

Innovation Management in Canadian Newspaper Newsrooms:
Identifying Blocks and Enablers to Facilitate Digital Change

by

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Abstract

Local newspapers have become fixtures in communities as archivists, watchdogs over people with power, and as trusted sources for information and analysis. This thesis examines the challenges newspapers face as they reinvent themselves as digital media companies. When a legacy company attempts to innovate, it will encounter a number of predictable forces that will stand between it and change. Innovation blocks are associated with newsroom culture, processes, and physical assets that have become so engrained over time that they inhibit new ways of doing things. By identifying what blocks exist, specific strategies can be developed to overcome them. This theory was applied to three Canadian newspapers that had just gone through significant innovation projects. The research provides insight into what factors blocked each of these projects along with specific strategies that were used to enable change.

Acknowledgements

For many of us working in legacy news organizations it was exciting when leaders first shared their “digital first” strategies. It meant that we would finally start meeting our potential as digital content producers. But change was slow - and I wanted to understand why. I returned to Carleton University in the fall of 2014 to complete my master’s degree and attempt to answer this question. The following report is the result of that effort.

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and displayed an unexpected level of candor. Their honesty will hopefully help other legacy news organizations make similar digital transitions.

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Appendix A: List of Interview Subjects

Introduction

Starting time for the Sunday morning ritual varies from week-to-week. One thing is for certain, 6 a.m. is much too early for the coffee maker to go off. It officially begins about an hour later with the sound of the deliveryman speeding up the street in his old blue car and pulling into the driveway. He heads back the way he came just as quickly as he arrived, but not before making his presence known with a thud on the front path, flowerbed or, occasionally, the front door.

There's really no need for this (often-frustrating) wait on Sunday mornings. Everything the *New York Times* publishes in its Sunday edition is available on the iPad that sits on the bedside table (they often publish their feature stories online days in advance) hours before the coffee starts brewing. But there's nothing quite like that feeling of holding the newspaper when it finally arrives. The sound it makes while sorting through each section one-by-one, pulling at various headlines that catch the eye, and how sometimes the pages still feel a little bit damp from the freshly printed ink. Every Sunday, having a collection of features, columns, profiles and photo essays served-up as a stack of printed pages is one of life's little luxuries.

The reality is that a growing number of people no longer wait for the print newspaper to arrive. While the *New York Times* still caters to those who enjoy a tactile read, paper is no longer a priority for this publication and many others around the world. Print editions are still the main source of revenue for most newspapers but industry research continues to show that print readership is falling, while digital readership is on the rise (Nadbank; Vividata). Newspaper readers aren't the only ones going online. Advertisers are as well. In 2006 Canadian

newspapers generated \$2.7 billion in print advertising revenues. By 2014 print revenues had plummeted to \$1.6 billion (Newspapers Canada "Net Advertising Volume Canada Interim Report 2005-2014"). There is a growing urgency for newspapers to focus their energies online and to create digital products worthy of daily rituals that meet these changing audience habits. They must also remain competitive as new digital native companies threaten to steal valuable audiences and advertising revenue.

Newspapers have been experimenting with putting content online for more than 30 years, which means they should be leaders in digital delivery. But, for most, this isn't the case. It wasn't until around 2010 that many newspapers finally committed to reimagining their products as "digital first." This meant that the printed product would no longer be the newspaper's number one priority.

In 2014, the year this research project began, several large newspapers proclaimed that digital must become their primary focus. *The New York Times* declared digital as a priority in its leaked *Innovation Report* and Jeff Bezos was looking to grow *Washington Post* audiences with an Amazon app. In Canada, Postmedia completely reinvented three of its publications as multi-platform products, and the *Toronto Star* followed in the footsteps of *La Presse* by lifting its paywall and launching a tablet application (Nguyen). A 2014 press release from *La Presse* let the world know exactly how it felt about its print edition when it said, "The paper Newspaper doesn't have a future" (CBC).

These legacy publications need to re-invent themselves to suit the digital environment. This will mean changing how they have operated for more than a

century. They will no longer be in the business of just producing news for the printed page. Instead they must tell stories over multiple platforms and embrace their new identity as storytellers for the screen.

Complicating matters this change must look beyond just today's digital environment. Current technology to access digital news is in a state of perpetual and rapid evolution. Legacy newsrooms need to establish a culture that encourages experimentation and fosters iterative innovation. There is an added sense of urgency for legacy publications to innovate, as popular digital-native publications like *BuzzFeed* and *Vice* expand into Canadian markets, and as Google and Facebook continue to absorb a substantial share of Canadian advertising revenues.

Canadian Newspapers Focus on Digital

Most major daily newspapers have had an online presence for years, but it was only recently that newspapers like *The New York Times* declared that it still had work to do in “[mapping] a strategy to make *The New York Times* a truly digital-first organization” (“New York Times” 9). In that same section of its *Innovation Report*, the *Times* describes how its mobile apps are still organized by print sections and how different news desks spend a great deal of time laying out their sections, while neglecting social media strategies. This newsroom proved its digital motivation with its revolutionary multimedia piece “Snowfall” in 2012, but as of 2014 its work processes and newsroom culture was still guided by a print mindset (5).

Between 2010 and 2015, several large Canadian dailies made their own strides in becoming digital-first companies. On May 20, 2014, Postmedia unveiled its “reimagined *Ottawa Citizen*.” A media advisory released that morning declared that

“the new print, web, tablet and smartphone versions of the *Ottawa Citizen* that hit the streets of the nation’s capital this morning will redefine the way news is produced, presented, consumed and monetized”(Gelfand "Postmedia Unveils the Reimagined Ottawa Citizen"). This strategy transformed the way the *Citizen* newsroom worked by having separate teams produce platform-specific content. In the press release announcing the new *Ottawa Citizen*, Postmedia said “migration of our digital audience has accelerated the past 18 months to the point that two-thirds of total traffic is now accessed via mobile devices, either smartphone or tablet”(Gelfand "Postmedia Unveils the Reimagined Ottawa Citizen").

Six months after the launch of the *Citizen’s* four-platform strategy the *Toronto Star* announced that it would go through a digital transformation of its own by scrapping the pay wall on its website and developing a free tablet edition. In November 2014 Torstar president and CEO David Holland said, “This is an important strategic step forward for the *Star* and for Torstar as we commit to our future of cross-platform, a future that we recognize will be increasingly mobile” (Nguyen). The *Star’s* tablet project would cost the publication more than \$20-million before the end of 2015.

For this project, Torstar is working with *La Presse*, which has had incredible success with its iPad app, *La Presse+*. In May 2014, *La Presse* announced that it was planning to end its daily print edition and dedicate all of its resources to its digital offerings. The app had 490,000 downloads one year after it launched in April 2013, and was responsible for 30 per cent of the company’s revenues (CBC). *La Presse+* is

free for readers because the strategy is to cultivate a highly engaged mass audience attractive to advertisers (Crevier).

The Transition from Ink to Screen

Watching these historic publications commit to these strategies is encouraging. But it is also interesting to consider why newspapers aren't leaders in digital delivery. Newspapers are actually pioneers in the digital realm, having started their experiments before the widespread proliferation of the Internet began in the early 1990s. The digital newspaper has actually evolved concurrently with both the Internet and the technologies used to access it.

When the Internet browser was introduced for public download in 1993, newspapers had already spent years experimenting with electronic publishing including videotext and facsimile (Boczkowski 19). But the World Wide Web (the Internet which is accessed using browsers like Chrome or Safari) changed everything. In July 1993, the first electronic newsstand appeared online, with eight magazines offered for download. One year later, that number had grown to 80 titles, which were accessed over 40,000 times per day (Mitchell 50). By 1995 there was general consensus within the newspaper industry that facsimile and videotext were technologies of the past. Audiences preferred the web and the web would be the new digital medium of choice (Boczkowski 20).

In the early years of the World Wide Web, most newspapers would simply copy and paste print content online (this content became known as "shovelware"), and there was little or no audience interaction (Boczkowski 55). By 1999, newsroom managers started investing more money and personnel in their online

editions, which in some cases were spun off and turned into separate businesses (Singer, Tharp and Haruta 45). This happened at *La Presse*, where for the first half of the 2000s its website was run by a separate entity called *cyberpresse.ca*. The print and online newsrooms merged in 2008 (Pineau).

By 2003, the popularization of new social networking sites created a more interactive and social web, known today as Web 2.0. Among other things, this new web became “a library, a telephone, a public park, a local bar, a shopping mall, a broadcast medium, a print medium, a medical clinic, a private living room, and a public educational institution” (Biegel 28). The web hadn’t just become a new form of utilitarian space, but it was a social space as well. For newspapers this meant that the Internet had evolved into a space where people could comment, share and make adjustments to online content (Robinson 35). Newsrooms entered the social web by creating online newspapers complete with commenting systems, reader question and answer features, and the incorporation of user-generated content.

Since the mid-2000s there has been further evolution of the Internet and the technology used to access the online space. Higher bandwidth Internet connection means that newspapers are now in the business of also producing video and sound. This has created enormous potential for engaging audiences with multimedia storytelling methods. A challenge of this particular era, however, is that audiences are now equipped with not just computers, but also tablets and mobile devices to access online news. Newspapers must now contend with audiences fragmented over several platforms, not just one (Newman and Levy 5).

Newspapers like the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Toronto Star* and *La Presse* are attempting to master the multi-platform environment with their latest digital strategies. They must also consider that the future of news delivery will look much different than it does today. As they consider innovation for today, it's equally important to anticipate how news delivery will evolve in five to ten years from now.

The Significance of Emerging Technology

Toronto Star editor Michael Cooke acknowledges that there's a good chance his publication's tablet edition may only be good for the next few years (Cooke). *La Presse* is already chomping at the bit to build on *La Presse+*. It also encourages staff to experiment with new technologies as they emerge. This forward-thinking leadership is critical because emerging technology stands to have a significant impact on how newspapers will deliver news in the future. Several think tanks proved this more than 20 years ago in predicting the future of the news industry. In 1992 the Knight-Ridder's Interactive Design Lab was created to study the possible impacts emerging technology would have on newspapers (Rosenberg). The following year MIT's Media Lab would launch its five-year research initiative "News in the Future" (Garneau; Rubin). Their work demonstrates that the technology newspapers could be using ten or twenty years from now, likely already exists today.

In 1994, Knight-Ridder's Roger Fidler's vision for the future newspaper was a "portable flat-panel computer screen" that would display what looked like a newspaper. He said at the time "it contains headlines for featured stories followed by their first few paragraphs and a jump to an inner page. The jump, unlike that in

your usual newspaper, is electronic and immediate... [it] might contain a trove of news, graphics, audio and even video” (Rubin). The Knight-Ridder Lab was developing this primitive tablet technology when it closed in 1995. In essence, Fidler anticipated the arrival of the iPad 16 years before Apple unveiled it.

Jerome S. Rubin of the MIT Media Lab predicted something similar, but he didn’t believe that the newspaper would only exist in tablet form. “We envision many other embodiments, each of which would be tailored to a different set of circumstances or needs. In our view there is no single universal solution for the delivery of news; the new electronic technologies will give us the freedom to deliver news and advertising in many different ways,” he said. In 1994 Rubin was bracing the industry for a future that was comprised of multiple technologies. He goes on to say, “That is why the program is called News in the Future, not the Newspaper in the Future”(Rubin). If newspapers had started planning for their future at the time of these predictions, they would have had a twenty-year head start on where they are today.

Like Fidler and Rubin, the late William Mitchell, former dean of MIT’s School of Architecture, was completely enamoured with the World Wide Web and its potential for the future. In his 1995 book *City of Bits*, he asks his readers to imagine a future in which:

... all your personal electronic devices – headphone audio player, cellular telephone, pager, dictaphone, camcorder, personal digital assistant (PDA), electronic stylus, radio modem, calculator, loran positioning system, smart spectacles, VCR remote, data glove, electronic jogging shoes that count your

steps and flash warning signals at oncoming cars, medical monitoring system, pacemaker (if you are so unfortunate), and anything else that you might habitually wear or occasionally carry – can seamlessly be linked in a wireless bodynet that allows them to function as an integrated system and connects them to the worldwide digital network (Mitchell 29).

In this passage, Mitchell predicts that the Internet will become an extension of our bodies through wireless and mobile devices. Almost all of the technology he predicted in 1995 exists today. Newspapers are currently dabbling with some of the new technologies such as live video and “smart spectacles.”

Each of these predictions emphasizes the need for newspapers to consider today’s emerging technologies such as virtual reality, the iWatch and Google Glass. However, not all up-and-coming technology will find its way into the future mainstream. As newspapers look forward, attempting to decide what the next disruptive technology might be, Pavlik advises that newsrooms be on guard for technologies that “will become little more than a technological gimmick... showcased for its own sake rather than as an enhancement to storytelling” (Pavlik "Journalism in the Face of Developments in Digital Production" 119).

Digital Native Competition has put Newspapers to the Test

As legacy newspaper companies attempt to make their digital transformations, there’s a slate of young digital savvy publications looking to steal their audiences and advertising revenue. Mitchell warned of their arrival in 1995 when he said that the “elimination of the need for access to printing presses and paper supplies has removed traditional barriers to entering the publishing business;

anyone with an inexpensive computer and a network connection can now set up a server and pump out bits” (Mitchell 53). Today legacy newspapers are feeling the pressure from these digital natives, which started small but have grown to the point where they are now legitimate competition.

BuzzFeed, which was founded in 2006 and is known for its viral animal videos, is moving into traditional news coverage and now has a staff of 170 journalists including Pulitzer Prize-winner Mark Schoofs. In October 2013, *New York Times* tech columnist David Pogue moved to *Yahoo!*. First Look Media has Glenn Greenwald, and until just recently it also had *Rolling Stone’s* Matt Taibbi (“State of the News Media 2014: The Growth in Digital Reporting” 2)

These digital natives also have money. *Buzzfeed* earned \$40 million in revenue in 2013. EBay co-founder Pierre Omidyar said he would invest up to \$250 million in First Look Media’s *The Intercept*, which launched early 2014. VOX Media, known for live blogging and visual storytelling, raised \$40 million in 2013 and is valued at roughly \$200 million (“New York Times” 18-20).

These publications aren’t just financially viable competition without the overhead costs of printing presses and legacy infrastructure, but they are fish in water. They are social media gurus, aggregators, visually appealing, and proficient in search engine optimization (SEO).

Canadian newspapers must also contend with companies like Google and Facebook, which have become attractive platforms for advertisers. In November, 2014 Postmedia President and CEO Paul Godfrey said that his company’s acquisition of Sun Media’s English newspapers and digital properties put Postmedia “in a better

position to compete against non-traditional competitors including foreign-based giants” (Gelfand "Postmedia to Acquire Sun Media's English Language Newspapers and Digital Properties"). In an internal letter to staff sent by Godfrey in the spring of 2012 after 25 layoffs at the *Ottawa Citizen*, he expressed his concern that “a lot of the lost revenue in Canada is going to foreign-owned and controlled digital companies who, without any regulation, are accessing Canadian audiences and eroding Canadian media revenues” (Howell).

A World Without Newspapers. What’s at Stake?

If newspapers like the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Toronto Star*, *La Presse* and their counterparts aren’t able to find ways to update their legacy products for today’s audiences, their local markets and the communities they serve will suffer. Without newspapers, cities will lose their archivist, watchdog over people of power, community builder, and a significant source of local information and analysis.

All three newspapers featured in this research project have been covering their respective cities for more than one hundred years. Over time, each has produced a valuable archive that tells a rich story about their communities.

American historian Clarence Brigham once said that,

If all sources of history had to be destroyed save one, that which would be chosen with the greatest certainty of its value to posterity would be a newspaper... the fact that newspapers are put together by people who are not consciously recording for posterity-but proving a bird’s-eye view of life as it happens-makes them even more valuable” (Fischer and Willsley xix).

Rather than producing history with agenda, newspapers attempt to present daily events through a lens of objectivity.

As these newspapers have cemented their role as archivists in the cities they cover, they have done so on the foundation a “free press.” The free press is a fundamental freedom listed in section two of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which allows journalists to write freely without government censorship as long as what they are writing is true (Government of Canada "Constitution Act, 1982"). This allows the press to have a critical eye on the most powerful people in society without reprimand, so long as the reports they produce are accurate. The free and open media that exists in Canada today was born on the pages of its newspapers (Kesterton v).

By operating in an environment in which a free press is a basic right, “newspapers have developed a watchdog mentality as a way to protect and inform the public of wrongdoing” (Martin and Copeland 102). Historically, this role began with watching government, but now includes any member or institution that has the power to take advantage of people (Copeland 102). Beyond just bringing communities together, newspapers “examine the performance of contemporary institutions.” It’s not difficult to think back on important newspaper investigations, like the *Washington Post’s* Watergate investigation (Copeland 102). In recent years, the *Toronto Star* has broken major stories holding power to account, including the investigations into the late Mayor Rob Ford’s drug use.

