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# HiPPOs (Highest Paid Person's Opinion) in the Swedish media industry on innovation:

## A study of news media leaders' attitudes towards innovation

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Decades of change in the media landscape and technological innovation have brought several uncertainties to media leadership. In this study, we explore media managers' perceptions of their organizational conditions for innovation and their attitudes towards change and draw on a subset of the upper echelons theory to discuss possible isomorphic behaviour. Based on a survey of 372 Swedish media leaders, our results indicate that while innovation is considered to be a strength at media companies, innovation work may still stand in contrast to the institutional perspective. We found that Swedish media leaders perceive innovation as highly important and something they are good at. The perceived ability to work with innovation inside the organizations (rather than introducing knowledge from outside expertise) is undermined by the fact that, during the average work week, the majority of leaders set aside very little time for developing their own competences, individual talks with their employees, and time to reflect on their own work. Thus, in line with upper echelons theory, we find a paradox of trust in in-house innovative strength and, at the same time, media leaders fall back on their own experiences, limiting the inflow of new ideas into their strategic work.

Keywords
media management, leadership, innovation, skill development, leadership roles, change

## INTRODUCTION

One of the core strategic challenges for the media industry is adaptation (Küng, 2011, p. 44); the current need to adapt can be linked to when media companies first created product portfolios. With the introduction of digital technology in newsrooms and the widespread use of the Internet, media companies had to produce and offer more than one product. These required changes created substantial managerial challenges (Picard, 2014). The change also brought about new challenges in how journalists might develop skills to become multi-channel reporters (Nygren, 2014). As a consequence, media leaders now have to face multiple stakeholders and be responsive to a wide variety of industry-specific dynamics, where journalistic integrity, in particular, may be at odds with experimentation inside the organizations (Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2017).

Lowrey (2011) found that changes in news organizations are prompted by coercion from owners and investors or by signals found in audience data. Such changes may, at times, lead to the journalists fearing that their autonomy is reduced, because the normative ideals of the journalism collective – involving working independently in the public interest – clash with management strategies (Waldenström, Wiik, & Andersson, 2018). Even though these clashes create resistance to change, studies show that editors-in-chiefs have changed their perception of the journalistic product and increased their awareness of mar-

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ket influences (Andersson & Wiik, 2013). Visionary media portfolios have now gained acceptance in the media industry and, consequently, there is a need for forward-looking leaders (Brundin & Melin, 2005). Thus, how leaders are fostered inside media organizations and their working environment as leaders are important components for understanding change in the media industry as media leaders "set the ground rules" by which experimentation can occur, in terms of time that can be dedicated to product development, how new ideas can be infused into daily work routines, and the decision to bring new innovations to market (Boyles 2016, p. 230).

Previous research has found that studies on leadership in media and, in particular, how this leadership influences product development and outcomes, is an underexplored and undertheorized area. Deuze (2011) argues that future research in this field should consider not only content, processes, and technology, but also organizational life. According to Küng (2011, p. 50), those aspects include features previously linked to strategic behaviour, such as beliefs, values, and emotions. However, there is a lack of research that explores other aspects of organizational life, such as the working environment for media leaders.

This aim of the paper is to explore how managers at media companies perceive their working environment, with a specific focus on how they work with change and innovation in their everyday working week. In this study, we refer to the concept of innovation as a combination of current ideas, competences, and resources (see Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013) that calls for the integration of new knowledge into routine practices. Furthermore, innovation entails certain abilities or dedication, as shown for example in the definition provided by García-Aviles, Carvajal-Prieto, Arias-Robles, and De Lara-González (2018, p. 5):

> Innovation is the capacity to react to changes in products, processes, and services through the use of creative skills that allow a problem or need to be identified and solved in a way that results in the introduction of something new that adds value to customers and thereby fosters the viability of the media organization.

To make informed strategic decisions, especially at a time when technological sectors such as social media platform companies and telecoms are driving innovation (Küng, 2017), the upper echelons of media companies need to have up-to-date knowledge. To achieve our aim, the following three research questions therefore form the basis of the study:

As perceived by the media managers, what types of development projects did organizations engage in during the past year?

In what ways do media leaders appreciate that they are open to new stimuli and knowledge?

Who are the media leaders in terms of demography and organizational background?

Drawing on an online survey sent to a sample of 1,084 Swedish media leaders who are members of the Medieledarna trade union – a part of the Swedish organization, Ledarna – we analyse innovation strategies as perceived by the HiPPOs at media companies. The term HiPPO originates from the IT sector and stands for the Highest Paid Person's Opinion (Kohavi, Henne, & Sommerfield, 2007); it is used in a humorous manner to describe employee frustration with top management decisions, presumably based on hunches rather than facts or data. In this paper, we start by embracing the HiPPO perspective; however, the paper ends on a more negative note. According to upper echelons theory, managers that are subjected to an overload of different stimuli tend to rely on their own values and beliefs, ignoring outside data (see, for example, Hambrick & Mason, 1984), and these negative attributes of the HiPPO may thus prevent innovative strategies.

