to the above research question was the true definition of “watchdog journalism” and whether or not the studied organization strove to practice it. Based off of past readings and interviews, the researcher has come to define “watchdog journalism” as exposing corruption or truth. In terms of truth, the researcher believed the organization strived to fulfill that role. An example of this being its package on minorities in the state falling farther behind than their white counterparts that was published in January of 2013. From a corruption standpoint, the researcher believes that the mission of the organization does not allow for a great deal of corruption to be unveiled because of the beliefs that are in place from within the corporation the organization is partnered with. This claim is further validated by the beliefs of the corporation’s president, does not wish to target specific groups or individuals.

Josh stated,

There’s a watchdog role that you have, but it’s not always about the personal property of people. If you’ve got a corrupt politician, it’s how that corruption manifests in policy that you want to be alert to. We think our responsibility is to look at the system as a whole, see if it functions, and see if there are influences that create less efficient or differential outcome that shouldn’t be there. That’s what we’re trying to cover.

Some would define investigative journalism as finding out or reporting information that people do not want to find out. Amber, who founded the studied organization, made it very clear that the type of journalism the her organization made it a point to practice was public service

journalism because she ultimately wanted the type of reporting to be on something that educates the public and enables them to make an informed decision on how something is being done, and potentially request a change to the current policy or decision-making process. The researcher believes that this organization did a better job of educating and informing the public on a consistent basis with its reporting and packages than practically every for-profit media outlet in the state with the exception of the state's largest metro daily newspaper, which enjoys much more personnel and resources in its newsroom. This is based on witnessing several other for-profit outlets within the state either run or piggyback off this organization's reports. Nowhere was that more apparent than when a certain major network television station coming to the organization's newsroom (multiple times) to interview its reporters and gather their insight or perceived expertise on certain news items.

RQ4: What are the effects of collaboration that non-profit organization's like the studied one have on journalism culture?

The response to this question is two-fold, as it was apparent during the observation that the organization's practiced extensive collaboration both internally and externally. While much of the organization's original business model centered on collaborating externally with various traditional for-profit media outlets, it became evident that collaboration happened far more frequently internally. Ultimately, this was because the organization officially became a part of the larger corporation it originally only worked out of, giving it access to television and radio media platforms. One package that was produced during the observation on peoples' struggle to rise above poverty was not just cross-promoted by the corporation's broadcast outlets; both the radio and television arms of the corporation piggybacked off it and produced its own stories off the original report. The organization's lead reporter and editor were interviewed about the project

for the corporation's big weekly television show. As every newsroom employee and the corporation's president indicated, this form of internal collaboration would be the wave of the future for both the organization and the corporation.

External collaboration also was frequent. This was apparent on a Saturday during the observation period when three separated daily newspapers picked up an organization's story and ran it in the respective Saturday issues. Much like a wire service, the space and prominence the story was given was left up to each managing editor's discretion.

From a business model, the organization's external collaboration was not ideal for one big reason – the budget cuts that for-profit news organizations were going through. As the organization's overall editor said, the state's largest daily newspaper had to opt out of partnering with the organization only because it no longer had the budget to do so. There was another instance in which one of the state's largest television stations wanted to partner with the organization for multiple times a month, but could only promise it exposure and not money.

CONCLUSION

The premise of this study was to examine the culture of a recently-started (2009) nonprofit media organization during an observation the spanned approximately 120 hours and incorporated various informal and formal interviews about whether the culture, values and decision-making process of a nonprofit organization differed from that of a more traditional for-profit media outlets and entities. This observation and the participants who took part in it mimicked much of what numerous past media studies indicated about the present state of for-profit journalism: that being that it is not providing the public with as much public-service, in-depth journalism that it once did due to budget cuts, staff reduction, technological advancements and, to a degree, transformed values.