Newspapers also have the power to build a sense of community (Martin and Copeland 139). When researching his book *Wired City*, Dan Kennedy discovered that

community newspapers were “an essential force in building strong cities, towns, and neighbourhoods, and in empowering people to take charge of their lives and their communities” (Kennedy 6). Newspapers that publish local news and information build community by creating a shared sense of belonging. Creating this “sense of community” fosters civic engagement, provides a sense of place, and helps people learn how to care about their community in the context of the world around them (Kennedy 150).

By serving all of these important roles, newspapers contribute to a healthy democracy filled with informed citizens. When newspapers were experiencing some of their darkest days in 2009, Nichols and McChesney, authors of the book *The Death and Life of Great American Newspapers*, said it was a crisis that had the potential to “leave a dramatically diminished version of democracy in its wake” (Nichols and McChesney).

It might not be possible to preserve the paper product, but preserving the newspaper in its digital form may just save what newspapers have worked so long to build. Reuters fellow Kirsi Hakaniemi even thinks it can be done better with digital technology, which has actually created more avenues for creating better journalism (Hakaniemi 6).

Value of Study

This thesis examines the challenges legacy newspapers face as they reinvent themselves as digital media companies. The literature suggests that when attempting to innovate in a legacy organization, especially if the innovation is disruptive, the company will encounter a number of predictable forces that will

stand between it and change. Many of these blocks are associated with processes, cultures and physical assets that have become so embedded over time that they inhibit new ways of doing things. By identifying these blocks, specific strategies can be developed to ease the friction that so often comes with organizational change.

This thesis applies this concept to three Canadian newspaper companies that have recently implemented significant digital innovation projects. Ethnographic research conducted at the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Toronto Star* and *La Presse*, confirmed that a number of legacy blocks stood between each newsroom and successful change. These case studies also provide insight into how each publication dealt with each of these blocks as they implemented some of the greatest change they had experienced in a century.

Many of the blocks these newsrooms encountered are similar. A common friction point is that old print-centric culture seems to linger, despite each publication having implemented strategies that diminished the importance of the print edition. Print culture is embedded in journalists' attitudes about what makes a good story and results in a reticence to adopt new ways of producing journalism.

There is a lot at stake for communities that face the potential loss of their local newspaper. These publications have become fixtures in communities as archivists, watchdogs over people with power, and as trusted sources for information and analysis. Understanding innovation processes and what impedes and enables them isn't the magic bullet solution for saving the newspaper industry, but it is a tool that will help news organizations evolve as they attempt to lay the groundwork for a new set of digital daily rituals.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The purpose of this research project is to further understand what factors block and enable innovation at legacy media organizations, with a focus on Canadian newspapers. Data was collected from three newspapers, the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Toronto Star* and *La Presse*. These titles were ideal cases to study because each had recently implemented large-scale digital transformation projects. The research period fell just as the *Toronto Star* was in the midst of rolling out its tablet edition, while the *Ottawa Citizen* and *La Presse* had just come out the other side of projects that had reinvented their newsrooms for the digital age. Together these three news organizations offered a rich sample for understanding how innovation is managed in Canadian legacy newsrooms.

The study began with a literature review including history texts along with articles describing previous digital transformation projects in legacy newsrooms as well as a review of innovation theory. Fieldwork began immediately upon ethics clearance in May 2015 and ended the following February. Ethnography was the chosen method for data collection, which consisted of 30 onsite interviews (Appendix A) and time spent observing each of the newsrooms. While qualitative research does have its limitations, the material collected in this research project will provide some insight into an important evolutionary period in the history of Canadian print media and inform future innovation projects in legacy news organizations.

Before setting out on fieldwork, this project began with a review of texts describing the history of Canadian newspapers. This confirmed that newspapers play a significant role in Canada's past and continue to do so as they attempt to navigate the complexities of evolving for the digital age.

The literature review continued by examining literature that applied innovation theory to newspaper newsrooms attempting to make the shift to digital delivery and content. The review includes a number of peer-reviewed studies that have investigated innovation management and transformation in newsrooms around the world. Book chapters, journal articles and reports from academic think tanks like Harvard's Nieman Lab, the Harvard Business Review and the Columbia Journalism Review were also included.

The primary research in this project is presented as three case studies (one for each of the newspapers). Case studies allow the researcher to get an up-close understanding of the selected "cases," a closeness that provides "an invaluable and deep understanding... hopefully resulting in new learning about real-world behaviour and its meaning" (Yin 4). To understand the impact of each digital innovation project and specifically what variables acted as blocks and enablers, it was necessary to spend time in each of the newsrooms to observe processes and speak to both the change makers and the people affected by the change. Data was collected for the case studies through ethnographic study at each publication.

Seeing as ethnography is the primary tool for most journalists, it seemed appropriate to apply the same lens to this investigation on new journalism practices. The Oxford Dictionary of Journalism defines ethnography as "methods of studying

journalism that involves newsroom observation and engaging journalists in workplace discussions as a way of gathering qualitative evidence.” (“Ethnographic Research”). When looking for a deep understanding of a particular group, renowned sociologist the late Erving Goffman explains that ethnography allows the researcher to “physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation, or whatever. So that you are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them” (Goffman). As well, being close allows the researcher to take “into account the flaws, restrictions and opportunities that encompass the lives of the participants” (Serrant-Green).

The ethnographies presented in each case study are the product of onsite interviews and observation. While ethnographic interviews tend to be more “informal, conversational, and spontaneous,” the interviews in this study were still guided by a set of core questions to keep conversations on track (Lindlof 1995 in Merrigan, Huston and Johnston 207). The following set of questions were established as a way of collecting consistent data from the interview participants:

Q1 Can you please describe your role in the newsroom?

Q2 How did your newsroom implement its latest digital strategy?

Q3 What challenges or blocks did your newsroom face when implementing change? (Prompt: culture, organizational structure/process and technology).

Q4 Can you think of anything unique or special your newsroom did to help enable change?

Q5 How is your newsroom preparing for the future of news delivery?

The purpose of this series of questions is to understand how different individuals in the newsroom perceived the various innovation. Question three has the participant think about specific blocks to innovation, and question four attempts to determine if any of the newsrooms were able to come up with new or ingenious ways of facilitating innovation. The final question gets at whether they have acknowledged the constant change that comes with digital news delivery, or whether they are resting on the laurels from their most recent digital transformation projects. Most interviews took place in a private space away from the newsroom where participants could share openly without being overheard by their colleagues or management. Each conversation was recorded on an external audio recorder. Audio files were immediately uploaded onto an encrypted computer and then deleted from the recorder.

Between three and five days was spent in each newsroom. During that time, when not interviewing participants, time was spent observing newsroom practices and routines. Observation was not guided and the researcher was free to wander through each space as she pleased. To ensure a complete understanding how the newsrooms worked, observation times varied. At the *Ottawa Citizen*, one night shift editor was observed, which provided insight into how the print edition was produced (including a tour of the press room). Data was recorded in the form of handwritten notes, which also described the physical newsroom space, the mood and atmosphere, along with information on day-to-day activities.

Field research began with the 2015 Newspapers Canada Conference in Toronto at the end of May. At this conference management from dozens of newspapers across the country shared their digital strategies and how they were tackling the digital environment. Postmedia CEO Paul Godfrey was the keynote speaker and spoke at length about his professional history, his chosen digital strategy for Postmedia and his justifications for purchasing Sun's English print and digital properties earlier that spring. The talk provided useful context for the first case study placement at the *Ottawa Citizen*.

The *Ottawa Citizen* case study period consisted of five days beginning Monday May 22, 2015. This was exactly one year after the launch of the "reimagined" *Ottawa Citizen*, a four-platform publication that delivered custom content for print, web, mobile and tablet. Nine interviews were conducted in total, including conversations with many of the key players who implemented the digital strategy. The observation period ended the following Monday at town hall meeting where staff were given updates on what the Sun acquisition would mean for the paper. At the time there were no clues that the following fall the *Ottawa Sun* would move into the *Citizen's* newsroom, that the following January the two newspapers would merge, or that in February they would lose nearly 15 of their most senior and accomplished staff to buyouts and layoffs. While this is an important part of the *Ottawa Citizen's* story and will certainly have an impact on innovation at the paper, the focus of the study is the observation period in May 2015 and the several years leading up to it in which the newspaper developed and implemented its current digital strategy.

Two weeks later, observation and interviews continued 450 kilometres west of the *Citizen* at a newspaper that was in the midst of transition. The *Toronto Star* had spent the spring expanding its newsroom with new journalists and designers as it prepared to launch its tablet edition, *Star Touch*. It would be created using software designed and successfully implemented by *La Presse* in Montreal two years earlier. In addition to nine onsite interviews, this case study involved four days observing how this newsroom was transitioning from print-first to tablet-first production. Time was spent observing story meetings, tablet production, and meetings in which trial editions of *Star Touch* were critiqued.

The final case study is a look inside *La Presse's* operation in Montreal. Research was conducted over a three-day period beginning February 22, 2016. Data collection at this publication consisted mainly of interviews, but some passive observation did take place by simply being present in the newsroom.

All interviews were transcribed after the completion of each case study period. The transcripts from these interviews were then coded to pull out a set of specific themes, which corresponded to the questions asked of each participant. The first theme, was why each of the papers chose its respective strategy and how it moved forward with implementation. The second theme tried to understand what blocks inhibited the change or continues to inhibit innovation within the newsroom and at the newspaper company. The third theme was to get a sense of what each publication did to help enable the change. The fourth and final theme was whether any of the newspapers had considered what comes next in terms of digital strategy.

By observing each of the paper's new digital methods in practice, it was possible to see just how well each was working rather than just accepting what was being said in interviews. It was also an opportunity to get a sense of newsroom culture, to see the physical environment and to observe processes in action. In-person interviews were useful not just for collecting facts, but also to sense emotion around the changes. Body language and facial expressions were useful indicators. As well, when a participant hesitated to share certain pieces of information, such as negative feedback about how the organization or newsroom was being run, sometimes tone of voice said more than his or her actual words.

It helped during these interviews that the researcher was able to relate and empathize to much of what was being said, having spent time in the participant's newsroom but also having been through similar newsroom transitions herself. It was much like what Goffman described when he said about the practice of observation that "you are in a position to note their gestural, visual, bodily response to what's going on around them and you're empathetic enough – because you've been taking the same crap they've been taking – to sense what it is that they're responding to" (Goffman).

Conducting case study research in person compensated for a possible drawback of the in-person interview as a form of data collection. In-person interviews don't always elicit as much openness as, say, an anonymous survey, because participants may refrain from sharing important details out of fear. For example, in this study newsroom staff were asked questions that might have resulted in negative responses directed at management ("what blocks stood

between you and successful innovation?") Even though interview participants were briefed at the beginning of each conversation about his or her right to have certain sections or the entire interview cited as "anonymous," several participants were hesitant about what they would share.

Participants at the *Toronto Star* appeared to be the most reticent, simply because the paper's tablet product was still in development and hadn't yet been released to the public. New hires were asked not to talk about the product outside of the newsroom because it was still in development. As well, this researcher had to sign a non-disclosure agreement before beginning the case study period, limiting her from publishing information about the tablet edition before it was officially released to the public. That said, while several participants expressed some hesitation, they were in the minority.

In the end, interviews and observation were useful tools for collecting information on these news organizations and provided valuable insights into what blocks and enables innovation at Canadian news organizations. Conducting case study research onsite generated richer content for the study and a bird's-eye-view of these important transformational projects, which could potentially help inform future legacy media companies looking to implement similar innovation strategies.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Anyone working in a Canadian newsroom during the first decade of the twenty-first century will likely have experienced similar frustrations as they watched the wheel of technological innovation spin at a dramatic pace outside the newsroom walls, while they toiled away inside, marred in old processes and outdated technology. For many, this writer included, it was impossible to understand how our organization was so proficient at talking about innovation, but incapable of implementing serious change - or at the very least giving the new digital players a legitimate run for their money.

It is no secret that most legacy media, newspapers especially, haven't been "leaders in the cyberspace race" (Adams 64). More than twenty years after the launch of the web browser, newspaper companies haven't been able to figure out how to make adequate profit from their websites (65). While journalists stew at their desks or at the water cooler in frustration, what many don't see are what media researcher Lucy Kung suggests as "blocks" or barriers that stand between their newsroom and innovation.

Navigating these barriers isn't easy, especially for large and established businesses. Many of these blocks are specific to legacy media and provide a good explanation as to why, despite being pioneers in digital delivery, newspapers were unable to launch themselves out of the gate and become dominant players in the digital realm. What follows is a summary of some common blocks that stand between legacy news organizations and successful innovation. These blocks may seem obvious at first, but what isn't obvious is how effective each is at slowing down

or preventing innovation in a company. They are figurative walls that stand between old and new. To create an environment in which innovation is a naturally occurring process it is necessary to understand what blocks exist and for legacy news organizations to develop strategies to overcome them.

Media researcher Lucy Kung addresses the concept of “innovation blocks” during a lecture called “Leading Legacy Media through Technology Transitions” given to the Institute of International and European Affairs in Dublin in June, 2012. In the lecture she addresses the questions “Why didn't legacy media seize the digital opportunity more resolutely? Why aren't their positions in the new media world as strong as they were?” She says that legacy media aren't alone in their fight to stay relevant. Sony, for example, created the Walkman. But it hasn't been able to develop a digital product to compete with the iPod, or now, iPhone. The same goes for Nokia. At one point its mobile phones were very popular. Now, she says, nobody wants a Nokia phone. Finally, she says that Microsoft mastered the desktop publishing business with its Office Suite, but that the product has yet to master the online sphere. Instead, Google has become the leader in online publishing. Meanwhile, Google is struggling in its attempts at social media. She says that you can see a pattern. There is a leader in one technological age, but it's difficult for it to carry over and be as successful in the next technological era (Ikea).

Disruptive and Sustaining Innovations

In order to become competitive in the digital environment, many newspapers have implemented digital strategies that attempt to disrupt their legacy paper

product with new digital platforms targeted at modern audiences (Christensen, Skok and Allworth).

The theory of disruptive innovation was first widely introduced by Harvard Business professor Clayton Christensen in his 1997 book *The Innovator's Dilemma*. In this book Christensen explores why companies, which had experienced great success in the past and seemed positioned for future success, ultimately failed (Christensen 3).

Christensen divides innovation into two categories: sustaining and disruptive. Sustaining innovations are incremental improvements to existing products. He explains that these changes to the technologies of an organization can be subtle or dramatic, but “what all sustaining technologies have in common is that they improve the performance of established products, along the dimensions of performance that mainstream customers in major markets have historically valued” (Ellis). Sustaining innovations at a newspaper company might include changing the size of the paper to make it easier to hold, introducing new sections, or changing the colour scheme on a website to make it more attractive (Ellis).

Unlike sustaining innovations, disruptive innovation is counterintuitive. Instead of improving existing products and catering to higher-end customers, disruptive innovation targets new or lower-end customers with a lower-end product. The product is then improved over time with sustaining innovations that cater to customer needs. The idea is to secure underserved, or lower-end markets before anyone else has the chance to do so. There is high risk associated with disruption because it involves developing a completely new product then launching

it into untested markets (C. M. Christensen; C. M. Christensen, Michael E. Raynor, Rory McDonald).

La Presse disrupted its paper product with its tablet app *La Presse+*. *La Presse* knew that it was in the business of producing news, it just needed to find a new way of doing so that would appeal to modern readers. *La Presse+* launched in April 2013. Three years later *La Presse* ceased publication of its weekday print edition.

Postmedia and *Toronto Star* have also implemented potentially disruptive technologies into their set of offerings, but have done so cautiously. Neither publication has expressed openly that it is looking to replace its legacy product.

As these newspapers implement their disruptive innovation strategies, they must do so knowing that operating a digital media business today means having to constantly innovate.

An Environment of Perpetual Change

Dealing with “unceasing” technological change is simply just the nature of business today, and the media business is no exception (Ilea). The changes media companies are experiencing are occurring at an increasingly rapid pace (Rogers 2003 in Adams 64). There is now such a limitless range of options for delivering news over multiple devices that, “management of continuous change becomes a challenge for strategy development” (Jarventie-Thesleff 123). Even the the *New York Times* has made it a priority to “become a more nimble, digitally focused newsroom that can thrive in a landscape of constant change” (“New York Times” 4). Managing this change is particularly challenging for legacy organizations, like

newspapers, which have experienced sustained success by essentially doing things the same way for long periods of time.

Acknowledging this environment of perpetual technological change is important because it means the solution to surviving in the digital environment isn't a matter of coming up with a single strategy or approach for surviving the digital age. Instead, it emphasizes a new kind of survival instinct based on the need to establish a newsroom culture that fosters regular innovation and is constantly looking forward to the next change.

A large part of managing an environment that fosters and, ideally, exploits this perpetual change, is trying to get to the bottom of what it means for incumbent organizations that have pre-existing legacy "systems, structures and strategies" (Kung, Picard and Towse 31). Unlike new media companies that were born into the digital environment, legacy organizations need to find a way to adapt to a multi-platform world that has no resemblance at all to the century newspapers spent... just being newspapers.

So for companies that haven't been proficient at managing the first phase of digital change in their organizations, how exactly do they expect to survive in a world of constant change? Christensen says that when a new innovation emerges, managers will face "a number of highly predictable forces." He says that "understanding and managing these forces can make innovation more predictable" (Dyer 9). Kung says that it has much to do with the companies themselves. Embedded in these companies are "legacy phenomena" that block innovation. These

phenomena include old mindsets, physical assets and processes that inhibited change (Ilea).