Because managers have organizational authority, their role is essential for innovation to take place (see, for example, Gade et al., 2018). Our results add to the body of existing research on management in the media industry in terms of exploring media leaders' resistance to change. The prevalent research discussion on innovation and change in the media industry explains reluctance to change with a focus on factors such as media professionals' lack of time due to day-to-day operations and institutional resistance to market-oriented initiatives related to ideals around autonomy in creative industries, particularly in journalism (see for example Boyles, 2016). However, we determine how media leaders value their role in relation to innovation work within their organization and how their working environment, in terms of time, reflection, and contact with employees, may contribute to their attitudes towards taking different types of managerial action when promoting innovation. Our findings may thus shed new light on the current conditions for strategic decision making, and, as suggested by Boyles (2016), explore how internal management arrangements can promote or constrain organizational innovation. We use the lens of the upper echelons theory to discuss how managers' current working environment may be linked to the tendency of media organizations to adopt isomorphism (see Lowrey, 2011). The analysis is thus inspired by several schools of thought within media management and innovation theory.

Although the upper echelons theory is intended to assess media industry performance, upper echelons scholarship, according to Schnatterly, Gangloff and Tuschke (2018, p. 2406), has evolved from the "examination of CEO demographics to the influence of more cognitive variables such as hubris and core self-evaluation". Similarly, a limitation of this study is that we refer to the theory to explore media leaders' resistance to implementing change rather than testing the theory, that is, the outcome of managerial behaviour on company performance.

In the following sections, we will briefly introduce the upper echelons theory, previous research on managers' emotional attachment to company values, general research on leadership and innovation, and the specific case of innovation in the media context. In the method section, we will present the survey study behind our sample, followed by the results section and our conclusions.

## UPPER ECHELONS THEORY AND INFORMATION OVERLOAD

The upper echelons theory links distinct traits of executives to company performance, stating that the values of managers and their backgrounds can predict organizational outcomes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Because strategic choices to a large extent have been found to consist of behavioural components, the theory states that a manager will bring his or her "givens", based on personal values, into the decision-making. These givens are always updated with stimuli from both outside and inside the organization, but the managers will use their givens to "filter and distort what is going on and what should be done about it" (p. 195). While the upper echelons research tradition is concerned with how background characteristics, such as demographics, affect decision-making and company success, a prerequisite for the theory is that managers, when they do not have the time for an extensive information search and re-evaluation, will use their existing cognitive schemas instead of new stimuli (Shaw, 1990). Thus, when managers are confronted with too much information to handle, they will fall back on biases that stem from their own experiences and perceptions (Cho & Hambrick, 2006).

Considering different factors that explain a person's values and beliefs, Hambrick and Mason (1984) describe how age, functional tracks, other career experiences, education, socioeconomic roots, financial position, and group characteristics will impact managers' strategic choices. Reviewing previous research, Hambrick and Mason (1984, p. 198) state that age will influence risk, because younger managers may be more risk averse. Older managers have been associated negatively with the ability to integrate information in making decisions, but older age is positively associated with seeking more knowledge in order to evaluate information before taking decisions.

Managers' career experiences also have an impact on the types of actions taken by a manager; managers brought in from the outside will carry out more changes inside an organization than promoted executives (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Furthermore, in the case of unprecedented problems, such as deregulation, intensive competition, or radical technological shifts, executives who have spent their entire careers inside an organization will have a restricted knowledge base and can be assumed to have relatively limited perspectives (Hambrick & Mason, 1984).

Another factor mentioned in upper echelons theory is education. To some extent, education will indicate a person's knowledge and skill base, and studies have found that top managers' level of education is positively related to receptivity to innovation (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Explanations for this relationship could be that the decision about a person's formal education in itself is an indicator of a person's values and cognitive preferences, or that a certain education can grant a person access to a new socio-economic group.

## MANAGER'S EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT IN RELATION TO THE HIPPO PERSPECTIVE

New institutional theory suggests that actors facing disruptive environments may not respond to disruption, but rather turn to the field's legitimate and institutional structures and processes against rational-choice assumptions (Lowrey, 2018).