This reflects on what was reported in 2010 at the State of the New Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism that between 2001 and 2009 “roughly a third of the newsroom jobs in American newspapers are now gone.” Ultimately, as Charles Lewis wrote in a 2010 journal article (“New journalism ecosystem thrives”) Because there are less people to report, write and edit original stories, fewer and fewer people in power are held accountable. Simply put the watchdog role that has long been associated with journalism is fading into the background, and, as Lewis said this is a “very sobering perspective” (Lewis, 2010). In that same article, Lewis further wrote that non-profit news organizations such as the observed and studied organization are now carrying the public-service journalism baton so to speak.

After evaluating the topic’s present-day studies and analyzing the data taken from the observation and interviews, the researcher believes both accounts to be more the norm than the abnormal because unlike many of today’s for-profit media outlets, the studied nonprofit organization did not have to operate at a beatnik space to cover breaking news meet story-count

quotas. Instead, this organization did not have to “feed the beast,” which allowed it to “pick its shots” and take far greater time to report and work on projects. A microcosm of this behavior this could be seen in the fact that it was able to spend 18 months putting together data, analysis and information for one package that dealt with minority groups falling farther behind their white counterparts that was published the same year as the observation took place. That report, initially, was only supposed to be a six-month project. There is little doubt that it would not have been OK’d to extend the deadline of a similar project at a for-profit media outlet by 12 months because of the demands of covering breaking news and the pressures of producing an “acceptable” amount of copy by today’s industry standards.

The researcher would even go say as far to say that only one for-profit media organization in the same state as the studied nonprofit organization would possess the budget, resources and expertise necessary to consistently produce a package of the same caliber as the one which took staff of four 18 months to produce. Though biased to a degree, the organization’s founder, Amber, reiterated that claim by stating this about the project on minorities falling farther behind their white counterparts that encompassed four parts, a video and 43 interviewed sources. “You look at the list of stories that we’ve done, and the impact that it has had – if you were at the (Daily Globe) and had a 200-person newsroom and a \$20 million budget, we would have been proud of this record. We did this with a five-person newsroom, and not even a \$500,000 budget.”

That Amber and the organization’s four other full-time journalists worked together for numerous years at a major metro-daily newspaper could not be underplayed. Not only was the chemistry apparent, the talent of the five was considerable. Each one had been involved in a project that had either won Pulitzer Prize or merited serious consideration for journalism’s most

prestigious honor. Because of their past achievements, expectations by the organization and from within the corporation, which it was partnered with were high. One corporation employee, Charlotte, went so far as to say that she wondered what the future of the organization would be if it were unable to produce a Pulitzer.

That a comment like that would be said further validates that non-profit media organizations, like the studied one, that have sprung up around the country do not just face the pressure of producing insightful and high-quality work, but also must yield a positive return on investment. Lewis mentioned 60 such nonprofit journalism organizations in his 2010 article (“New journalism ecosystem thrives”). Included in the 60 was the studied organization, as 37 other non-profit organizations that also did not start up until at least 2006. If not entirely new, it is a modified industry, which incorporates a business model that relies on grants and donations, as opposed to advertising revenue as traditional for-profit models.

In many respects, it’s a gamble. Lewis pointed out that many of the people who went on to start these nonprofit news organizations were former editors or newsroom workers with little to no financial, entrepreneurial or management experience, and Amber was no different when she started up the studied organization in 2009. She was a distinguished reporter, who was Pulitzer finalist, before jumping it to the nonprofit world of journalism. She said the beginning phases were very stressful: “doing high-level (journalism) and pointing fingers at people without a whole lot of heft behind you.” As trying as that was, through interviews, observations and reviewing other literature, the research is confident in saying that the most daunting challenge the majority of these relatively new nonprofit news organizations is the uncertainty of funding. It should be noted that by partnering with a big-name nonprofit corporation, the studied organization enjoyed a built-in advantage that many other nonprofit news organizations do not.

Behind closed doors, Amber said this of those organizations: “I think you’re going to see a lot of them fail (soon) because they’ve kind of run out of their first major grant, and didn’t get a second major grant. I couldn’t have done it that way or the way other people are doing it. I mean, one of these entities mortgaged his house to do it. There’s no way in hell I would have ever mortgaged my house because it’s risky.”