Potential Block #1: Pathology of Sustained Success

The first set of blocks resides in the mind of newspaper staff and leaders. This is what Lucy Kung refers to as cognitive blocks. In his paper “Inhibitors of disruptive innovation capability” Marnix Assink refers to this as the “mindset barrier”(Assink) . These blocks are latent ideas or attitudes that develop over time and dictate ways of thinking about how things are done. There are two significant cognitive blocks that stand between newspapers and innovation. First is an over-confidence in the original newspaper product. The second is the challenge of breaking free from old ways of thinking about producing a “newspaper,” which means breaking free from “print-centric” thinking.

In most cases, a healthy dose of confidence goes a long way. And if there’s one thing newspapers had by the end of the 20th century it was confidence in their centuries-old medium. Not only had newspapers endured sustained success over a long period of time, but they did so even after new technologies entered the news delivery market. Radio and television did have an effect on the overall success and audience base of newspapers, but not enough to threaten the entire industry. But the Internet presented challenges unlike what came with radio and television. Newspapers experienced mass revenue losses when classified ads found a new home on free websites sites like Craigslist. Print advertisers also jumped ship when less expensive digital options with greater audience reach and more accurate ways of gauging audience response presented themselves. The Internet also opened the

playing field for new competition from small media start-ups like *BuzzFeed* and *Huffington Post*. While confidence is often a winning trait, confidence in newspaper newsrooms at the beginning of the digital revolution blinded them to these potential threats posed by the Internet. As a result newspapers have become locked into a “pathology of sustained success” (Tushman and Smith 2002; 387 in Kung, Picard and Towse). After creating the same product or different versions of the same product for decades while continuing to turn massive profit, there was no urgency to make changes. In addition to this, there is a level of comfort that comes with doing what you’ve always done for such a long period of time (Kung, Picard and Towse 35). This results in a confident maturity that causes inertia (Ellis) and no sense of urgency to look to the future.

Kung et al say that that years of profit lured newspapers into a false sense of security:

The newspaper industry has become accustomed to decades of reliable generation of high levels of cash years of profit have led to unwieldy and bureaucratic structures, high cost bases, slow decision making, complex reporting lines and moribund corporate cultures. Against the backdrop of aging populations, low growth and significantly the Internet, which is attracting high levels of classified advertising, they look set to be replaced eventually by a new news vehicles based around the Internet.” (Kung, Picard and Towse 35)

So, not only did they not see the new competition coming, but this complacency bred by their successes created an environment where inertia was simply just part of the culture.

Another consequence of clinging to past successes is that companies that are too confident in their dominant design open themselves to the being disrupted by external innovations (Christensen 2003 in Assink 220). Scott Anthony and Clark Gilbert, who lead the Newspaper Next Project in 2006, say that “market leaders tend to dismiss early disruptive developments because they just don’t affect their core business” (Antony and Gilbert). Then “when a technology transition occurs and a new dominant design emerges, the incumbent is trapped by its track record of successes in existing markets.” (Levitt and March 1988 in Kung, Picard and Towse 35). Rather than placing so much value in corporate memory, companies would be equally served with a little bit of “corporate dementia” (Institute 9).

Potential Block #2: Fear

There is comfort in doing things the way they’ve always done, which means that trying something new can induce fear in some of the best-managed companies. Part of the problem is that new innovations, particularly of the radical or disruptive variety, don’t offer a guaranteed return on investment (Assink 221). Without a guaranteed ROI, many leaders will instinctually shy away from a project. As a result, companies that are risk averse will stick with sustaining innovations, or perhaps no innovation at all, when radical innovations are needed (Kung, Picard and Towse 35). If a project that is considered risky does get approval to move forward, there’s a good chance it will encounter a risk-averse environment within the organization,

both at management and ground level (Assink 224). One risk is that current staff won't fully accept the changes, and the fear mindset will prevent change from occurring in processes that are "deeply embedded" in the organization (Anthony and Gilbert 43).

This fear also produces within established organizations an unwillingness to "cannibalize their own investments and assets until it's too late" (Assink 224). It's difficult to accept that a product on which a company is built will eventually be phased out. One example of a legacy company waiting too long to cannibalize old technologies is Kodak, which dragged its heels in moving away from chemical film (224). A media company that has successfully cannibalized its old product, is the Montreal media company *La Presse*, which has recently stopped publication of its weekday newspaper and replaced it with a tablet edition.

A valuable lesson learned from the past decade of newspaper history is that "mastery of one stage of development is really no guarantee for mastering the next one." (Braganza, Awazu and Desouza 49) Instead, Kung says, the reverse normally applies, which could mean that the best time to innovate is "while the old business model is still functioning and the old revenues are still flowing" (Assink 223). But this hasn't typically been what newspapers have done. There is a natural reticence to invest in new technologies that may not go anywhere. There has been an even greater reticence to acknowledge that the print model is slowly dying and that the industry might have to change dramatically to survive.

Fear may impede change from occurring at the management level, but it also risks blocking change on the newsroom floor. Journalists in legacy newsrooms have

become accustomed to working in an environment that is rooted in daily routines and processes that haven't changed much over the years. Large-scale technological innovation projects throw this environment into flux. As a result journalists may fear that they don't have the skills to master the new technology or that it might replace them. They may also fear that that younger staff may excel while they falter and look foolish (Kelleghan 64). Innovation projects are more likely to succeed when they are fuelled by positive enthusiasm rather than an environment filled with "unhealthy stress" (64).

Potential Block #3: Print Centric Thinking

It's safe to assume that by now, as the North American newspaper industry continues to collapse, that a "pathology of sustained success" isn't the most significant block impeding innovation. But there are other cognitive blocks that continue to endure in the psyche of newsroom staff and managers, and none quite as persistent as the attachment to the newspaper's printed pages.

One of the greatest barriers to progress for newspapers is what the literature has referred to as a "newspaper mindset" or "print-centric thinking" ("New York Times" 4), which exists in all levels of the newsroom. In 2006, Anthony and Gilbert said that newspapers were spending "a disproportionate share of time and attention on their print product," (Anthony and Gilbert 43). The pull of the paper was still an issue in 2014, as stated multiple times in the *New York Times Innovation Report*.

In her Reuters report from 2014 Kirsi Hakaniemi sets out to understand "how a regional newspaper company in particular can make the digital transition and reinvent itself" (Hakaniemi 4). She states in her introduction that "the main

constraint for change in a legacy newspaper company is that the whole organization has been built up for the purpose of producing and delivering tomorrow's newspaper" (4-5). The American Press Institute made a similar observation in its 2006 "Newspapers Next" report: "For newspaper companies, the very newspaper itself - its form, function, history, role in society and demanding production processes - creates blinders that make it hard to comprehend the fundamental changes happening around them" (American Press Institute).

Residual or lingering print-centric habits were noted as a key challenge for the *New York Times* in its *Innovation Report*. Paul Berry, who was quoted in the report, says, "At The *New York Times*, far too often for writers and editors the story is done when you hit publish... At Huffington Post, the article begins its life when you hit publish" ("*New York Times*" 4). Just a few pages later, the report emphasizes that "the habits and traditions built over a century and a half of putting out the paper are a powerful, conservative force as we transition to digital – none more so than the gravitational pull of Page One" (7).

Just as the newspaper needs to move away from its connection to the front page of the newspaper, it also needs to stop placing an emphasis on the homepage (24). Considering that technology is always evolving, it is important to consider that "legacy mindsets" can now also apply to digital products, like websites.

While old mindsets around the legacy product do hold newspapers back, they also have the potential to carry with them great value. This value lies in the "core competencies" that many newspaper companies have cultivated for over a hundred years.

The *New York Times* decided that the core of what the paper did best was the key to its future success, not coming up with new stand-alone products. Its approach to innovation was to “leverage the *Times*’ journalism and talents in even smarter and more effective ways” (8). For example, its *Innovation Report* emphasizes the importance of “Evergreen Content,” which is repurposed content, like archived material from the cooking section (28). This means that their cooking content, past and present, has great value for the paper.

While core competencies are a legacy media company’s greatest asset, there is a danger that “use of old competencies inhibits efforts to change capabilities” (Leventhal and March, 1993 in Assink 222). When this happens core competencies become “core rigidities,” prohibiting companies from efficiently making change (222).

Potential Block #4: Process

Moving outside of the mind and into the functioning of the newsroom, the next set of innovation inhibitors are procedural blocks. The process of producing a newspaper is a complex, yet finely tuned and highly efficient operation. Traditionally the process saw a story travel from reporter to copy editor, then to layout, and eventually to the presses and onto the pages of that day’s edition. As technologies have evolved over the years, so have the processes. But, until recently the processes were always working toward the same end paper product, with digital products as an almost afterthought. The introduction of the World Wide Web into the newspaper process brought a whole new set of issues. It soon became apparent that “processes are not nearly as flexible or adaptable as resources are, and

priorities are even less so” (Hakaniemi 6). Studies of newsroom innovation from the mid-2000s confirm the lack of urgency in updating newsroom processes.

In their 2002 study Saksena and Hollifield surveyed 23 small to medium-sized daily newspapers in the United States. Their findings showed that “innovation-management process used by newspapers as they adopted the Internet was relatively haphazard, involving low levels of research, resource commitment, involvement by the editorial department, or use of cross-functional teams.” Not surprisingly they also discovered that newspapers weren’t using the Internet to its full potential (Saksena and Hollifield 76). They discovered that 58 per cent of papers launched their websites because they saw the Internet had the potential to be a lasting disruptive technology. But 42 per cent of respondents believed the Internet would remain a “secondary medium”(79).

In 2008, Adams continued this research and conducted a survey of 500 American weekly newspapers. She found that there was still something of a “haphazard” approach to the web and that few of the newspapers she surveyed conducted target-market research before launching online products. This study also revealed that half of the weekly newspapers surveyed didn’t have a business plan or defined set of goals for their online work. She did discover, though, that for newspapers that did set goals, more than a half managed to achieve them (Adams 71).

The reason for the lack of commitment to developing specific processes for digital products was that they still hadn’t developed a strong ROI. By creating

processes that invest more staff resources in digital, newsrooms run the risk of compromising the print product and its guaranteed revenues.

Potential Block# 5: Technology

In addition to intangible baggage like mindsets and processes, technological assets can also impede innovation. Understanding how to phase out old technology poses a challenge, but so does the introduction of new technology. There is often a reticence to invest in new technology because there is no guarantee that a new technology will or won't stick.

Saksena and Hollifield's study concluded that newspapers were slow to adapt for a number of reasons, but part of it was the challenge of deciding whether online delivery was a technology worth the investment. For example, the industry experimented with Videotext in the 1980s, which was eventually phased out by the Internet (Boczkowski 19). The risk of updating technology, of course, is making a large investment in new technology that could possibly be phased out quickly (Hollifield and Saksena 76). Another substantial risk for media companies looking to invest in new technologies is that the investment won't pay off. While newspapers continue to shift their focus to digital products, in many cases, these products (i.e. mobile news apps) haven't proven themselves to be very lucrative.

Not only do legacy companies run the risk of losing a significant amount of money in technology investment, there are the additional costs associated with creating new processes to work around the new technology. Research has shown that early adopters of new technologies experience less benefit, which might explain reluctance to innovate (Pavlik 184).

Overcoming the Blocks

Understanding that these blocks exist in the first place is the first step in successfully implementing a single or multiple innovations within an organization. The next step is finding ways to surmount them, ultimately creating a culture that works to move innovation forward.

In one of the most recent reports about innovation at newspapers, the American Press Institute endorses the significance of culture with this simple line: “innovation is a product of culture” (Sonderman and Rosenstiel). In its May 2015 report *How to Create a Culture and Structure for Innovation* it goes on to say that “culture is the ultimate source of most of the defensive mechanisms that block organizational change and prevent learning from occurring” (Silverman). Many of the blocks outlined above are engrained in the corporate culture of newspaper organizations. However, most research about saving newspapers until recently has been focused on strategy and coming up with structural business solutions. Strategy is important, but unless people are managed properly and the proper culture is nurtured within an organization, innovation doesn't stand a chance (Hollifield and Saksena 75).

Strong Leadership

Adams discovered in her study “Innovation Management and U.S. Weekly Newspaper Web Sites,” newspapers are capable of achieving goals, if the goals set out for them are clear. Leaders are responsible for setting out specific goals for their teams as well as “energizing the process.” If leaders do this, Sonderman and

Rosenstiel promise that “innovation is far more likely to flourish”(Sonderman and Rosenstiel).

To foster iterative innovation, staff need to know from the organization’s leaders that it’s safe to experiment and try new things. Part of this involves taking stock in how different behaviour among employees is treated. When it comes to rewarding staff, it’s not just large rewards that are noticed by staff, “but also how attention and simple praise are distributed” (Schein, 2010 in Brown and Groves).

Building Culture at Ground Level

While leadership is important, in many cases, culture flows from the ground up (Sonderman 4). A promising finding in Adams’ 2008 study is that newspaper staff are open to change. In the study conducted by Adams in 2008 (surveying 500 weekly newspapers) three-quarters of the 500 newspapers surveyed reported that they did not encounter resistance from staff about producing the online newspaper (Adams 71).

To help foster innovation among newspaper staff, it’s important to consider physical layout of the newsroom and where different teams work in respect to one and other. When people who specialize in similar areas work together, this often creates an environment that is creative, supportive and motivating (Sonderman 7). When these groups start to mesh, “tribes” form and result in common languages, histories and cultures (Sonderman 7). Empowered tribes can help foster innovation.

This concept of mixing up people from different “tribes” is an important concept in lean or agile business management. In their paper “The Lean Newsroom: A Manifesto for Risk” Brown and Groves explain the benefits of creating cross-

disciplinary teams “separated from typical organizational routines and immediate revenue pressures” (Brown and Groves). Teams that are created outside of the traditional structures of the newsroom with the intended purpose of innovating are more likely to experiment and take risks (Brown and Groves). Examples of groups like this in the newspaper industry are the *New York Times*’ Research and Development Group and Boston Globe Lab (Brown and Groves).

Sonderman and Rosenstiel recommend that an organization establish internal processes that facilitate innovation. This might include putting groups of staff (i.e. designers) close to each other to facilitate collaboration; creating a physical space in which collaboration is easy and “suggests transformation rather than decline” (i.e. bright coloured walls); incorporating virtual sharing spaces (i.e. Slack); creating multidisciplinary teams using people from different tribes; having daily stand-up meetings; and encouraging experimentation through things like “hack days” (Sonderman 13).

Moving Past Cognitive Blocks

Successful legacy organizations are built on narratives and shared assumptions on how they need to function in order to achieve success (Brown and Groves). Because this is built into the culture of the organization, it’s hard to break. But Brown and Grove suggest that moments of crisis, as in the potential demise of the organization, are pretty effective in breaking this mindset (Kets de Vries, 2001; Schein 2010 in Brown and Groves). They suggest managers can use “disconfirming data,” which induce anxiety, sparingly to “motivate change” (Schein 2010 in Brown and Groves).

Conclusion

The three newspapers studied in this research project were faced with no choice but to innovate their current offerings or potentially succumb to ever-declining circulation numbers and advertising revenues. Each publication chose to finally look beyond a future that would definitely include its historic print publications, to one that might be digital only.

There are a number of variables that can stand between a company and successful innovation. This literature review is a sampling of what those variables might be. It is through this lens that the following three case studies were produced.

Chapter Four: *Ottawa Citizen* Re-Imagined

Preamble

It's about 7 p.m. on a warm summer evening in late May, 2015. Streaks of bright pink and purple fill the sky over the *Ottawa Citizen's* office building. The building is a relatively flat span of brown brick located about 10 kilometres from Parliament Hill. It sits on the edge of the Queensway, Ottawa's main multi-lane traffic corridor, and in the shadow a giant blue and yellow Ikea building that sets the sky aglow with its glaring LED sign.

From inside the evening sky is hard to see from where the print team works. Of all the teams in this newsroom they sit furthest away from the window but closest to the printing presses. It's at this time of day, the tail end of rush hour with Ottawa residents obviously whizzing by outside, when the presses fire up to print the next day's edition.

Bruce Craig runs this operation with the ease of someone who has been doing it for nearly half a century - which he almost has. His head of hair is a youthful white, complimented by a full moustache of the same colour, which makes it hard to believe he's been working these presses for more than 41 years. Today he's sporting a pair of blue jeans and a white shirt, with a package of cigarette peeking out his chest pocket. It was almost as though he was tempting fate with all that white by offering a tour of his pressroom, which he warns is steeped in ink from floor to ceiling.

"It's everywhere," he says.

Walking into the pressroom, the air is thick with the smell of ink. It's the same smell a small photocopier gives off, but this printing press sounds and feels like standing next to a giant locomotive. As rolls of paper about the size of a large tractor tire unravel into the machine, a gentle breeze wafts through the room, along with a slight vibration.