From a strategic management perspective, Porter (1980) describes a similar situation in terms of managers filtering or distorting decisions based on personal values and beliefs. Managers that, for example, are not interested in abandoning unprofitable business lines despite having access to rational economic data, may have an emotional attachment and commitment to a business. As a result, they can become an exit barrier, where a firm continues to compete even though their financial performance is subnormal (p. 265). Furthermore, in such cases where managers' emotional attachments become high exit barriers, they tend to look for optimistic signs rather than pessimistic ones, because the latter are too painful.

Naturally, managers' points of view when compared with their employees' perspectives have been found to differ somewhat. In a Swedish study, Andersson and Wiik (2013) found that managers in journalism tend to perceive that professional forces have strengthened over the past decade, whereas journalists working at the same companies perceived a significant weakening of their professional influence. In an American survey study on the transparency innovation processes, Gade et al. (2018) found that managers took on a more positive view about how these innovation processes were managed compared with non-management in the organization, where efforts made by management were found to be insufficient for the journalists working with innovation projects at the media companies.

The tendency to rely on individual experiences and beliefs rather than external stimuli when forming decisions is what characterizes the humorous creature in the popular discourse about managers – the HiPPO. The term was created by three Microsoft researchers and is an abbreviation for the highest paid person's opinion; it is used as a metaphor for strong managers with strong opinions (Kohavi, Henne, & Sommerfield, 2007). The HiPPO is today mentioned primarily in the context of data analytics and data-driven decision-making (Loebbecke & Picot, 2015) and, in the popular technological science debate, it has been argued that the HiPPO perspective (i.e., relying on intuition) makes sense when data is scarce; however, with more possibilities to digitally track performance, the role of managers or domain experts are shifting – they need to be able to ask the right questions rather than giving opinions, and to create and manage cross-functional cooperation, where teams of experts can be brought together to analyse data, instead of top management (McAfee, Brynjolfsson, Davenport, Patil, & Barton, 2012).

## MANAGING MEDIA INNOVATION

Innovation in the media industry is predominately incremental or sustaining, involving small changes of products and processes (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013, p.18). However, with the convergence of industries, disruptive innovations which challenge the economy have appeared and the industry has had to innovate products, processes, positions, and paradigms to survive (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013, p. 18).

Product development in the media industry may involve different types of innovation. Storsul and Krumsvik (2013) suggest five types: product, process, position, paradigm innovation, and social innovation, where innovation may be seen as an invention that is implemented into a market or a social context. Similarly, Rogers (2003) refers to innovation as a new idea and, from the Schupmetarian perspective, Storsul and Krumsvik argue that innovation does not have to be a new technology, but rather a combination of current ideas, competences, and resources (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013).

According to Küng (2017), innovation in the media sector can be understood as the successful implementation of creative ideas. She argues that media industry leadership is about three spheres: the outer strategic environment, the inner organizational ecosystem, and the internal relationship with the self – the ability to reflect, learn, and connect with others (p. 201). Because innovation calls for the integration of new knowledge into routine practices, management needs to build trust by creating and communicating a vision and to use incentives which motivate people to change (Gade et al., 2018). Küng (2017) suggests that leading for creativity involves putting together teams of different competences, as suggested by McAfee et al. (2012), because such teams have an influence on the intrinsic motivation that is needed for creativity. Thus, the challenge for leaders is to provide an environment that is flexible and less hierarchal, because creative teams also need autonomy (Küng, 2017).

Media managers face an unstable environment; they need to constantly adapt to technology and progressively abandon the old (Deuze, 2011). Nevertheless, such uncertainty often leads to isomorphic behaviour; i.e., following existing practices rather than innovating the product (Lowrey, 2011). Isomorphism within an organization's field may, however, still lead to changes and implementation of new ideas, as other progressive organizations may have adopted new ideas which later adopters then follow (p. 68).

Because of the nature of the regular operations within the media industry, innovation projects require specific focus and prioritization to succeed, because the regular operations already create pressure on employees (Virta & Malmelin, 2017). Thus, the key actor in change processes is the strategic leader, who belongs to the upper echelons, with a responsibility to be visionary and dedicated to change (Brundin & Melin, 2005, p.68). However, the enthusiasm connected with certain phases of innovation projects may be compromised by the discipline needed for ongoing production work; current duties may interfere with new responsibilities, resulting in rising tensions at an individual level (Virta & Malmelin, 2017, p. 50). At a team level, expected results and project planning may be at odds with resource allocation and project execution and, at an organizational level, short-term sales and existing structures may be in opposition with long-term success and innovation initiatives (p. 55). These tensions also create clashes with the traditional logic of professional journalism and managerialism (Waldenström et al., 2018), leading to ambiguity and uncertainty for media actors, who need their practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs to be grounded in some widely legitimated institutional order (Lowrey, 2017). The clash will prompt journalists and managers to negotiate new logics and, as a consequence, new organizational leadership strategies will emerge (Lowrey, 2017; Waldenström et al., 2018).