Though still risky at the time of the observation, much of the uncertainty of what the future may hold for the organization was lifted when it partnered with the major corporation it had been officing out of earlier that year. By having a big name behind it, the organization now has had an easier time getting in the front door, generating interest and attaining grants and, more specifically, donations. This partnership also has enabled the organization and corporation, which also houses radio and television outlets, to collaborate internally. It is this kind of collaboration, and not the external collaboration, that stood out the most to the researcher, and provided the greatest opportunity of success for each entity.

The researcher believes this to be true because nearly all the data collected before and during this observation pointed to for-profit media outlets not having the budget to regularly collaborate with nonprofit organizations like the studied organization to where it would be financially impactful for either side. It is through internal collaboration and use multiple media outlets – by utilizing print, television and radio mediums to package reports - that this organization and corporation it partnered with could better maximize full potential– for financial gain and journalism impact.

LIMITATIONS of the STUDY

Possibly the notable limitation to the study was the allotment of time involved. While the researcher attempted to gather as complete a picture and understanding as possible, the approximate time of 120 hours spent at the site over a five-week time period, simply was not enough time to gather and collect the best amount of data possible, especially when one considers the amount of time Herbert Gans spent – 10 years – collecting data from four major media outlets for his book *Deciding What's News*. It should be noted, that unlike Gans, the researcher did operate on a more limited budget and timeframe to conduct the study. It also should be noted that, as opposed to spreading the study out over a more lengthy portion of time, the researcher opted to go down to the site 4-5 days per week for five weeks to get a better understanding of the day-to-day operations of the organization and corporation. The researcher also wanted to be more of a fixture within the building, albeit during a short period of time. It should be further noted that the studied organization differed significantly from the ones in which Gans studied, in that those covered day-to-day breaking news and event.

Another limitation to the study was the use of qualitative research. Though the researcher and the committee felt this was the appropriate method of research for the study, it is not an exact science but one of observation and nuance. Another researcher might interpret observed interviews and events in a different light than the researcher, who conducted this study. This could also funnel down to the data analysis itself. Though the researcher took careful steps to code interviews and field notes from day-to-day operations of the study, one researcher might have come up with a different set of themes entirely. It, however, should be noted that the information gathered and observations made of this organization and corporation could result in a better understanding of the culture and decision-making process of nonprofit media outlet.

Lastly, the researcher himself must be considered a limitation to this study. His extensive background in journalism, which included working in no fewer than four different newsrooms, was well known throughout the organization before the study even began. Even when factoring in any potential bias, the researcher's background likely allowed him to build better rapport with the subjects. It also should be documented that the researcher's background in media, specifically print journalism, likely was able to aid him in the interview process, as well in evaluating the most interesting and valid points from the study.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is the researcher's hope that the results from this study will help pave the way for more future observations and interviews that deal with not just the culture, values and decision-making process of nonprofit media outlets, but for-profit media organizations as well. While still considered by most to be the most accurate and best sociological account of new organizations, Gans' *Deciding What's News* has become outdated to a degree. It is now 35 years old, and several transformations have occurred from technological advances to severe circulation and readership declines that have greatly affected media organizations.

Additionally, each of the organization's employees interviewed expressed a concern over whether or not the present business model of nonprofit journalism – primarily through grants and donations – would be sustainable. Each did say that with the uncertainty came a level of excitement and optimism for journalism that had previously left many when, like so many other of their colleagues, were forced out of a job when their former newspaper closed down in 2009. Where does the future hold for nonprofit news organizations? One notable concern the researcher has is where the next generation of reporting talent will come from for non-profits. Non-profit organizations, this one included, seem to select extremely strong veteran journalists. Once this generation retires, where will the new guard come from and will the new guard be able to turn out the packages like their predecessors?

Though admittedly biased, it was this quote from the organization's founder, Amber, that resonated with the researcher and possibly could help set the wheels in motion for future studies on this topic.

“I think we’re going to do something really revolutionary. Is revolutionary too strong a word. We’re creating the evolution of journalism. We’re doing something different here. It’s not recreating the (Daily Globe), and it’s not recreating the kind of journalism we used to have. It’s creating a new kind of journalism and I think if we do it right a better kind of journalism.”

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