Once the paper has travelled through the presses, pages are cut, folded, and then checked by a handful of young men and women wearing blue jump suits and baseball caps, as well as large ear protectors to drown out the thunderous sound of the machines that surround them. They check the pages for quality and adjust the ink flow using a keypad at the end of each unit.

"Soon it's going to get much more busy in here," says Craig.

He's referring to Postmedia's acquisition of the English-language Sun properties in the spring of April, 2015. For the crackerjack price of \$315-million, Postmedia picked up 175 new newspapers and digital titles. The company now owns the two major daily newspapers in Ottawa, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver.

Because of the Sun acquisition, Craig will also be printing local papers from Brockville, Cornwall, Pembroke as well as the *Ottawa Sun*. Each of the non-Ottawa papers has a daily circulation between 12,000 and 33,000. Asked if this might create more jobs, he says "it'll be a few, but surprisingly not as many people as you might think."

From the pressroom, the papers are carried into a giant warehouse, known in the industry as the mailroom, on a long stretch of yellow vertebrae that zigzag across the ceiling. They click along like a roller coaster finding its way up the track.

This is their last stop before they are finally released into the world for the next day's ritual.

A daily average of 104,379 copies of the *Citizen* were printed here in 2014. That's 20,000 copies less than five years prior (Newspapers Canada 2009 *Circulation*; Newspapers Canada 2014 *Circulation*).

"The web gets all of the glory," says Alan Kors, the night print editor. "But it's way more interesting in here."

Introduction

It's been exactly one year, almost to the day, since the *Ottawa Citizen's* print product took a back seat to its digital properties. On May 20, 2014 the *Citizen* launched as a publication "re-imagined for today." It was a significant move for the paper, which hadn't had a redesign since the late nineties. It was also the first time in its 171-year history that the print product would no longer be top priority. Instead, the *Ottawa Citizen's* focus would be split over four platforms: mobile, tablet, web and print.

By the time the *Citizen* went live with its re-imagined publication, the web browser had been around for 24 years, the iPhone for seven and the iPad for four. In a world with so many options for accessing news, and with so many people now using digital platforms Postmedia (the *Citizen's* parent company) made the strategic decision to start an aggressive search for audiences on multiple platforms. While it had been offering content through mobile and tablets before, the content was curated directly from the web. This new vision would have the newsroom creating four distinct products. This would require them to re-imagine what had been

produced pretty much the same way for more than one hundred years. The *Ottawa Citizen* would be the prototype, then Postmedia would roll out the same approach to its other major metropolitan newspapers across the country. By April 2016, eight of its newspapers will have been “reimagined.”

A year after the launch of its four-platform strategy, it was already clear which parts of the *Citizen's* innovation strategy were succeeding and which were struggling to gain traction. The *Citizen* faced several impediments between it and successful innovation. Some were legacy-related but one of the most significant had nothing to do with legacy culture, processes or technology. It was Postmedia itself.

Since this research project began in the spring of 2015, the *Citizen* and its sister papers have suffered enormously as a result of the financial pressures on its parent company. Postmedia is laden with such extreme debt that finding efficiencies and maximizing scale haven't just trumped the need to produce important journalism, it has also become an impediment to innovation practices within its newsrooms. As well, now that it owns almost half of the daily newspapers in the country, it is also limiting the overall extent of innovation taking place in newspaper newsrooms in Canada.

A Brief History of the Citizen

To understand just how deep the *Citizen's* ink runs in Ottawa, look no further than a history book. Its presses have been rolling since the city streets were dirt and Parliament Hill was just an empty swath of land overlooking a great river. The *Citizen* predates both Ottawa's incorporation as a city (1855) and Confederation (1867). William Harris founded the paper in 1845, as the *By Town Packet*. Its only

competition at the time was the *Gazette*, a Tory-leaning publication (Fischer and Willsley xv). The *Packet* began as a four-page publication, printing roughly 200 copies. Its pages were filled with a “populist mix of politics, town news, social notes, letters, items on science, moral behaviour and the law” (xvi).

In their 2005 book *Each Morning Bright*, a compilation of some of the *Citizen's* writing over the years, editors Doug Fischer and Ralph Willsley argue that from the beginning the *Citizen* has been a “crusading paper.”

This paper pushed hard to have Ottawa declared the capital of the united Canadas, it maintained a vigorous 19th century campaign against ‘slatternly women’ and it was the first newspaper, at great cost to the bottom line, to drop tobacco advertising. It has been an outspoken proponent of animal welfare and such an opponent of corrupt government that its denunciation of Mackenzie King’s wartime government earned it a sedition charge (x).

Fischer and Willsley have curated articles that demonstrate some of the modern crusades taken on by the paper. They include articles on the *Citizen* support for Prime Minister Trudeau’s use of the War Measures Act in 1970 during the FLQ crisis (Fischer and Willsley 371); how it profiled the local gay community in 1980, causing a stir with many of its readers who accused the paper of promoting homosexuality (385); and in 2002 how the paper’s publisher, Russell Mills, was fired after publishing a column demanding the resignation of then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, which went against the political view of his then CanWest bosses (419).

Part of the *Citizen's* enduring success is also likely connected to the watchdog role it plays in the government town it serves. Some of the paper’s most significant

original reporting in recent history was produced by politics reporter Glen McGregor and Postmedia's Stephen Maher. Together they broke the Robocall scandal, an investigation into telephone calls that misled around 7,000 Guelph voters and sent them to the wrong polling stations. This story won what the *Ottawa Citizen* calls the "triple crown" of journalism in 2013. The pair won that year's National Newspaper Award, a Canadian Association of Journalists Award, and finally the Michener Award, which is handed out every year at Rideau Hall for outstanding public service journalism (Singer).

In Ottawa, the *Citizen's* competition in the daily watchdog role, especially when it comes to local news, is wearing thin. It is one of a handful of news producers that have been shrinking significantly over the years faced with plummeting revenues and consequent staff cuts. The situation in Ottawa became even more grim in the winter of 2016, eight months after the case study period, when the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Ottawa Sun's* print newsrooms merged. Shortly after, nearly a dozen of the *Citizen's* journalists and editors left to pursue other opportunities (Watson).

Postmedia Era

To understand Postmedia's impact on innovation at the *Ottawa Citizen* and the overall Canadian newspaper industry, it is first important to understand how Postmedia came to be, its current status and its philosophy for survival in a world of "Googles and Facebooks" that have captured a significant amount what was once Postmedia's advertising revenue (Godfrey).

In recent years the *Ottawa Citizen* has passed through the hands of several holding companies. From 1877 to 1996 it was owned by the Southam family, but in

1996 Conrad Black's Hollinger Corp. purchased the family's 14 daily papers, selling them to CanWest in 2000 (Fischer and Willsley 417).

The *Citizen's* current parent company, Postmedia, was born in 2010 after Canwest Limited Partnership newspapers and digital publishing businesses filed for bankruptcy protection under Canada's Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (Hamerman). Backed by a group of about 20 domestic and foreign secured lenders, including a handful of American hedge funds (Livesy), Postmedia paid \$1.1 billion for a collection of newspapers that Canwest had paid \$3.2 billion for ten years earlier (Powell). Postmedia hoped to run the chain profitably and pay off its debt to its lenders. In each year since the 2010 purchase, with the exception of an essentially break-even 2011, Postmedia has posted losses of at least \$50 million, which sum to over \$600 million (Postmedia "2015"; "2014"; "2013"; "2012"; "2011").

Postmedia acquired 36 newspapers, including 11 large-scale metropolitan dailies (Canadian Press "Postmedia Network Acquires Canwest's Newspaper Division"). The destiny of a number of historic Canadian newspapers including the *Calgary Herald*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Edmonton Journal* (Canada's only Pulitzer Prize winning publication) and *Ottawa Citizen*, was in the hands of the country's newest media enterprise. Despite having a ball and chain's worth of debt tied to its ankle, Postmedia began with a great deal of optimism for the future.

Talking about his newly-acquired newspapers shortly after the creation of Postmedia in 2010, CEO Paul Godfrey said they "produce a lot of cash flow, and can get a lot better in the future if they progress into the digital world" (Powell). It took

two full years for the company to finally commit to a digital strategy. In the summer of 2012, its four-platform approach to news delivery started to take shape.

The Four-Platform Vision and Implementation

Sitting at his desk on the far edge of the *Citizen's* newsroom, closest to the windows and furthest away from his print team, editor Andrew Potter recites an old Chinese proverb: "The Man who chases too many rabbits catches none, right?" He is referring to his company's multi-platform digital strategy that launched one-year prior, almost to the day on May 20, 2014. He and his team haven't just had time to reflect on how their newsroom implemented this massive innovation project, it's also clear now what factors might have both helped and hindered their efforts. Some of the harder lessons were learned in this newsroom and were applied when the four-platform strategy was introduced in Montreal the following October and one month later in Calgary.

The transformation began in the summer of 2012 when then deputy editor Carl Neustaedter and publisher Gerry Nott visited Postmedia's head office to present a new look and concept for *Ottawa Citizen*. This was designed to freshen up the product for a contemporary market. As it turns out, Postmedia had a transformation project of its own in mind for the paper along with all of the other papers in its chain. In addition to an aesthetic update, Postmedia wanted to overhaul its newspapers for the digital age. This would become its four-platform strategy.

When it came time to implement what Postmedia referred to as its "transformation program," Nott volunteered the *Ottawa Citizen* to go first. When he

announced the project to staff at a town hall meeting in 2013, he noted, “The good news is that we’re first. The bad news is that we’re first” (Duffy).

“Part of the reason the *Citizen* went first was because we had already planned so much, in terms of our own rebranding and re-launching,” says Neustaedter. “Part of that, of course, was if you go first you get a bigger hand in planning and developing what’s to come.”

Drew Gragg the paper’s web editor noted that a perk to going first was that they were able to have a say in how the website was designed. *Citizen* staff could just get up, walk over to the developer’s desk and ask for something to be changed. They can’t do this now, because the central designer is no longer in Ottawa. On the other hand, he says that by going first, you’re also the first to fail, “like a canary in a coal mine” (Gragg). Indeed many of the hard lessons the paper learned along the way had much to do with being the guinea pig in this digital experiment.

Assembling the Digital Quartet

During the winter of 2013 the *Citizen* and Postmedia began to design a re-imagined product that would reportedly cost the chain \$25-million (Goodhand).

Spearheading the vision for the project was American newspaper design consultant Mario Garcia, who “set about redesigning the papers and the website, which eventually transmogrified into a thoroughgoing rethink of our entire content strategy” (Potter). The new strategy would be known in the company as the “media quartet” and was meant to be much more than just putting content on four different platforms.

As Potter explains, Garcia's concept of the "media quartet" is "this idea that you would follow a story over the course of the day – you'd wake up, check in on your mobile phone, read it on your website through the course of the day, check it on your tablet at the end of the day, then a final print edition would make its way into the paper for the next day" (Potter).

"[It was] a nice elegant sort of story," said Potter. "But it didn't really hold together as an account of how journalism actually functions, how people actually consume media."

Feeding the "media quartet" would be more than just dumping print content into four separate platforms. Instead, Potter explains that each platform would have similar content, but each would be written in different voice targeting different audiences and written for the specific platform. A core goal for the project, according to Garcia's website, was to "find ways to adapt stories to the platform in which they appear" (Garcia "In Canada").

Potter says it was also a plan driven by the desire to attract advertisers. Each platform would have its own distinct voice, content strategy, target demographic and time demographic, which would allow them to get "deeper audiences that then the advertisers could sell" (Potter). "So, it's a content strategy married to a business plan" he said.

Product Champions

Prior to this project, the paper had been publishing news online and on both a tablet and mobile apps, on what it referred to as the 1.0 products. The mobile and tablet apps, however, were simply fed content directly from the web. The new four-

platform strategy would see a complete overhaul of the newsroom, dividing it into four distinct teams that would create content designed specifically for each of the individual platforms.

A potential block to implementing change in a legacy organization is that the existing culture, the one rooted in old ways, will reject the change. To circumvent this, at the very beginning of the project, each platform was assigned a “product champion.” The champions were responsible for helping to develop the products as well as getting buy-in from their teams and the rest of the staff. Ultimately it was their job to ensure the success of each of their respective platforms. Potter said that the champions were given a certain level of freedom to work with the people working at central operations in Toronto, giving them the ability to think “what can we do” with the product. This also helped to prevent innovation solely from the top down.

Assigning product champions was also a useful strategy for managing the dissemination of information about the new platforms. Neustaedter says it was a challenge communicating these changes to staff. Partly because they didn’t know what or when everything would be implemented. The product champions helped with this, he says.

Because the newsroom was already delivering news across four platforms, the four-platform strategy wasn’t a completely new concept. But creating content tailored specifically for mobile and tablet would be a new way of producing journalism at the *Ottawa Citizen*.

Voice of Mobile

One of the most significant innovations in this project was the introduction of the mobile app. It wasn't so much the technology part of the platform, but developing a unique mobile "voice," which strayed dramatically from the paper's traditional tone. Potter describes the mobile team as a kind of start-up in the newsroom. It is the only one out of the four that isn't co-produced with the central Postmedia team (Neustaedter), which gives its production team a level of freedom in how it works and produces content.

Drake Fenton was named the mobile champion shortly after the product launched in late spring 2014. He's 26 years old and this is his first management job. During this study's observation period his team consisted of two other staff members and a summer intern who worked full-time hours. Fenton's days start between 5:30 and 6 a.m. and he works long hours. By noon he will post about 11 stories on the mobile app, all of them lifted from the web and re-written to suit the tone of the platform.

Not all of the content that appears in the app is recycled from the web. Often Fenton and his team will find time to create their own "mobile originals" (Potter). This team has been given what seems to be free reign to step away from the traditional newspaper style of writing to produce content that Potter says "you wouldn't put in the newspaper, and you probably wouldn't even put on the web, but on mobile it works really well" (Potter). People tend to describe this content as "buzzfeedy."

The mobile team's first post of the day is usually about the weather. Fenton, who graduated from the University of British Columbia in English Literature, describes these posts as often being "pedantic, esoteric jokes that will make sense to an audience of about 15 people" (Fenton). He has written them as haiku and sonnets ("the sonnet was really difficult" he says), and they are often accompanied by animal photos. While these weather posts may not be for everyone, they've developed quite a following on social media. They were even featured in a BuzzFeed article, gaining the *Citizen's* weather brand some widespread online notoriety (Belfer).

The mobile app also has its own subtle style points. Mobile journalists will rewrite headlines from how they're presented on the web. This is primarily to make them shorter, but also to catch the attention of multi-tasking mobile audience. Also, unlike newspapers, they use words like "today" and "tomorrow" rather than using days of the week, a digression from traditional newspaper style (Fenton).

He explains that while he and his team currently work this way, it could very well (and likely will) change over the next year. "We're constantly reinventing this. We never stick to anything for more than two months before we change," says Fenton. "If you don't work that way in the digital space, you're going to fail."

Fenton often works outside of the box, including how he packages content. He mentions a Vine video he made using iMovie that mixed a Taylor Swift song with video of Ottawa's mayor. He expresses, again, the importance of creativity in writing both headlines and the daily weather post. His work is unconventional by legacy newspaper standards, but seems to work for his social media audience (Twitter and Facebook). It's still unclear just how successful the mobile app has been, however.

As of April 2016, no public analytic data was available to offer insights into audience size and engagement.

He says that there is an internal company mobile strategy guiding the Postmedia conglomerate. But he also says that his team has the freedom to make changes to the content they post, when they post it, and for what audience. That's likely because there is very strong support for the mobile team from newsroom leadership. Potter has insulated his mobile team from the rest of the newsroom, as well as the centralizing forces of Postmedia. This seems to foster creativity and experimentation within the team.

While Fenton has many creative ideas, he's not always able to follow through on them. He has a story that he'd love to produce this morning, but explains "I'm too busy to do anything else. I have to stick to the game plan." Experimentation and creativity may be encouraged by management, but that doesn't mean much if time and lack of resources constrain it from truly flourishing.

Besides there not being enough hours in the day, another challenge for the mobile team is that the platform is not a responsive design that accommodates the full spectrum of screen sizes audiences are using. As a result Fenton sits with several iPhones on his desk to test everything he posts. He explains while holding an iPhone 4 (a smartphone with a small screen compared to later versions) that if he puts too many words on the screen, the text will cut off. This is why when you are viewing the app on larger-screened phones, there's a lot of empty white space. Attempting to make sure stories fit on different screen sizes (which is crucial for positive user interaction with the mobile app), occupies time that could otherwise be spent

producing more content, and experimenting with new ways of telling stories. That the *Citizen's* mobile software doesn't adjust automatically is both a design flaw and an impediment to the potential success of the platform.

The Invisible Tablet

Another significant innovation in Postmedia's four-platform strategy was the launch of a daily 6 p.m. tablet edition. A study released by the PEW Research Centre around the time Postmedia was developing its four-platform strategy reinforced this idea that the tablet is a "lean back" reading experience, meaning that audiences are more engaged for longer periods of time and less distracted while using the device. The same study revealed that 66 percent of regular news consumers who own a tablet use their device between 6 and 9 p.m. (LaFrance). The decision to publish in the evening was grounded in research, yet some believe it had a lot to do with the product's demise (Garcia, "What Next for Tablet Editions?").