Similar to other Western news media, the Swedish media industry has experienced rapid deregulation of the media market as well as an extensive digitalization process (Andersson & Wiik, 2013, p. 706). Swedish news organizations have moved towards a stronger management culture and managers stress a need to develop their economic and organizational skills, while at the same time emphasizing their possession of these abilities (Andersson & Wiik, 2014). Studying Swedish journalists and managers, Waldenström et al. (2018) found, however, that journalists still feel autonomous in most work-related situations, yet within the strict framework of managerial and organizational goals. Nevertheless, Swedish journalists do not object to the manager's right to lead, perhaps because, in a Swedish setting, leaders in journalism are recruited from the editorial staff and generally have experience of reporting before entering management (Waldenström et al., 2018). Waldenström et al. (2018) found that this particular background acts as a legitimization for creating trust.

Boyles (2016) finds that the scholarly literature on management and organizational change suggests that leadership, organizational culture, and innovation speed are essential to guiding an industry through times of uncertainty. In fact, innovation has been a promoted ideal, as suggested by Chreech and Nadler (2018). In reports created by think tanks and non-profit institutes targeting the media industry, Chreech and Nadler (2018) detect a possible pro-innovation bias (Rogers, 2003), as the concept of innovation is pictured as the only route out of the current media industry crisis (Creech & Nadler, 2018). Creech and Nadler (2018) argue that these reports function as innovation advocacy during a time when the industry is trying to understand the crisis. Creech and Nadler suggest that the concept entails a revenue-and-market-driven logic, involving the development of new products and processes and new types of content, that takes the focus away from a more pressing discussion on the kind of news system that a democracy needs and the values that should guide the design of sustainable media infrastructures to support a democratic society (p. 194). However, regardless of whether innovation may be seen as good or bad for the development of the industry, it is part of the adaptation process to an evolving digital media landscape and is central to organizational change.

## METHODS

This paper is based on an online survey sent to the total membership base of the Medieledarna trade union – a part of the Swedish organization, Ledarna. The Medieledarna branch represents top and middle managers in the Swedish media industry and, in particular, at news media companies. In a qualitative study of media leaders, Painter-Morland and Deslandes (2017) found that many media leaders perceive themselves as "authentic leaders" with distinct traits and behaviours. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Swedish media leaders have become members of the union Medieledarna, which focuses on media managers, instead of the union for journalists. Belonging to Medieledarna does not exclude media managers from being connected to the Swedish union for journalists (Journalistförbundet). As a media manager, it is also possible to be connected solely to Journalistförbundet or not to belong to a union at all. Thus, this sample does not contain all the media leaders in Sweden.

The number of registered members in the Medieledarna database was 1,084. E-mails were sent out with four reminders. Three hundred and seventy-two respondents answered the survey – a response rate of 34%. The web-based survey was active during February and March 2017, and consisted of 35 questions covering views on organizational development, perceived time spent on various tasks, work-life balance, development of skills and training, methods for working with technology and innovation, beliefs about the future of the media, the managers themselves, and their perceptions about their future role in the organization. Measures used in the analysis are percentages and Kendall's tau-B, a non-parametric correlation coefficient (Weiss & Hassett, 1999) that can be used on ordinal variables for which values can be ranked. Kendall's tau varies between -1 and 1, where 1 represents full accordance and -1 indicates that the rankings are fully the opposite between the two variables.

## RESULTS

The results indicate that the respondents are primarily experienced media managers, having spent more than 10 years of their career in a management position. Almost one-third of the sample consists of top management on the editorial side of the media companies and about 39% consists of non-editorial managers who could well be part of the upper echelons (e.g., HR officer, chief of technology, business development, market operations).

Table 1 illustrates the demographic profile of the respondents. The sample consists of an equal distribution of men and women. The median age is 50 years and the majority of the respondents have been managers for more than 10 years. Thirty per cent of the sample consists of respondents working at regional or local newspapers, and more than half of the respondents work in the capital of Sweden, Stockholm. The highest academic level varies from elementary school to master's degree. Around one-quarter of the respondents have a degree in journalism of some sort, 14% have only finished high school, a miniscule proportion (1%) do not have a higher degree than elementary school, and 2% have not finished elementary school. When asked about the number of years spent in the media industry, 90% stated that they have worked within the same industry for more than 10 years. A large proportion of our sample members seem to have spent their entire career in the media industry, as almost 40% stated that they have been working in the media industry for more than 25 years.