Since the launch one year earlier, the production team had been pared down from eight to four. The remaining team members know that the product is on its last legs, but it still hasn't been announced formally to the entire newsroom.

At first glance, it's hard to believe that the product didn't catch on with audiences. "Everybody who sees it is wowed by it," says Neustaedter who was the product champion for the tablet and currently holds the title of senior producer on the project.

Every day, Neustaedter's team brings much of that day's print content to life with interactive graphics, photographs and videos. One day the team took a graphic of an eel from the newspaper and added interactive labels. Someone on the team

jokes, “this way, you can touch an eel without actually touching an eel.” The interactivity and ability to draw audiences in with engaging graphics are part of what makes the tablet such an appealing storytelling platform. Neustaedter explains that for this reason it wasn’t hard to attract advertisers to it. As well, it is important to note that not all of the tablet’s content was repurposed from print. The edition also included news and analysis that had occurred during the day.

Assembling the tablet edition requires a specialized production team. The initial team consisted of three designers, and five journalists. Neustaedter emphasizes the importance of collaboration between designers and journalists. He says that designers need to have an editorial mindset, and the team’s journalists needed to start thinking more about design. It took them two months to produce their first prototype edition. Their challenge was coming up with a design that worked with the overall editorial vision while trying to figure out how to tell a story using this new medium. “We would do a story over and over and over again,” said Neustaedter.

Part of the challenge was that they didn’t have other publications to copy. “Not many people were doing this when we started. We had to figure out how to tell a story,” says tablet journalist Joanne Laucius. “The job is taking something that is in a narrative form and turning it into something that is visual and interactive. We learned very quickly that you have to trim things down, then trim it down some more, then trim it down even more.” Her current project was taken from the web and has been pared down to a third of what it had originally been.

Like the newspaper, only a portion of the tablet app is produced in Ottawa. The rest is published by a central Postmedia desk, which produces content that is shared with Postmedia newspapers across the country. Sections produced in Ottawa included front-of-book, City File, the Hill Politics and the back of book (local entertainment and style). The rest of the publication, called Canada and the World, is produced in Toronto and Hamilton. It was also the same content you would have found in Montreal and Calgary's tablet editions, limiting its distinctiveness for an Ottawa audience.

Tablet Issue #1: The Invisible Platform

Getting all of the journalists to buy in to the tablet proved to be a challenge. Neustaedter explains that some journalists like writing their content as a narrative. But there was another problem, which had to do with some journalists just not understanding the platform.

"The challenge of the tablet is that so few people in the newsroom have one," says Neustaedter. "It's an invisible platform."

To overcome this challenge, he would often have to take a iPad over to people to show them what their stories looked like when prepared for the tablet.

Tablet Issue #2: Silos and Staffing

When the tablet was fully staffed at the time of launch, it had eight staff members working on it. He says that when you think about it, that's not very many people, to assemble a daily "highly designed, interactive publication." But to put that number into perspective, it was also about ten per cent of the newsroom. In other words, it was resource rich, without actually having very many resources.

The people working on the tablet were also specially trained for the work. They had to be taken away from the newsroom for a period of time and taught the specific skills required to produce the tablet edition. This is an issue, because the job is so specialized, it's not easy to take someone from one part of the newsroom to fill in if required.

"A smaller newsroom needs to be more nimble," says Neustaedter, explaining that everyone needs to be able to do everything for it to work efficiently.

"We were very concerned before we started, and we continue to be concerned now about the silo effects, putting our products out on different platforms," says he says. "They're distinct things."

He says that most people in the newsroom are now proficient working in WordPress. But if someone were to go and work on the mobile app, they would have to be trained not only how to use the mobile app production software, they would also need to understand how to write in the style of a mobile post. This isn't something that would come naturally to everyone in the newsroom. The tablet requires an even more specialized set of skills. "I would say that the tablet part was the biggest silo, because it had to be so different in terms of producing it," says Neustaedter.

Tablet Issue Number 3: User Experience

One year after launch, the tablet team has been pared down to three full time staff members consisting of two journalists and a designer. As of late spring 2015 Neustaedter still works with the team, but he has recently accepted the position of managing editor and his time is split with the team. The news that the tablet will

cease publication as of the end of the summer has many speculating on why the tablet didn't catch on.

Neustaedter explains that as a consumer, there was a lot of "friction" with the experience of using the app. First off, when the product launched it was behind a pay wall. Users could access the app for a trial period, but first had to provide payment info. He says that making people provide their credit card number right off the bat was "a huge disincentive." He says that there were roughly 15,000 downloads with very little traction in terms of actually paying the fee and signing up.

But the pay wall was the least of the tablet's issues in terms of user experience. Potter describes the *Citizen's* launch of 2.0 as a "pure launch." By that, he means that when they launched their new products, all previous phone and tablet apps were shut down. When Calgary and Montreal launched in the fall, they kept their old apps running and Potter says "it created confusion in the marketplace." He says there was little incentive for audiences in these markets to switch over to the new apps. Then, Potter says the decision was made by head office to bring back the *Citizen's* old apps.

Just to add to the confusion, about six months after the tablet was launched, Postmedia made the call to drop the pay wall on the tablet (both Calgary and Montreal launched their iPad apps without a pay wall). Potter says that by that time, the marketing push had ended and the audience had already made up their minds on whether they wanted it.

A confusing user experience is one possible explanation why the tablet didn't catch on with audiences. Another, speculated by several managers and journalists in the newsroom, was the late afternoon publishing time.

When it was announced that the tablet was being put to pasture, Mario Garcia posted the news on his blog, questioning what they could have done differently to make the product succeed. He still believed that evening was the right time to release the tablet, because the data they had at the time said that tablet reading went up in the evening and that it was meant to be a “pure lean back reading experience.” He then questions whether the content could have been “newsier,” but concludes that news is “lean forward” material and that there is enough of that kind of content on other platforms during the day. Finally he speculates on the “look and feel” and whether this might have turned off audiences but concludes that couldn't have been the problem. He says, “Postmedia tablet editions went out there looking like a million bucks” (Garcia “What Next”).

Print Re-Imagined: The Comics and Puzzles Fiasco

The re-imagined *Ottawa Citizen* also included a redesign of both the print and web edition. Both received an aesthetic treatment, which included a new logo that replaced the paper's traditional horizontal masthead. While there were significant design changes to the website, it was the print edition that garnered the most reaction from audiences. They may have been able to handle the new look of the paper, but it was how the content was reorganized and what content the publisher decided to keep and discard, that upset a huge portion of the *Ottawa Citizen* readership.

The new format would include the A section, Sports, Context and a You section. The original newspaper had a city section, which was now included in the A section. Despite still having the same amount of local coverage, it was perceived by audiences that the paper had discarded City and reduced its local coverage. "I think a lot of people saw us as getting rid of city news. Even though the byline counts remained the same, it looked like we had downplayed city news," says Potter. He says that it would have been his preference to bring the City Section back, but it was out of the *Citizen's* hands. "That decision was made top down."

Negative feedback is always expected after change. But Potter wasn't prepared for the backlash he experienced in response to the changes made to the paper's Saturday puzzle section, cutting it from nine pages of comics and puzzles to three. The reaction was loud and relentless.

"People lost their minds. They literally lost their minds," says Potter. He says he got more than 1,000 emails and phone calls about the change. He recalls being told by one of his colleagues to "weather the storm," but he said that the complaints about the changes to the puzzle section were unceasing. "I had seniors calling and crying and saying that the only thing that kept [them] sane every day was doing this puzzle," he says. "It was heartbreaking."

He did manage to cobble together a little bit of money for adding six or so puzzles back into the fold, but not enough to satisfy all of his subscribers. Potter was unable to get them all back because he had cancelled its contracts with the puzzle publishers. Getting them back would have been too expensive.

Rather than winning subscribers with their new platform strategy, Potter estimates they lost 3,000 subscribers after the launch. “The launch here was not a success, and I know that the company attributes a lot of it to the comics and puzzles fiasco, and I think that’s true.”

After the fallout at the *Citizen*, the *Montreal Gazette* and *Calgary Herald* launched their four-platform strategy without making changes to the puzzle section. As well, neither of these publications changed how the sections of the newspaper were organized. Meanwhile, Potter said that he had made the request to Postmedia on several occasions to get his City section back with no success.

Analysis

The *Ottawa Citizen* is a classic case of a company looking to find its place in the digital sphere by disrupting itself from within. The point of a such a move is to introduce products that target underserved or new markets. This is often a chance at survival for companies, like newspapers, whose current markets are shrinking and can’t be rebuilt by simply improving the legacy product (C. M. Christensen, Michael E. Raynor, Rory McDonald). The theory of disruption suggests that the disruptive product can be introduced to market before it is perfect. In other words, if the market is there, the minimal viable product will suffice. The new product is improved gradually through incremental innovations, often spurred by customer feedback. In their 2012 Nieman Report, David Skok, James Allworth and Clayton Christensen encourage legacy news producers who are looking to innovate existing products to “always consider the audience first” and to focus on “jobs to be done” (Christensen, Skok and Allworth 12). For some news consumers, the job that needs

to be done is “help me fill 10-minutes while I wait at the doctor’s office.” Another might be “provide me with a deep analysis of the federal budget.” Skok et al explain that once a publisher understands the job or jobs that needs to be done, it can then determine how it’s going to go about doing the job and over what channels (12).

What this means for legacy media companies that are in the process of choosing an innovation strategy is that it is important to find a way of giving audiences what they want, how they want it, and via the platform on which they want to access it (whether it’s smartphone, tablet, or even up and coming technologies like the iWatch or virtual reality). This was the intention behind Postmedia spreading its innovation strategy across four separate platforms, rather than focusing on just one. In an ideal world, they would have mastered all platforms garnering a large enough audience to lure back advertisers, pay off their substantial debt and start funnelling money back into their newsrooms.

A year after the strategy launched, three of the four platforms remained standing while the tablet edition was on the cutting block for the end of the summer. For newspapers looking to innovate in a similar way there are a number of lessons that can be learned from the experiment at the *Ottawa Citizen*, by looking specifically at what factors blocked innovation and what special techniques the *Ottawa Citizen* team used to enable it.

Block: Concentration and Centralization

It’s no secret that Postmedia’s primary business strategy for survival is to introduce economies of scale. The company’s CEO said it at the Newspapers Canada Conference in May 2015, “I sincerely believe that if you don’t have scale and you’re

not part of a big news organization in this country, there will be more difficult times ahead of you.” Not only does Godfrey say he believes that scale is needed to compete, but added, “I think you have to get as big as you can get.” The only thing standing in Godfrey’s way in the Sun Media purchase was Canada's Competition Bureau, but Godfrey was convincing enough to get its blessing. “We basically told the Competition Bureau ‘if this industry is going to survive, if this Postmedia is going to survive, you gotta allow us to do this thing,” he said. They did. As of the spring of 2015, Postmedia was the proud owner of 175 of Sun Media’s English-language print and web properties, giving it control over 45 per cent of large Canadian daily newspapers (Newspapers Canada "2016 Ownership Groups - Canadian").

In his 1999 book *Newspapers a Lost Cause?* author Patrick Hendriks compares the newspaper industry to Henry Ford’s “production regimes.” He points out several similarities including “high asset specificity, its volume, its manufacturing-driven production and its history of mass production.” As well, he says that production through a Fordist regime is highly structured, automated, is controlled centrally and produces “homogenous – rather standardized – products and the system inherently requires mass consumption and is strongly driven by volume” (Hendriks 49). Granted, this book was published in 1999, a time when most newspapers were still primarily printed on paper with complex and expensive manufacturing processes. But even today, as it attempts to be a more digital company, Postmedia continues to apply this centralized production logic and economy of scale to compete with online giants like Google and Facebook.

Scale allows Postmedia to do two things. First, scale means larger audiences for the company as a whole across the country. “The fact is that putting [the newspapers] together gives us more runway, more scale, more unique visitors per month, and it puts us in the top ten of website unique visitors in Canada,” says Godfrey. This then puts them in a better position to attract national advertisers. Not only that, by owning the lion’s share of newspapers in the country, Postmedia eliminates competition for those advertising dollars. By acquiring the Sun publications Postmedia now owns both major newspapers in the country’s largest cities.

Scale also allows the company to find efficiencies in the business by centralizing operations. As Godfrey explains, you can have multiple newsrooms, but then you just have one ad department, one HR department, one finance department, and one IT department (Godfrey). In addition to administrative efficiencies, Postmedia also centralized aspects of the production of its various platforms. For example, branding across papers and common sections allow different publications to share content, or even entire pages (Potter).

As well, much of the *Ottawa Citizen’s* content comes from Postmedia’s central desks located in and around Toronto that assign and edit national copy. This copy is shared between papers and saves each publication from, say, having one reporter each in Ottawa covering Parliament Hill. The problem with a system like this is that communities aren’t able to cover federal issues that pertain to their individual communities. Instead, their pages are at the whim of the central desk in Toronto or what content might be available on the news wires that day. As a result it becomes

more of a challenge for dailies in different parts of the country to hold their elected representatives to account.

Another by-product of centrally-produced content is a possible disconnect between the journalist and editors and the copy's intended local audience. In an article published on *thewalrus.ca* shortly after being laid off from the *Edmonton Journal* in January 2016, former editor Margo Goodhand explains a tour she took of Postmedia's copy-desk operation in Hamilton in 2007. "Why have your own staff doing the work these people can do for you, for so much less?" she recalls Postmedia VP (and former *Citizen* publisher) Gerry Nott asking (Goodhand). She also recounts watching a young editor handle an op-ed about Granville Street in Vancouver. She asked him if he had ever been to Vancouver. "I've never been outside of Hamilton" he told her. The company saves money by having this work done from a central location, but it also produces generic content that may not appeal to local audiences.

All of this demonstrates that centralization does have the potential to impact the quality of information printed on the pages or screens of Postmedia's properties at a time when local content is the daily newspapers most valuable differentiator. Everything else, audiences can find elsewhere. What was also observed at the *Ottawa Citizen* is that centralization was arguably an impediment to the success of the implementation of its four-platform strategy, and continues to impede innovation at its papers.

A perfect example is the demise of the tablet. Because of its failure, many in the industry have ruled out the iPad app as a viable digital strategy for newspapers. However, before ruling out the iPad altogether as a potential medium for delivering

news, it is important to consider whether their tablet's lack of success can be largely attributed to the centralized nature of Postmedia.

Postmedia had the right idea by creating a centralized content hub to fill out the daily iPad edition. Because it is a resource-heavy medium, centralizing allowed the company to save costs in content production. However, producing something like an iPad app is too collaborative for it to be completely centralized. Producing local content requires in-house designers. "Having designers and journalists in two different places wouldn't work. It was too collaborative" (Neustaedter). Unlike its print or online versions, the tablet isn't an ideal platform to be produced centrally.

Also decisions about how to manage the *Ottawa Citizen* iPad app were influenced by what happened in other markets. Because Montreal and Calgary didn't remove their 1.0 apps from the app store, Ottawa was then required to bring it back. This meant that in addition to having its 2.0 mobile and tablet apps in the app store, it would also have the older 1.0 apps. This decision came from Postmedia and caused confusion. Neustaedter recounted:

To this day, I usually get multiple phone calls, usually every day from people who are saying they're having troubles with the Citizen on [their] iPad – and I have to go through it with them. I ask "what are you reading, what does it look like on your screen, are you reading the epaper, are you having troubles with the 1.0 app, are you calling the about the 2.0 app...its always this little quiz show about what [they are] actually reading (Neustaedter).

The confusion virtually condemned the *Ottawa Citizen's* tablet edition to failure, in what can only be called an unsuccessful product rollover.

There was also an overwhelming consensus at the *Citizen* that the evening publication of the tablet edition wasn't working with audiences. But there was no way for the *Citizen* to alter that publication time, as it was interconnected with the tablet editions across the country. A change in Ottawa would have meant a change across the board. In this case, centralization made pivoting, based on what local management thought was needed, impossible.

Beyond the tablet, the *Ottawa Citizen* was also limited in how it could respond to the overwhelming feedback it received regarding the changes to its City section and, of course, the "comics and puzzles fiasco." By removing control from the local newsroom, Postmedia has restricted the ability of its publications to cater to local audiences, which is critical when legacy media organizations attempt to disrupt from within (Christensen, Skok and Allworth 12).

Finally, when the priorities of the central organization change, this inevitably has an impact across the chain. When Postmedia purchased the Sun properties, the organization's energies were then focused on that acquisition. "I know that's taken up an enormous amount of bandwidth for Postmedia Toronto, to both acquire the Sun and then integrate it, which is all ongoing right now" says Neustaedter. That said, he then goes on to explain how the company is working on "upgrades." In other words, the company is still making efforts to improve its products.

Finally, there is a common theory that successful innovation within an organization must be done on an iterative basis. By centralizing innovation, and creating a top down approach to change, Postmedia has essentially reduced the overall potential for experimentation. In other words, rather than having

experimentation in 100 newsrooms across the country, most of the experimentation and innovation takes place at the top. Just as Postmedia has arguably eroded the amount of content in Canadian newspapers – it has also eroded the breadth of experimentation taking place in newspaper newsrooms across the country.