The majority of the managers in our sample have been in a managerial position for a very long time and, furthermore, at the same company for more than 10 years (60%). Using the lens of the upper echelons theory, age and time spent in one organization could indicate that the companies do not take risks in terms of product innovation in the same way as they would have done had managers been younger or had career experiences from other companies (see Hambrick & Mason, 1984). That is not to say that risk and product innovation is always the preferable choice but, considering the ability to pursue innovation, these factors could be interesting to explore further.

Table 2 indicates that innovation is perceived as one of the main strengths for Swedish media leaders (60%). Furthermore, as our respondents are experienced leaders, it is not surprising to find that 65% of the managers value leadership as one of the organization's main strengths (Table 2). Because the sample consisted mainly of media leaders operating in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, followed by the big cities Gothenburg and Malmö, it was no surprise to find that geographical location was rated as a core strength by Swedish media leaders. Also, for regional and local media companies, location is naturally perceived as a strength.

When grouped into different levels of managers, we found that there is a significant difference between them. Seventy-two per cent of the top managers perceived innovation as a strength, compared with 53% of middle managers ($X^2(3)=9{,}239$, $p=.026$, Kendall's Tau-b = 0.055).

*Table 1: Sample of media managers.*

| | Background information | Frequencies |
|---|---|---|
| Sex | Female | 180 |
| | Male | 181 |
| | Prefer not to say | 6 |
| Age | ≤ 35 | 20 |
| | 36–50 | 183 |
| | ≥ 51 | 164 |
| Years as a manager | < 1 year | 5 |
| | 1–3 years | 21 |
| | 4–6 years | 59 |
| | 7–10 years | 68 |
| | >10 years | 208 |
| Year within the company | < 1 year | 21 |
| | 1–3 years | 50 |
| | 4–6 years | 46 |
| | 7–10 years | 37 |
| | >10 years | 213 |
| Type of manager | Top management (publisher, editor-in-chief, and other editorial) | 107 |
| | Non-editorial manager (technology, business development, marketing, HR, etc.) | 143 |
| | Middle management (editorial) | 84 |
| | Non-manager (team leaders or editors) | 38 |

| | Background information | Frequencies |
|---|---|---|
| Type of media company | Public service | 92 |
| | Commercial TV or radio | 17 |
| | National newspaper | 15 |
| | Regional and local newspaper | 109 |
| | Digital native news company | 15 |
| | Other (consultants, hyperlocal media, PR) | 121 |
| Highest academic degree | ≥ Elementary school | 7 |
| | Secondary school diploma | 50 |
| | Other education at secondary level | 69 |
| | Journalism at folk high school | 29 |
| | Bachelor's or Master's degree in journalism | 88 |
| | Bachelor's degree (other) | 90 |
| | Master's degree (Other) | 31 |
| | Doctoral degree | 1 |
| Geographical location of the organization | Stockholm (capital) | 172 |
| | Gothenburg | 15 |
| | Malmö | 17 |
| | Other | 111 |

*Table 2: What managers perceive as strengths and weaknesses inside their organizations.*

| Managers' perceived strengths and weaknesses inside the organizations | Strength | Weakness | Net balance | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The geographical position of the organization (n=360) | 88% | 12% | +76 | 100% |
| Leadership (n=363) | 65% | 36% | +29 | 101% |
| Innovation (n=361) | 60% | 40% | +20 | 100% |
| Business models (n=347) | 57% | 44% | +13 | 101% |
| Competence levels (n=360) | 57% | 43% | +14 | 100% |
| Organizational structure (n=362) | 50% | 50% | 0 | 100% |
| Current revenue situation (n=349) | 46% | 54% | -8 | 100% |

*Note:* The question was formulated as follows: To what extent are the following strengths or weaknesses inside your organization? Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding. The net balance displays the distribution around the equilibrium as the difference between the positive and the negative attitudes, shown as a percentage.

A limitation of the study is that we did not ask the respondents what they mean by the concept of innovation. To understand what the concept of innovation might entail for the media leaders, we present a list of 56 areas in which development work could have taken place, as specified by the union Medieledarna. The respondents could select multiple areas. The areas specified include formats on different platforms, internal processes, advertising-related areas, new business and new genres, and audience-specific initiatives Table 3 displays the top 20 areas that the media managers perceived to have been the object of development work from the areas specified by the union Medieledarna. A majority of the media leaders chose different types of technological development areas, but, on the top twenty list, we also find several internal process-related areas, such as reorganization, competence development, cooperation across editorial boundaries, leadership, company culture and values, editorial workflow, and internal courses. When specifically asked about projects that they had observed outside their organization that they found