Block: Technology

Innovation at the *Ottawa Citizen* wasn't just stifled by its parent company. The paper encountered several innovation blocks that are often associated with implementing change in legacy organizations. The first set of blocks came from technology during its transformation.

The first challenge is keeping up with the rate of technological change. For example, because mobile devices are constantly evolving, this poses a challenge for content producers looking to create a positive user experience. They are producing content for new and old devices that aren't compatible. The digital editor sits with multiple devices at his desk to make sure that content they post works across all devices. Because the app technology wasn't developed to accommodate evolving mobile technology, the digital team must compensate for this shortcoming, which limits the amount of time it has to experiment with new storytelling methods.

As well, the *Citizen* was confronted with the challenge of coming up with the best way of retiring legacy technology, specifically its older apps. There is a lack of literature offering advice on explaining how to introduce new apps and retire old ones. However, if apps are to be treated like physically-manufactured products, the best way to handle product rollover is to completely phase out the old product when the new one is introduced (Billington, Lee and Tang).

Block: Process and Culture

For years the *Citizen* had been producing content for print and the web. With its new “media quartet” strategy it was faced with the challenge of having to rearrange the workflow to suit four platforms. Andrew Potter says of all the changes they made, this was the single biggest transformational issue. The challenge, he says, was sorting out how the central hub of reporters and editors in his newsroom would communicate with the various platforms. He didn’t want his reporters to have to report to four different bosses (one for each platform).

The problem in large part had to do with both print and the tablet being deadline-driven platforms that had a specific amount of empty space that needed to be filled. The danger was that that the tablet and print editors would end up chasing reporters for content. Not only that, but they would be looking for platform-specific content. That would have meant reporters answering to their editors along with the various platform managers. Instead, what Potter decided to do was put the section editors in charge of their sections on each platform. So, the city editor would make sure the paper and tablet were filled, the politics editor would do the same and so on. Every morning the section editors and platform managers would meet to check in regarding stories that would fill that day’s pages or screens. It seemed to work.

However, it wasn’t without its challenges. Christina Spencer is the executive producer of Politics. It’s her job to make sure all of the politics content is filed on time to each platform every day. She arrives to story meetings with a chart divided into columns, which helps her keep track of who is writing what and whether its been filed on each of the platforms. She says that her reporters are usually receptive

to producing content tailored for the different platforms, but while reporters know that they aren't supposed to be focused on print, often they can't help it.

"For some reporters, there's still that connection to the print product," she says. "At first there's resistance, but then a reporter thinks about it and it clicks that 'more people are going to read my story.'"

While it clicks with some people, she says there's still the potential for "quiet dissenters." People might not be openly cursing the new platforms, but there are just those people who don't adopt.

Block: Legacy Brands and Millennial Retention

During the observation period, two young members of the mobile team left to pursue journalism jobs at other publications. One went to work for another daily newspaper in the city, while the other went to work for Ottawa's new *BuzzFeed* bureau. It is unclear whether the *Citizen* attempted to retain them, but it's easy to see how challenging it might be for this publication to retain millennial staff.

First, when a new media brand like *BuzzFeed* arrives in Ottawa, it brings the opportunity for young people in the journalism business to work for an organization known for trying new things and for being successful in the digital sphere. To put this in perspective, in January 2015, *BuzzFeed* was the seventh most visited news site in the United States, beating out the *New York Times*. It is also the second most visited digital native site, after the *Huffington Post* (Olmstead and Shearer). Vice News, which also has an Ottawa Bureau, is the eighth most visited digital native site in the United States. Granted, these are American metrics, but what this means is that these sites have cachet for young journalists. Rather than being a training

ground for journalists who will eventually move on to higher profile opportunities, it is important for legacy media to start thinking about how they will retain young staff.

While observing the team react to losing several of its young, bright reporters, it begged the question “what incentive is there for them to stay?” Why would a young journalist want to stay in a dark newsroom, miles away from the core of the city, at a company that isn’t just old but also might be on its last legs? In their report “A Culture-Based Strategy for Creating Innovation in News Organizations” Jeff Sonderman and Tom Rosenstiel outline a number of “modules” newspapers can implement to enable innovation. They include things like holding “hack days” where staff can help with innovation processes; creating “virtual spaces” like Slack to help facilitate communication and break down silos; and reorganizing physical space with new furniture, carpet or paint, which will “[suggest] transformation rather than decline” (Sonderman and Rosenstiel). This might not solve the problem entirely, but changing newsroom culture will be important to consider when thinking about the future workforce in legacy newsrooms.

On the flip side, however, it is also important to consider that millennials are known for being more transient in their careers than professionals of earlier generations. It is for this reason that in their book *Gen Y Now*, dedicated to theories on managing millennial, Buddy Hobart and Herb Sendek say that “if a talented worker leaves your company, it is not your fault or his or hers. Blame is not assigned” (Hobart and Sendek). While culture might be important to consider when looking to attract and retain a younger workforce, it’s also important to understand

the nature of this demographic. Dealing with staff who are constantly looking for the next best thing, may require special thought and strategies for countering high turnover.

Enabler: The Mobile Start-Up

There were two significant things that management did to help facilitate change in its newsroom. First, by assigning product champions it was able to enlist help in getting buy-in from staff. “It was a stroke of genius,” says the *Citizen’s* Potter. He said that it gave the Champions and their teams ownership of their assigned products, and released a kind of “entrepreneurial energy” in the leaders.

The other choice this newsroom made was to allow experimentation with the mobile app. During the observation period, it did seem as though the mobile team was given room to try new things, despite the fact that much of what they were doing diverged from how the *Citizen* had traditionally presented information.

Creating a start-up vibe in the newsroom can help foster the traits that make these kinds of businesses successful at innovating, including being able to “thrive in uncertainty” along with “[having a] defined a set of processes and concepts that minimize risk, add flexibility and increase chances of success” (Sonderman and Rosenstiel). Treating the mobile team as a kind of start-up within the newsroom, gave them the flexibility to innovate without the fear of being reprimanded for trying new things.

Conclusion

On that warm summer evening at the *Ottawa Citizen*, as the presses did what its presses have done for 171 years – transferring ink to broadsheet creating the

next day's paper – there was a sense that the future might be grim. Everyone was capable of putting together the pieces of what a merger with the Sun could mean, but few could have anticipated just how fast the demands of an organization looking to “find efficiencies” could move. Even the most sceptical journalist can't be blamed for believing Paul Godfrey when he said, over a glass of champagne with a newsroom, that the Sun newsroom would never merge with pre-existing Postmedia properties (Goodyear). But that's just what happened. In the fall of 2015, the *Ottawa Sun* moved into the *Ottawa Citizen's* newsroom. The following January, the two newsrooms merged. The flat brown building on the edge of the Queensway is still one newsroom, but now produces two newspapers instead of just one.

Over the observation period in the late spring of 2015, the newspaper lost 10 per cent of its staff. At the end of the observation period, it was announced that there were no intentions to fill all of the vacant positions but staff were encouraged to persevere and to keep the media quartet humming along.

Instead of being a newsroom that is focused on perpetual innovation, this newsroom is too weighed down with the problems of its organization. It's constantly being forced to recalibrate, and readjust on an organizational level. It's likely safe to assume that the future of the newspaper industry won't be found in the newsrooms of Postmedia. In fact, it will be a miracle if there is a future at all for the *Ottawa Citizen*. In January 2016 talking about the company's second-lien notes being all in US funds, Godfrey said "With the Canadian dollar falling the way it's falling, that's almost like a noose around your neck" (Friend).

Chapter Five: *Toronto Star's* Tablet of the People

Preamble

About two hundred Torstar employees have gathered on the third floor of the *Toronto Star* building, which sits one block from Lake Ontario at number one Yonge Street. It's the beginning of June and they're here for a special town hall meeting to discuss the future of the *Toronto Star*. There's one item on the agenda and on it the future of the paper hinges --*Toronto Star's* new tablet edition, *Star Touch*, which is set to launch in three months.

The meeting begins with a presentation by the *Star's* publisher John Cruickshank. He stands at the front of the room, backlit by a handful of round windows that look like portholes. He gives a high-level presentation that appears to have been packaged for board members and shareholders who need to be convinced that the tablet is indeed the key to pulling the paper out of financial deterioration, including at least two years of losses from continuing operations. Board members need to be convinced that it was a viable future for the publication, ensuring continued faith in management. Shareholders need to be convinced to prevent the stock price from continuing to drop.

Cruickshank goes over the history of the paper, the changing habits of newspaper consumers, and how critical it is for the *Toronto Star's* journalists to "regain their credibility" by finding a way to speak to today's modern audiences; the ones, they hope, that have a tablet device fixed to their hands.

His presentation is convincing enough, but the real sell comes from *Toronto Star* editor Michael Cooke. The *Star* has historically billed itself as the paper of the

people, and Cooke in this particular moment could be described as a man of the people. He has taken his place at the front of the room wearing a long black blazer over a white shirt tucked into a pair of jeans, his hair messy, and a pair of dark-rimmed glasses tucked behind his ears. Waving a small iPad in the air, he makes a case for this new way of making news that anyone would have a hard time disputing - to his face anyway. He is the captain of this new vessel that will, and to some degree already has, completely reinvented the way the *Toronto Star* has worked for over 123 years. Starting now the *Toronto Star* is a screen-first publication.

Cooke is hugely charismatic, energetic and is clearly a huge proponent of this new product. He makes it clear to his staff that it's not the container that will make this new platform successful. "The magic comes from the people, and the content they put into it." These are the words of a man who needs his crew behind him if there's any hope of keeping this new product and the existing paper afloat.

Introduction

The tablet is an odd choice for an all-in bet on a digital future. The latest *Reuters Report on Digital Media* has declared the smartphone as the "defining device for digital news" while "tablet growth for news [is] weakening in most countries" (Newman, Levy and Nielsen 8,9). The number of people who use tablet devices to consume news has grown year after year since 2012, however the pace of growth has slowed (9). Yet, these numbers don't seem to phase the *Star*, because it has seen just how successful the tablet has been at *La Presse* in Montreal. It is from *La Presse* that the *Toronto Star* purchased its tablet software.

The tablet's success at *La Presse* doesn't necessarily mean it will be equally successful at the *Star*. There is a great deal of speculation on what has contributed to *La Presse's* ability to garner mass audiences on its tablet edition. Many believe it has to do with its French-language audience. Of the 102 daily newspapers in Canada only 12 are French (Newspapers Canada "2016 Ownership Groups - Canadian"). The audience share is therefore less diluted for *La Presse*, merely because the lack of options on where its French-speaking audience can access daily news. So far this is an unproven hypothesis, but *Toronto Star's* success or failure will definitely offer clues as to whether it's possible for an English newspaper to cultivate an equally healthy audience on the tablet.

The importance of the *Star's* tablet experiment isn't just to prove (or disprove) whether tablet is a valid platform for delivering news. Its success is critical for the survival of the newspaper (Cooke). When the *Star* announced in the fall of 2014 that it would abandon its pay wall and go all-in on a tablet edition, its parent company Torstar Inc. was well into its second successive year of losses from continued operations of around \$50M due to the decline of print advertising revenues (Torstar Inc. 4). Its clearly deteriorating financial position was reflected in the plunge of its stock price from fiscal 2011 to the end of 2014 from \$15.00 to \$6.60 (Yahoo Finance). The consistent losses didn't bode well for the future of the company and for the future of the *Toronto Star*, its "flagship brand and publication" (Torstar Inc. 4). So the company made a bold move. In an attempt to secure a larger, younger and therefore more valuable audience for advertisers, it announced it would be acquiring the tablet app software from *La Presse*.

“The new tablet product is a key element of our multimedia evolution. Our vision is to create a compelling edition of the *Toronto Star* that reaches a significantly broader audience and engages them in new ways,” Torstar President and CEO David Holland said in the company’s 2014 annual report (4).

The *Toronto Star* chose to focus its efforts on tablet and not mobile because mobile doesn’t make money – at least, not enough to keep the paper running. “I wish I was wrong. I wish there was money on mobile, because mobile is easy” says Cooke. Not only is there no money on mobile, but he says there’s no money on thestar.com. “There’s millions of dollars in revenue on thestar.com,” he says. “But it’s a tiny fraction of what we need and what we get from print and what we will get from this.”

The *Star* will continue publishing its paper along with content for its website and mobile app, but now it will be tablet first. Cooke says that the tablet is anticipated to bring in double the revenues of the star.com in its first year, and four times as much in its second year.

“It had better – or else we’ve failed,” he laughs.

To ensure a fair chance at survival the *Toronto Star* spent the winter of 2015 expanding with roughly 70 new hires in just six months. This was a significant move in the world of Canadian newspapers, in which deep cuts, not investments, have become an all-too familiar reality over the past decade.

This four-day case study period fell at the beginning of June, 2015 as the newspaper was in the midst of transforming its newsroom from a paper-first to screen-first publication. The *Toronto Star* would no longer be in the business of

producing news for just paper. Instead, journalists and editors would be trained on how to think screen first, pitching and writing stories that would cater to the audience's mind, eyes and fingers.

Not only did the *Toronto Star* face the logistical challenges of having to increase staff and reorganize a high-functioning newsroom, it also had the enormous challenge of transforming a newsroom culture that partly measured a story's worth by its number of words and its placement in the printed paper. This case study is a snapshot of a news organization in transition, an attempt to understand what factors inhibited change during its transition period and what other factors helped to make the transition from page to screen a little easier.

History

The *Toronto Star* is no stranger to financial struggles. The paper was founded in 1892 by a group of printers and several young apprentices after they were locked out of their jobs at the *Afternoon News*. Their objective with the new publication was to “[reflect] the concerns of working people like themselves.” Initially the paper was very successful, but by the late 1890s it began to struggle financially. The paper was sold, and a new editor was recruited to breath new life into the publication. Joseph E. Atkinson was 34 years old when he got the job in December 13, 1899 (Honderich "History of the Toronto Star").

In roughly four years, Atkinson managed to increase the paper's circulation to 21,000 from 7,000. By 1913 the *Star* was Toronto's largest newspaper, which might have had something to do with its approach to news gathering. During the early 1900s, the *Toronto Star* gained the reputation of being “the last home of

razzle-dazzle journalism”(Kesterton 86). As W.H. Kesterton explains in *A History of Journalism in Canada*, no expense was spared to collect news for its pages.

They hurled battalions of reporters into big stories to gain saturation coverage, hired trains and aeroplanes for news-staff use, and spent money lavishly to provide a news treatment of overwhelming impact (Kesterton 86)

Over the years, excessive spending would be tamed, but the paper hasn’t ceased in its mission to produce news with a focus on social welfare and justice for all.

Atkinson was the paper’s longest-serving publisher, holding the position for just shy of 50 years. It’s been nearly 70 years since he was at the helm of the *Star*, but the Atkinson principles are still at the core of everything the *Toronto Star* does. The principles are “A strong and united Canada, civic engagement, individual and civil liberties, a necessary role for effective government and the rights of working people”(Honderich "Toronto Star"). The *Toronto Star* considers its mission to “focus public attention on injustices of all kinds and on reforms designed to correct them.” In the words of Atkinson, the *Toronto Star* is the “Paper for the People” (Honderich "Toronto Star").

As the paper sets its sites on a future that looks much different from its past, it still holds to the Atkinson principles, which have become a useful tool for teaching a new generation of newsroom staff, many of whom don’t come from a journalism background at all.

Toronto Star’s New Generation

Just hours before Cruickshank and Cooke’s presentation, a fresh crop of tablet recruits assemble in a boardroom one floor up. This week’s new hires are

young and come from a spectrum of professional backgrounds. There are two grads from the OCAD University (formerly, the Ontario School of Art and Design), a videographer, someone who has experience with page layout and a handful of journalists.

This is the first day of a two-week orientation. They're told that if they "survive" week two, they will be integrated into the production team. A major part of their success will have to do with how well they are able to adapt to the new production process.

Navigating them through their first few hours on the job is the *Star's* executive editor Paul Woods. He starts the morning by explaining that their new employer is the biggest newspaper in the country measured by copies sold, pages produced and the number of readers, which totals three million per week. The *Star* has won a total of 135 newspaper awards since 1949, including the Michener Award, which it has won four times, including one for breaking the story about Toronto's mayor appearing in a cellphone video in which he appears to be smoking crack cocaine (Doolittle and Donovan). He makes it clear that this team will still be expected to uphold the highest standards of journalistic integrity even though some of them haven't had formal journalism training.

"This is the largest amount of change this newsroom has ever undergone," says Woods. He then repeats for the group something someone at *La Presse* told him before the *Star* set out on the project, "If you think this project is big, guess what. It's ten times bigger than you realize."

How Star Touch Came to Be

The wheels on the *Toronto Star's* tablet project started turning in the newsroom in April 2014 when Jon Filson was pulled off his job as sports editor and sent to Montreal to cover the Quebec election with editor Michael Cooke. But covering the election wasn't Filson's primary assignment. Instead it was to familiarize himself with *La Presse's* new tablet app and the team with whom he would be spending a great deal of time over the next few months. He says he spent a total of about three of the next six months at *La Presse* getting to know its staff and understanding how the publication works. Filson has been leading the transition in the newsroom as the tablet development editor ever since.