*Table 3: Areas in which managers perceived development work to have taken place within their organization during the year 2016. Multiple answers.*

| Rank | Area for development work | Percentages |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Social media | 74% |
| 2 | App development | 61% |
| 3 | Web development | 60% |
| 4 | Reorganization | 58% |
| 5 | Competence development | 50% |
| 6 | User-generated content | 47% |
| 7 | Cooperation across editorial boundaries | 45% |
| 8 | Leadership | 45% |
| 9 | New formats | 45% |
| 10 | Mobile formats | 44% |
| 11 | Company culture and values | 43% |
| 12 | Content marketing | 43% |
| 13 | Mobile first | 43% |
| 14 | Editorial workflow | 43% |
| 15 | New technological internal system | 43% |
| 16 | Native advertising | 42% |
| 17 | Internal courses | 40% |
| 18 | Advertisement formats | 40% |
| 19 | Video | 40% |
| 20 | Algorithms | 39% |

*Table 4: Prioritization of resources when working with innovation.*

| Prioritization and innovation work style | Prefer to manage innovation projects | Prefer to support employees that are managing innovation projects | Innovation occurs without my involvement | Keep innovative projects back in my role as manager | We do not work with innovation | Total (n) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| We do not work with innovation (n=363) | 0 | 0 | 10% | 0 | 73% | 14 |
| Our staff are only working with innovation if it is within their ordinary tasks (n=363) | 19% | 24% | 14% | 0 | 7% | 76 |
| Resources are reallocated in order for our staff to have more time (n=363) | 35% | 37% | 35% | 67% | 7% | 129 |
| Consultants are brought in (n=363) | 26% | 12% | 10% | 17% | 7% | 54 |
| Staff from other parts of the organization are brought in (n=363) | 20% | 27% | 31% | 17% | 7% | 88 |
| Total (%) | 100% | 100% | 100% | 101% | 101% | 100% |
| Total (n) | 89 | 222 | 29 | 6 | 15 | 361 |

*Note:* The questions were formulated as follows: How do you prioritize your resources when working with innovation in your organization? How do you work with innovation? The association is statistically significant: $X^2(16)=225.5$, $p< .001$, Kendall's Tau-b = -0.108. Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

to be innovative, several of the mangers instead listed (in free text) new business or genre areas, such as explainers, robot journalism, and native advertising.

At the very bottom of this list, selected by less than 10% of the managers, we find areas that are currently seen as being at the forefront of innovation in the industry, such as VR, gamification, machine learning, augmented reality, and verification.

Media management literature suggests that managers' key role in innovation projects often involves their authority to allocate resources and their ability to balance the regular operations with the prioritization of innovation projects. Of all managers, 57% state that resources are indeed reallocated so that staff can have more time; however, one-third of the managers stated that the staff only work with innovation within their ordinary tasks. If these perceived statements are true in real life, this would be in line with previous research on media workers' daily list of tasks creating tensions with new norms and practices, but also in terms of getting the time to squeeze in new tasks in the already demanding work day (Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2017).

Another factor for the success of innovation projects as described in previous research is managers' own involvement. We asked the managers about their typical involvement and dedication of resources to innovation projects. In Table 4, the roles are presented in relation to managers' perceived prioritization of resources. Our results indicate that there is a connection between how innovation is prioritized inside the organizations and how managers perceive their own involvement in innovation. We found that leaders of innovation projects and managers that support other employees who are managing innovation projects to a larger extent than other managers state that they dedicate resources to innovation in terms of reprioritization of time, reallocation of staff, and the appointment of consultants. We found that managers involved in innovation projects tend to dedicate resources to innovation inside the organizations, such as, for example, 35% of the managers who themselves prefer to manage innovation projects and 37% of those who support employees managing innovation projects also state that resources are reallocated in order for staff to have more time.

In Table 4, prioritization of resources was plotted against the media leaders' own preferred approach when working with innovation. However, in the total sample, almost one quarter (88 respondents) of the media leaders stated that consultants are brought in for innovation projects. This could indicate that there are competences missing inside organizations or that regular operations are prioritized before innovation projects, but it could indicate that the management was open to bringing new ideas into the organization. Nevertheless, one quarter is a rather modest proportion, especially since we find that even though the media sector today, due to digitalization and convergence, is closely intertwined with the technology industry (Küng, 2017), more than 40% of the managers are not entirely satisfied with the organization's technological competence levels, in particular concerning design and interaction (Table 5). Yet, they feel confident about editorial and journalistic skills; this is slightly in contrast with findings from previous studies about Swedish media staff (see Andersson & Wiik, 2013). Table 5 thus indicates that, in terms of competence levels, media managers tend to be most satisfied with the current editorial and journalistic expertise, and least satisfied with technological aspects, such as design and interaction competences, followed by programming and development competences, and

*Table 5: Manager satisfaction with staff competence levels.*

| Manager satisfaction with competence levels inside organizations | Not satisfied at all | Satisfied to some extent | Fairly satisfied | Very satisfied | N/A | Net balance | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Technological, programming, and development (n=368) | 9% | 34% | 40% | 15% | 2% | +12 | 100% |
| Technological, design, and interaction (n=361) | 9% | 38% | 35% | 16% | 3% | +4 | 101% |
| Editorial (n=360) | 3% | 11% | 34% | 43% | 8% | +63 | 99% |
| Journalistic expert knowledge, politics, economy, culture, etc. (n=352) | 5% | 20% | 31% | 34% | 11% | +40 | 101% |
| Business (n=358) | 6% | 33% | 33% | 20% | 9% | +14 | 101% |

*Note:* The question was formulated as follows: To what extent are you satisfied with competence levels in your organization? Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding. The net balance displays the distribution around the equilibrium as the difference between the positive and the negative attitudes, shown as a percentage.

*Table 6: Managers' time for their own reflection, developing their competences, and having individual talks with their employees, in percentages (n=372).*

| During the average work week, how much time do you have for... | None | Less than one hour a week | Less than one hour a day | More than one hour a day | Don't know | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reflection | 7 % | 32 % | 45 % | 14 % | 3 % | 101% |
| Developing your skills | 3 % | 22 % | 49 % | 17 % | 9 % | 100% |
| Individual talks with employees | 4 % | 23 % | 47 % | 23 % | 4 % | 101% |

*Note:* Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

business competences.

There is a possibility that managers' background, personal values, and ideals may become a stronger influence in the media industry under certain circumstances. Küng (2017, p. 201) argues that, for example, the abilities to reflect, learn, and connect with others are crucial factors for media leadership. These aspects are also recognized in upper echelons theory, where time to reflect, skill development, and talking with employees are important tasks for leaders who are seeking to expand their views and obtain new stimuli; managers with not enough time to conduct information searches and re-evaluation will use their existing cognitive schemas instead of new stimuli (Shaw, 1990).

Table 6 illustrates the perceived amount of time Swedish media leaders spend on their own reflection, developing their own skills and talking to employees individually during the average work week. More than one-third of media leaders state that they spend less than an hour or no time at all on reflection during the average work week. Furthermore, about one quarter of media leaders spend less than an hour each week on developing their own skills and more than half of the sample spend less than an hour a day in individual talks with employees. These results may indicate that leaders may be missing out on important sources for gaining new information and updating their skills – all necessary traits for successfully leading innovation projects and associated with general leadership skills.

If we look more closely at how managers stated that resources are allocated inside their organizations and their time spent developing their own skills, we find a significant connection. Our results suggest that managers who do not have time for skill development tend to work at companies where the staff is expected to work with innovation inside their regular tasks (Table 7), while managers who have (or take) an hour a week or more to develop their skills tend to work at organizations where resources are reallocated so that staff have more time for innovation projects. For example, when innovation is prioritized as a task in its own right and when resources are reallocated in order for staff to have more time, 35% of the managers stated that they spend more than an hour a day on their own skill development; however, of managers who consider innovation to be part of regular tasks, only 14% spend more than an hour a day developing their own competences.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we found that innovation is considered to be a strength at media companies. Nevertheless, innovation stands in contrast to the institutional perspective that dominates legacy media, where routinization, homogenization, and resistance to change are a natural part of an organization's wellbeing, because these reduce uncertainty and protect the organization (see, for example, Lowrey, 2018). The respondents in

*Table 7: Prioritization of resources against managers' own skill development (n=363).*

| Prioritization and skill development | None | Less than one hour a week | Less than one hour a day | More than one hour a day | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| We do not work with innovation | 11% | 2 % | 2 % | 3 % | 0 |
| Our staff only work with innovation if it is within their ordinary tasks | 28% | 22 % | 10 % | 14 % | 25% |
| Resources are reallocated in order for our staff to have more time | 30% | 35% | 42 % | 35 % | 58% |
| Consultants are brought in | 11% | 16% | 18% | 21% | 8% |
| Staff from other parts of the organization are brought in | 20% | 25% | 29% | 28% | 8% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 101% | 101% | 99% |

*Note:* The association is statistically significant: $X^2(16)=28.7$, $p=.026$, Kendall's Tau-c = 0.134. Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding.

our sample are naturally partial to the institutionalized ideals prevalent inside their industry; yet, at the same time, as also pointed out by Creech and Nadler (2018), they appear to be influenced by the positive ideals surrounding innovation, new technology, and change.