Filson got his start at the *Toronto Star* in 1999 as an intern and was hired on full time at the sports desk. In that position he became involved in the development of *thestar.com*. He says that much of what they are doing today in developing the tablet mirrors the experience of launching the *Star's* website in the early 2000s. He says he's not sure if Cooke even knew of his web experience when he was given this assignment, but lessons he learned during that time have influenced how this new tablet edition will take shape at the *Star*.

"One of the big lessons I learned working on the web in 2000 was that just because you can do something, doesn't mean you should," he says.

He says that up to this point the media has been so consumed with finding ways to make things digital, that it hasn't spent enough time considering what the audience wants. "If you could make a car that's half giraffe and half car, but I'm pretty sure nobody would want to buy it. Car companies are aware of that, but

media companies don't seem to think along those lines," says Filson. With a project like this, it is critical to strike a special balance between effort and return. Shifting from page to screen, the *Toronto Star's* tablet edition offers a world of digital potential.

Tablet First

One of the greatest lessons the *Star* learned from *La Presse* was that for this project to succeed, the newspaper had to start operating "tablet first." This meant turning on its head how stories had been conceived, pitched and conveyed to audiences for 123 years. *The Star* was still committed to its print product, as well as mobile and web. But rather than producing for paper first, journalists were now writing primarily for tablet. This wasn't a move motivated simply by the fact that the tablet had all of a sudden become the *Star's* figurative favourite child. The change in workflow was required to facilitate daily production in the newsroom.

"All tablet content is repurposed for print. Nothing is done print first," says Filson. He says Michael Cooke calls it "tipping the iPad into the paper." He says, "if you do it the other way, it falls out in chunks and makes a big mess. You can't do it."

Filson learned this first hand after travelling to Montreal to produce their first trial edition at *La Presse*. He and his team arrived with a day's worth of paper content and attempted to make the first edition by slotting the content into *La Presse's* software. He says they learned quickly that it had to be tablet first. "Reverse engineering from print to tablet takes tons of editing work. Editing from tablet to print takes hardly any work at all."

“You can argue, and [*La Presse*] does, that it will make your paper better. You will have more graphics. Your stories will be broken up. They will play more attractively. You’ll be able to present content better than you did before,” says Filson. “I don’t think they’re wrong actually.”

Shifting its focus from producing news for paper to screen was a huge cultural change. To help get buy-in from staff, the *Star* sent groups of managers and staff to Montreal to observe how *La Presse* worked. The journalists were sent without managers, which allowed them to learn and ask questions “journalist-to-journalist” (Filson). Without managers looming, they had the freedom to ask critical questions without the fear of being reprimanded. The *Toronto Star* also organized a social event for its staff where the journalists from *La Presse* wore Montreal Canadiens sweaters and the *Toronto Star* tablet staff wore red shirts with “ask me anything” on them. It was an opportunity for staff to ask questions in a way that Filson says “wasn’t threatening and it wasn’t a hammer.”

This helped to get buy-in, but wasn’t exactly a clean sweep. “You’re dealing with an extremely high functioning newsroom here, so to go into something and for it to be hard and not get it right away and not be able to see what it’s going to be like on the other side is a challenge for people in a room of over-achievers,” says JP Fozo, who has been charged with training newsroom staff on tablet storytelling methods. At the same time, he says most people in the newsroom are all-in and they “just want to make this work.”

When asked what happens if any of his staff aren’t willing to buy in to the new way of doing things, Cooke says they’ll just be left behind. “They will be

encouraged and encouraged and encouraged,” he says. “But in the end we’ll sail away from that island and they will go down with whatever they will go down with.” It definitely sounds like he means business, but leaving the dissenters behind is much easier said than done in a unionized environment. He said that there aren’t many people who aren’t playing along. The ones who aren’t, he believes, will eventually catch on that if they start producing good work for the tablet, they’ll get more readers.

Stories for the Mind, Eyes and Fingers

Between the beginning of May and the end of June, the entire newsroom has been cycled through a series of training sessions that would equip them with the skills required to produce content for the tablet. Rather than pitching stories in column inches or number of words, journalists will have to tell their editor whether they think their story will make a good “clothesline” or “anchored scroll.” There are a total of seven different templates when telling stories on *Star Touch*. Journalists will now need to consider how to keep the “the eyes, the mind and the fingers engaged” (Fozo).

“The mind we’ve been doing for a long time,” says Fozo, referring to how audiences consume print media. He says that journalists don’t have to worry too much about catering for the eyes because of all of the designers and art directors they now have on staff. “Fingers. That’s the one that sometimes we don’t think about and when you go into an app you really need to engage touch,” he says.

Fozo started on the project in December 2014 to help guide journalists and editors through the process of learning how to tell stories on the tablet.

Transforming the ways the entire newsroom thinks about storytelling couldn't be done all at once, but it needed to be done efficiently, considering the product was set to launch the following September.

The project management method used for training staff on the tablet edition resembled some of the techniques described in the book *Scrum*. A copy sits on a bookshelf behind where the editorial team meets every day for story meeting. *Scrum* is a lean management philosophy that allows organizations to complete large projects on short timelines. When using the scrum technique, projects are broken down into sprints. This is how they work:

At the beginning of each cycle there is a meeting to plan the Sprint. The team decides how much work they think they can accomplish during the next two weeks. They'll take the work items off that prioritized list of things that need to be done and often just write them out on sticky notes and put them on the wall. The team decides how many of those work items they can get done during this sprint. At the end of the Sprint, the team comes together and show what they've accomplished during the time they've collaborated (Sutherland 15).

Sprints allow teams to accomplish work in a set amount of time. If they are unsuccessful at completing everything they set out to do at the beginning of the sprint, they start over, but recalibrate expectations.

The *Toronto Star* broke tablet instruction into a total of 12 two-week sprints, one for each section of the paper. For each team, Fozo says there is a week 0 in which he reviews with the team the various storytelling formats. Once they know

the different formats and know what's expected of them, they can hit the ground running at the beginning of the sprint.

When the sprints begin, he works closely with the editors, deputy editors, and any reporters who needed to talk over the new storytelling format. "We would have a lot of breakout meetings, whiteboard sessions, storyboarding, and discussions about what shape the story might take, because you need to do that before you report," he says.

"The whole exercise falls apart if you're just retrofitting stories that are written in a way that we always wrote them," he says. He says that it is possible for a story to work with just words, but then it's just a story. Planning ahead "just makes the outcome that much better."

Planning is critical for tablet production, but every journalist knows that producing news is often a reactionary sport. The City section was in its second week of sprints during the case study period. For this particular section, planning ahead is a challenge because so much of its content is breaking news or live events. "What happens when a video of Rob Ford emerges of him smoking crack. They will have to blow up their finished product and put something together quickly," says Tanis Fowler, a senior producer for *Star Touch*. "We're still trying to figure out how to manage a situation like this." A major part of the sprints isn't just learning how to tell stories on the app, but it's also an opportunity for journalists and their editors to work through different possible scenarios they may encounter when the product goes live.

Once teams completed their sprint, they're expected to continue producing content for the tablet even though it won't be going live until September. That's why the sprints have been come to known as "Hotel California" in the newsroom. Because, just like the final two lines of the famous Eagles song "You can check-out any time you like, but you can never leave."

Fozo says he has three goals when he does his sprints. First, is to teach the basics of storytelling on the new platform, but to do so in a way that maintains the *Star's* journalistic standards. His second goal is to master production with each of the teams. His third goal is to set expectations for design excellence. As a highly visual and interactive medium, design will be critical for the future success of this project.

Establishing Design Rigour

Considering the importance of design, the lead designer was hired and brought into the project quite late. Fadi Yaacoub, head of design for the *Toronto Star's* tablet edition, was hired in March, 2015 from CBC/Radio-Canada in Montreal where he had spent 12 years working in design for television broadcasting. One of his first jobs at the *Star* was to develop the look and feel for the app. He then had to hire the designers, coach them and start providing direction that would eventually lead to the "design excellence" which was needed for this product to succeed.

Yaacoub's method for achieving design excellence is to provide consistent and honest feedback. During the first two months of spring, Yaacoub would connect his iPad to a television screen in the newsroom and review all of that day's test screens with the production team. "I was criticizing every single screen. It was tough

for everyone,” he says. But he says that he told them from the beginning “I’m not here to judge you as a person. I am judging your work.” He says that when he criticizes their work, he doesn’t just tell them that he doesn’t like it. Instead he tells them why he doesn’t like it. By doing this, it appears as though he’s created an environment in which his design team want to impress him.

“The challenge first, was for me, how to be the bridge between the culture they have already and the design culture,” says Yaacoub. “So, if you asked me what was really my challenge here, it was to establish a design culture.” But to accomplish this, it is critical that all departments be working in tandem.

“Collaboration is the key, the master key here,” he says.

The Tie that Binds: Process

“The days of the lone wolf reporter are gone,” says Paul Woods, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, communicating and planning. Training the journalists, editors, tablet producers and designers is just a piece of the transformation. But getting all of the parts of a newsroom moving in tandem that now produce news for the “mind, eyes and fingers” is the real challenge.

A system of processes had to be created to ensure smooth operation between the tablet production team and the rest of the newsroom, along with the satellite bureaus at Queen’s Park and Toronto City Hall as well as the *Star’s* correspondents in Ottawa and Montreal (not to mention the paper’s “army” of freelancers and daily contributors).

Digital editor Jonathan Kuelein has the sole task of sorting out newsroom processes. First he had to produce a report on how the project might work at the

Star based on the *La Presse* experience. Seven months after submitting that report, he and his team are finally putting his theories into practice. “I’m shocked to see that they are still following some of that plan now,” he says. But this is also a work in progress. Kuelein’s workflows are living documents that continue to evolve as the team attempts to perfect them by the October start of publication deadline.

It’s Kuelein’s job to consider the different variables in the project and how they fit into daily production. Variables include things like staffing, technical resources, time and shift turnovers during the 19-hour tablet production day. He explains,

This is something I’ve been revising for a while now. Based on what our projected number of screens per day per section are, based on our number of staff, based on what their levels of expertise are, based on all of these different variables, then I have basically been coming up with what it’s going to take on the production side to get everything done on any given day at any given time. This is 14 pages.

Ensuring all staff have somewhere to sit further complicates matters. As the production day will be split into two shifts, it would be a waste of resources to buy new desks and computers for everyone. “So it’s basically going to be hot seats,” he says. “As soon as somebody gets out, within half an hour somebody else is going to be sitting down.”

He approaches each time he adjusts the workflow like a science experiment. “We try and execute it and then we make changes and then we try and execute it then we make changes, until we hone it down into what we really need to do,” says

Kuelein. “I’ve actually come up with mathematical formulas for how long it should take for things to get done.”

He says that it helps having people in the team, like *Star Touch* senior producer Tanis Fowler, who have extensive print experience in production. Not only do they have a good grasp on how the newsroom works, they are also adaptable. That is ideal for this kind of work, which is a daily exercise in trial and error.

“Every step of the process I’ve thought ‘this is never going to work.’ And then it does,” says Fowler.

On the bright side they have had months to figure it out, and still have a few more to go but there’s one downfall to a long trial period. “Some of this stuff, you know, I want to take it and show it off to everybody and be like ‘look at how awesome this is.’” The reality is that most of the test pieces they created in the trial period will never see the light of day. “It’s just practice,” he says, “which is a shame - but it’s all part of the process.”

Analysis

With three months to go until launch, changing newsroom culture to prioritize screen over paper has been and continues to be the greatest challenge the *Star* faces. It continues to benefit from lessons learned by *La Presse*, but still faces variables that could upset a smooth transition

Enabler: Be Transparent, A little Sneaky and Tone down the Enthusiasm

As advised by *La Presse*, the *Star* made communication and transparency a priority during this newsroom transformation. “We wanted to over communicate

this,” says Filson. “We did town halls until we heard a complaint that people were complaining about too many town halls.”

In addition to the town halls, they have weekly newsroom committee meetings made up of one staff member from each department. During the meetings, Filson provides updates on the project. The people who sit in on these meetings jokingly referred to themselves as “gossips and moles.” As “moles” these individuals spend time observing and listening to their peers talk about the tablet product. At the meetings they would “gossip” about what is and isn’t working to help resolve or prevent issues. Following meetings, they would disseminate important information to staff. Though their nickname may imply sneakiness and deception, this was really just a harmless way of making sure all levels of the newsroom were informed and on the same page during different stages of the transformation.

With transparency also comes honesty. “We said ‘I don’t know’ tons of times” says Filson. “That was different for us, to be that candid.”

As a leader in the newsroom, this was a challenge for Cooke. “I don’t have to get out of my hammock to put out a newspaper,” he says. “But creating a tablet is a completely different game, one that everyone is learning about at the same time.” Cooke says that this required him to change his leadership style. Where he has always been the expert in creating the product, he has hired a handful of new staff members to develop expertise beyond his own. Now, he says, “leadership is support, encouragement, honesty and making sure that we all have the right resources.”

To help get buy-in from staff, Filson enlisted two staff members as mentors. This strategy failed because the staff members they chose didn’t have enough

experience with the product. As a result they were able to follow through on their role as messengers, but not as mentors for staff learning the tablet.

Despite these weekly meetings and a failed attempt at enlisting mentors, Filson says that if he were to do anything differently, he would have picked more influential people in the newsroom and expose them to what the team was doing earlier on in the process. This would have meant less of a sales job, and more just saying “look, we’re just doing this. Let’s figure out how to do it.”

Having been in this newsroom since the launch of *thestar.ca* Filson cautions against too much enthusiasm for digital projects. “I think too often digital stuff has been sold as an exciting transformation that’s going to take us into the future,” Filson says. “There’s been hype fatigue because people have been hyping digital solutions since I was hired.”

This theory is echoed in a Harvard Business Review article published long before tablet technology existed. In their piece entitled “Implementing New Technology”, Leonard-Barton and Kraus explain “novel and exotic technologies are especially vulnerable to hype.” They say that too much hype often results in disillusionment by employees “when much touted innovations perform below expectations” (Leonard-Barton and Kraus).

Block: Unexpected dissenters

It is reasonable to assume that a “legacy block” when implementing technological change might be legacy staff. It only makes sense that the older people are, the more resistant to technological change they might be - seeing as older generations have had to get used to the digital revolution, unlike their millennial

counterparts who were born into it. If the theory were true, those most resistant to the *Star's* tablet project would have been the newsroom's veterans. Yet, this isn't the case at all.

"Some of the young people, and by young I mean 29, have had great difficulty moving from writing a 55-inch feature to doing a four-part dossier on the tablet," says Cooke. "They truly believe a 55-inch feature is superior journalism."

"They cover that in the false cloak of standards and quality of journalism as though this can't be quality and long text is. I think there's obviously room for both," says Cooke. He enjoys reading the *New Yorker*, he adds, but it doesn't mean he can't appreciate a shorter read.

Several managers suggested that older staff might be more adaptable because the industry has been in flux for years and they are used to that. For some younger journalists who have only been in the business for a few years and just starting to master their beat, the change may be harder to accept.

"Yeah. We didn't see that coming," said one manager.

Legacy Block: Salaries and Compensation

A new generation in the workforce also poses a challenge when it comes to compensation. Cooke says that he's paying the new hires three quarters of what the print journalists are paid, which has caused some tension in the newsroom between management, and veteran reporters unhappy with the tiered pay structure.

There is a belief by *Toronto Star* management that they can't pay print legacy rates that Cooke says "were built by unions years ago when print was turning 32 per cent ROIs and papers were rich and just money machines." So, new digital

journalists are hired and paid lower salaries while print journalists are still paid legacy rates. It has created an imbalance in the newsroom. People know about it and many don't think it's fair.

Cooke relates it to two people on the same production line. The one has been there for 30 years and he's making \$100,000 per year. The other just arrived, is doing the same job, and is making \$80,000. "The grandfathered rate is not a new notion," says Cooke. "But here, because of our institutional sense of social justice and fairness, it seems to be unfair that we're doing what we criticize other people for doing."

Star journalists protested this "two-tier pay regime" and recent layoffs in the spring of 2014, by removing their bylines from stories (Canadian Press "Torstar Headed for More Changes after Harlequin Sale"). The issue has since been temporarily resolved with the union. For the time being the *Star* has agreed to not create a new job category of "digital reporter." Instead new staff will be hired on as temporary staff, until its current staff contract expires in 2016 (Bradshaw "Torstar, Union Reach Deal over 'Digital Jobs'"). Cooke says that if there was going to be one issue that would keep coming up with the union, this would be it.

In their 1999 paper "Online Staffers: Superstars or Second Class Citizens?" published in the *Newspaper Research Journal*, Singer, Tharp and Haruta surveyed U.S. daily newspapers on compensation for their online journalists, receiving responses from editors at 184 different daily newspapers. They discovered that "if people with online expertise are indeed walking right into high-paying jobs, this study would indicate they're probably not going to work for newspapers" (Singer,

Tharp and Haruta 43). The study found that while some online managers were paid similar salaries as their print equivalent, “many earned less and are at a lower level in the newspaper hierarchy” (43). Their 1999 study concludes “the perception among online editors that they and their staffs are seen as second-class citizens demands immediate management attention before the challenge and excitement of doing something new devolves into a routine of overwork laced with bitterness and, before long, burnout” (45).