The first research question concerned what the media managers mean by innovation. We found that the top 20 development areas that their organizations had pursued primarily addressed technological development but also internal processes, both part of the normal everyday operations. This suggests that the development projects probably involved innovation of an incremental nature (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). This is also reflected in the least selected areas, which on the contrary consist of more disruptive innovation areas, such as VR, gamification, machine learning, augmented reality, and verification.

Our second research question was about the ways in which media leaders appreciate that they are open to new stimuli and knowledge. We found that almost one-quarter of the media leaders stated that consultants are brought in for innovation projects. This could indicate that the management is open to introducing new ideas into the organization and thus using its leadership to put together teams of different competences and create an environment in which innovation can take place (Küng, 2017). We also found that managers who prefer to act as leaders of innovation projects themselves or support other employees who are managing innovation projects dedicate resources to innovation in terms of the reprioritization of time, the reallocation of staff, and the appointment of consultants and the media manager to a greater extent than other managers.

Nevertheless, our results indicate that many leaders have a tendency not to give themselves the prerequisites for taking up new ideas both from outside the organization and from employees during the average working week in terms of time, reflection, and talks with employees. This could potentially harm innovation, as managers who lack the time to conduct information searches and re-evaluation will use their existing cognitive schemas instead of new stimuli (Shaw, 1990). In line with these arguments, we found that managers who do not have time for skill development stated to a greater extent than those who take time to engage in the above-mentioned self-development activities that staff members are expected to work with innovation within their regular tasks, potentially leading to isomorphic behaviour.

Our third research question concerned who the media leaders are in terms of demography and organizational background. We found that a large proportion of our sample consists of older managers, who have been managers for more than 10 years and have worked for the same company for more than 10 years. Around half of the respondents do not have a university degree, suggesting that they have worked their way up to the top position in the industry, thus being fostered into the prevalent ideals in the organization. However, 49% have a university degree of some sort, and one-quarter of the total sample have a degree in journalism. However, almost all of the media managers (90%) have spent more than 10 years in the media industry and 40% have spent more than 25 years in the industry. This could also lead to an isomorphic management style, as Hambrick and Mason (1984) argue that executives who have spent their entire careers inside an organization will have a restricted knowledge base compared with those who have worked in several organizations and industries.

Our results thus indicate a paradox of trust in in-house innovative strength and, at the same time, media leaders fall back on their own experiences, limiting the inflow of new ideas into their strategic work, indicating isomorphic behaviour rather than innovative behaviour. If managers forget to take time to develop their skills and widen their perspectives, they might indeed become the caricatures known as HiPPOs, embodying institutionalized ideals and values. From a long-term perspective, dependency on a manager's own beliefs can result in isomorphism and thus hinder change, which may, in turn, slow down innovation growth inside media organizations.

We do not intend to establish the HiPPO level inside Swedish media organizations, but we use the metaphor as a reminder of a certain level of danger associated with managers relying too much on hunches and opinions (Kohavi, Henne, & Sommerfield, 2007). In a normative sense, with an approach inspired by innovation theory, we found indications of both positive and negative traits as stated by media managers in relation to their everyday work week and their position to make decisions.

As suggested by Küng (2017), the key strategic roles belonging to the upper echelons at media companies will need to update their knowledge. What will happen if the managers do not spend time on reflection, building competences, and meeting staff for individual discussions? The upper echelons theory suggests that they may fall back on their old values and beliefs, based on institutionalized values. These may not be in tune with the current development of other sectors converging with the industry. Then, paradigmatic innovation, including changes in an organization's mind-set, values, and business models (Storsul & Krumsvik 2013, p.17), is unlikely to take off. Ignoring the industries that are coming closer to the media industry may thus protect institutionalized values, but will probably not be of help in innovating the industry.

On the positive side, the managers in our sample recognize a need for skill development, especially in the area of technology. Nonetheless, if they do not develop their own competences, the process of change may take longer. Consider, for example, the relatively slow adaption process to multiple product portfolios that are taking place and are still shaping the media industry.

Based on our findings, we suggest that the simple prioritization of media managers' time may actually present an opportunity for the industry in terms of innovation. This seemingly small change could broaden possibilities for managers in terms of strengthening their decision-making processes and that could potentially benefit the whole media industry.

To conclude, this study has several limitations that could form the basis of future research. The study was based on a survey, and it would be interesting to relate the results to qualitative case studies based on observations of, and interviews with, media managers. These results could also be analysed in the light of the company performance.

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## SUPPORTING AGENCIES

Medieledarna (Union) providing their e-mail list of Swedish media leaders.

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