Seeing as this disparity has persisted for almost two decades, Cooke might be right. This may just be a reoccurring issue until legacy journalists have cycled through the system into retirement. Until then, however, this two-tiered system risks tainting the culture around digital projects, rather than infusing it with the enthusiasm Cooke so clearly expects from his staff. It also means that top-notch talent needed to produce the tablet may end up looking for better-paying jobs outside of the newsroom environment.

Block: Paper Still Exists

When the *Star* launched the tablet project, it made very clear to readers that it would not be abandoning its print product, as *La Presse* was planning to do at the time. This means that a daily front-page discussion about A1, traditionally the most coveted real estate for journalists, will keep its spot on the agenda at the daily story meeting.

The *Star*'s front page is comprised of the “black line,” which is the headline at the top of the page; the “Barbie,” a fun story that is more water cooler story than hard news; the “splash,” which is the photograph or art; and the “stick” which is the

serious story for the day, which Cooke has been known to call “the softwood lumber stories.” Despite having committed to being a tablet-first publication, and working hard to change the mindset of its journalists, print culture is re-enforced by having a daily discussion about what will appear in each of these spots on A1.

For a dyed-in-the-wool news editor like Cooke, whose first byline made from hot metal still sits on his desk, the A1 discussion is a daily ritual. But newsrooms looking to nurture a digital-first culture, might find it helpful to consider the impact of these lingering traditions and what messages they send to staff (until, of course, landing a “first-screen” story is just as prestigious as landing a spot on A1).

Caution: Maintaining Relationship with Product Developer (*La Presse*)

To ensure smooth adoption of the tablet software by the *Star’s* newsroom, it maintained a close relationship with *La Presse* through the transformation process. Staff from *La Presse* have been welcomed into the newsroom to help communicate the merits of the product, as well as provide instruction on how to use it. However, one interview subject said that the *Star* learned that it needs to be careful with how much involvement *La Presse* has in the project, so it isn’t perceived that *La Presse* is running the *Toronto Star* newsroom.

Enabler: Nurturing Design Culture with pods not silos

For newsrooms considering a screen-first digital strategy, there is no overstating the importance of fostering a culture that values visual design as much as it does the printed word. As observed at the *Star*, for a screen-first platform like *Star Touch* to succeed, more planning is required by editors in the preliminary

stages of assigning a story and journalists must have a vision of their stories before they go out to cover them.

To ensure design is central to newsroom processes, but also to create efficiencies in the workflow, the *Toronto Star's* tablet team is organized so that tablet news producers and designers are integrated and working together in teams, rather than having the designers siloed in one particular section of the newsroom.

Yaacoub says creating a design culture like this would be the greatest challenge in his position as head of design on *Star Touch*. He emphasizes the importance of developing a strong relationship with all section heads.

“Collaboration is key,” he says.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges with this project, the *Toronto Star* continues to be a highly functioning newsroom grounded in the same journalism that has been at its core for 124 years. “I don’t want to sugar coat it. There’s been ups and downs and things that worked really well and things that we’ll never ever do again,” says Fozo. “But all in all the newsroom is onboard with telling good stories.”

As it continues to work on getting buy-in from its newsroom staff, the *Star* has to work on its audiences. Since the *Toronto Star* launched its app on September 15, 2015, has been downloaded 200,000 times. But its 26,000 daily users with an engagement time of an average of 22 minutes per day is a far cry from it’s goal of 180,000 daily readers by the end of 2016 (Sharp). As the tablet struggles to find audiences, *Toronto Star's* parent company continues to absorb losses.

In February 2016 Torstar's shares were trading 70 per cent below a year earlier. It's the second-worst performing North American newspaper stock next to Postmedia, which dropped 86 per cent in the same period (Chicago Tribune). In March 2016, it reported a net quarterly loss of \$235 million, after \$213 million write-down on its assets (Bradshaw "Torstar Continues Digital Shift Amid Fourth-Quarter Loss").

In January, it announced that it would close and sell its printing plant in Vaughan, Ontario. As a result, two hundred and twenty full-time jobs and 65 part time jobs were cut. It also announced 15 jobs from the circulation department, 13 jobs cuts to its newsroom, ten of those positions from the tablet team (Brownell). In March, publisher John Cruickshank stepped down from his position as publisher.

Only six months after its launch, it's too soon to tell how *Star Touch* will fair in the long term. However, before questioning the *Star's* tablet experiment based on slow audience uptake and staff cuts, there are several factors to consider. First, job cuts don't always mean failure. Sometimes they are a cost-saving measure made possible by finding efficiencies in daily processes. Second, this product is essentially a container for the same journalism, driven by the Atkinson principles, which turned the *Star* into Toronto's largest newspaper. The fact that the product has been slow to gain traction with audiences might have more to do with the audience's reticence in developing a new daily ritual rather than the quality of the product.

Perhaps the audience just needs more time. As Christensen writes in the concluding chapter of the *Innovator's Dilemma*, "the pace of progress that markets demand or can absorb may be different from the progress offered by technology.

This means that products that do not appear to be useful to our customers today (that is, disruptive technologies) may squarely address their needs tomorrow” (C. M. Christensen 258). He says that with this in mind, audience data can be helpful when making decisions connected to sustaining innovations but “it may provide misleading data for handling disruptive ones” (258).

If the *Star* fails to meet its 180,000 daily-opens benchmark by the end of the year and audiences continue to resist the lure of this new morning ritual, perhaps the paper will have to focus its energies on its other screen offerings. If this does happen the tablet will not have been a complete loss. Through this project the *Star* has proven that it can effectively implement massive procedural change in a short amount of time. It has also made major strides in transforming a newsroom culture that was once steeped in print traditions to one that now operates screen first. In the mean time, however, *Star Touch* will get a further push from Torstar Inc., which will invest another \$10 million in the product in the 2016 fiscal year.

Chapter Six: *La Presse*

Preamble

The main entrance to *La Presse* is a small door along St-Laurent Boulevard in Old Montreal. Surrounded by cobblestone streets, bakeries, galleries and just a few blocks from Notre Dame Basilica, this area is a popular spot for tourists visiting the city. But it's also an area saturated with potential news stories. The *La Presse* newsroom is just a stone's throw from the city courthouse and a short walk to city hall.

It's mid-February, 2016 and the entrance currently sits tucked behind metal scaffolds and plywood, which makes it hard to find. Luckily a square red sign that reads "*La Presse*" pokes out over the wood and metal. On the other side of the door is a small lobby with a high ceiling. A wall is covered with television screens filled with images promoting the paper and its digital offerings. On the other side of yet another glass door is a giant newsroom so big and so bright that it almost takes your breath away. The modern-looking space is painted stark white, with dozens of white pendent lights hanging from the ceiling, and three of four walls are filled with windows. The room is divided into three stories by two platforms that jut out of the south-facing wall. The hard news team works on the ground floor, the soft news team works on the first platform, and the second platform is where tablet production takes place. *La Presse* has been working out of this space since May, 2015. Before that, it was in the old *La Presse* Building next door.

Until recently this room was literally steeped in newspaper ink -- residue from a time when *La Presse* was responsible for its own printing. Where there is

now a span of cubicles, once sat two giant printing presses that spanned the length of the room. When the presses ran, people say it shook the entire building and the sidewalks outside.

La Presse closed its printing operation in 2003 when it outsourced the work to TC Transcontinental with a 15-year contract. It searched the globe for a buyer for its presses with no success. In the end they were melted down so the metal could be sold and repurposed for something else.

Since it stopped printing its own papers, *La Presse* has transformed itself into a publication known around the world for its graphic design work and most recently for a digital experiment that would end a 130-year tradition of putting out the day's paper. In April 2013, *La Presse* launched its tablet app *La Presse+* to little fanfare. Three years later, it says more people are reading the app than ever read the paper edition. On January 1, 2016 it broke its printing contract with Transcontinental two years early (at a cost of \$31-million). They still do business together on the Saturday edition, but aside from this, *La Presse* is now a digital media company.

When *La Presse* launched its iPad app with the intention of eventually phasing out the print edition, some journalists worried the paper would lose its journalistic influence. Legitimately so. *La Presse's* office building is surrounded by cafes filled with newspapers on their tables and in their magazine racks. The iPad edition, in this case, is an invisible medium. People aren't reminded of it in public spaces or on newspaper stands. As well, there is the question of whether the iPad creates a barrier for people who aren't able to afford the technology to access the publication. But according to CRTC data from the fall 2015, 49 per cent of Canadians

owned a tablet in 2014, which jumped 10 per cent from the year before (Government of Canada "Smartphone and Tablet Ownership on the Rise").

Despite not being something that its audiences will find on a coffee shop table, or something they might kick on their stoops as they leave their houses in the morning, *La Presse+* has established itself as a legitimate source for news in the city. A week before the case study period it published an interview with a man who alleged legendary Quebec filmmaker Claude Jutra was a pedophile. It had ripple effects across the city and the province, resulting in the renaming of city parks and streets. As well, other media cited *La Presse+* as the source of the story.

While many speculate whether the tablet is a viable platform for Canadian news companies, this 130-year-old newspaper company is adamant that it is. It still struggles internally with the challenges that naturally come from implementing a large-scale innovation project. But with record-breaking audiences as of February 2016, this tablet-first newspaper is still in the business of producing news that matters to the city of Montreal and for its growing tablet-equipped audience.

Introduction

In terms of reinventing itself for the digital age, *La Presse* is, in a sense, the unicorn of Canadian legacy media companies. Not only is it one of the very few legacy media companies that has successfully "disrupted from within" by almost completely replacing its legacy product with one that accesses both new and underserved markets (the illusive 24-55 demographic). It has also done so with a platform on which few others have succeeded. From the outside looking in, *La*

Presse seems to have made a relatively seamless transition to its tablet edition, *La Presse+* from its printed past.

There are few other newspapers in the world that have made a true go of a tablet edition. News Corporation launched the first iPad news app, *The Daily*, on February 2, 2011. It was a joint venture between Rupert Murdoch's News Corps and Apple, which charged a weekly subscription of 99 cents. Despite a strong set of staff writers from publications like the *New Yorker* and *Forbes*, and an investment of \$60-million in developing the product, the tablet edition caved almost two years later. Murdoch explained that the app was shut down because it "could not find a large enough audience quickly enough to convince us the business model was sustainable in the long-term" (Thier).

Like many other first-generation news apps, *The Daily* had a pay wall. But *La Presse* had a different strategy. It had its sights set on a mass audience. That is why, when it launched on April 18, 2013 after investing \$40 million in developing the product, it offered *La Presse+* for free.

"Do you think GM would pay to have an ad in a publication, in a Montreal French market, if we only had 35,000 subscribers," says *La Presse* president Guy Crevier. "They would say 'come back and see us when you are a mass medium.'"

Unlike *The Daily*, *La Presse* has had tremendous success with its tablet edition, *La Presse+*. In mid-February 2016, it says it has more readers for the tablet edition than it ever had in the newspaper's 131-year history. Crevier says he knew that in 1971 the paper's daily circulation averaged 21,000 subscribers. Its highest

print circulation was 207,000, which came shortly after implementing more aggressive marketing tactics in 2000.

At the time of this case study in mid-February 2016, *La Presse+* had an average of 243,000 daily downloads (Crevier). Many in the industry find it hard to believe that *La Presse+* secures this many daily readers, but Crevier says his digital circulation numbers are formally audited just as print circulation has always been audited. But he says that his digital analytics are more precise than print circulation data could ever be. The technology allows it to track the demographic and behaviour of its readers, so he know that they skew younger (46 per cent of readers are the highly-coveted 25-54 demographic), they have high household incomes, and they engage with the product for an average of 40 minutes on weekdays. This is an enticing proposition for today's advertisers, unlike print advertisers who never knew who and how many people read the advertisements in the paper.

"That means that not only are we a mass media, but we are a mass media that is much stronger than the newspaper has been in over 131 years," says Crevier.

A year after the launch of *La Presse+*, *La Presse's* parent company, Power Corp., announced that it plans to end its the printed edition. It took longer than hoped, but on January 1, 2016 *La Presse* went digital only, aside from its Saturday publication, which has a reach of 136,000 copies (Bradshaw "Quebec's *La Presse* to Scrap Weekday Print Edition to Focus on App"). The tablet is now the company's primary focus with anticipated revenues of \$75-80 million in 2016.

Crevier says *La Presse+* will continue with its mobile and web offerings, not because they are lucrative but because they serve their audience in different ways.

However, it is important to note that after developing its mobile app for more than 15 years, it brings in a mere \$1 million a year and *Lapresse.ca* generates between \$9 and \$10 million per year.

La Presse+ has been a huge success in creating a new mass medium that targets a distinct audiences, attractive to advertisers. That has come with challenges. Despite being ahead of other news organizations in implementing a digital strategy, it still must contend with the cultural and technological challenges that inevitably come with making significant changes to a legacy product that has been ingrained in the daily lives of both its staff and the city it serves for over 131 years .

What follows is a case study that explores how this newspaper company created an environment in which it could hit the delete key on its traditional product and reinvent it for the modern age. Three years after its launch, *La Presse's* tablet edition has been accepted by advertisers, audiences and within its own production environment.

The Decision to Disrupt

At the official unveiling of the iPad on January 27, 2010, Apple CEO Steve Jobs, clad in his trademark black turtleneck and loose-fitting jeans, asked his audience, “is there room for a third category of device in the middle. Something that’s between a laptop and a smartphone?” To create such a category, he says it needs to be better at doing some key things. Better than the laptop and the smartphone. Minutes later he introduces the iPad, which promises to be just that device (iPad Insider).

“It’s the best browsing experience you’ve ever had,” he says, iPad in hand as he leans back into a black leather chair on the stage. As these words fall out of his mouth, the *New York Times* appears on the iPad, which has been projected on a screen behind him. He proceeds to navigate the online newspaper, showing audiences just how satisfying scrolling through articles and looking at images can be using this new device.

Yann Pineau, vice president of continuous improvement at *La Presse*, says that Crevier knew immediately after the iPad was unveiled that this new platform would be the future of the publication. Not only that, he knew in 2010 that he wanted to replace the print product with it as soon as 2013. Pineau was charged with researching how *La Presse* might use the new platform, which took him to New York to visit the group developing the *Daily* app and to Sweden to visit the Bonier Media Group.

Pineau soon discovered that there was potential to create a new mass medium on the tablet, but *La Presse* would have to do it. This would come with a \$40-million price tag over the two years leading up to the app’s release, along with two significant challenges. Management would have completely transform its newsroom to work in a new way. Meanwhile it would be faced with the significant task of recreating from scratch the daily ritual that *La Presse* had become in the lives of its readers. But first it needed to get buy-in from advertisers.

Advertiser Buy-In: A Platform Worth Paying For

La Presse knew from the beginning that if this project was going to succeed it needed to be developed not just for audiences, but for advertisers as well. Jean-

Charles Rocha, senior director of advertising and sales, says that the "marriage of content and advertising" was critical.

"Six months before the launch of the iPad we knew that it would bring more emotion than the other media," says Rocha. "The tablet had the potential for storytelling but also for immersive experiences."

La Presse knew what they were capable of on the tablet. Now it was just a matter of convincing advertisers. To get advertisers on board *La Presse* involved them in the process of developing the app, made it easy for them to create the artwork, and offered incentives when it first launched.

Rocha says that *La Presse* performed a number of focus groups with its advertisers. They started by creating 1400 ads for internal testing purposes. This allowed *La Presse* to work with advertisers to figure out the best ways to make the ads interactive and effective. This process allowed them to narrow down their collection of advertising templates. Advertisers now have a total of 26 templates to choose from.

Rocha says that it was important for the app not to be a burden for advertisers. In efforts to ease possible friction between advertisers and having to develop these "interactives" *La Presse* has taken a number of steps to educate potential clients. The central hub for this education is *La Presse's* Creative Kit (creativekit.lapresse.ca).

The Creative Kit is an online hub that tells advertisers everything they need to know about advertising on *La Presse+*. It includes tutorial videos, tools for building ads, tips for best practices, and an outline of technical specifications. In

addition to developing the Creative Kit, *La Presse* held two-hour training sessions with over 600 agencies and direct clients in Montreal and another 100 in Toronto.

There are three ways advertisers can produce artwork for *La Presse+*. First, they can create it entirely on their own with support from the Creative Kit. Alternatively, they can provide static design elements to *La Presse* to assemble and make interactive. Or *La Presse* can produce the “interactives” for clients from scratch. This ensures that producing the artwork for this new platform is as easy as possible.

Rocha says that when *La Presse+* launched in 2013, their hope was that advertisers would like the experience so much that they would continue advertising on the new platform. So the key was to get them advertising on the tablet from the very beginning.

To do so, *La Presse* had an introductory offer. If advertisers maintained their print investment in 2013, they would receive 40 per cent value of that on the tablet edition for six months. The offer came with several conditions. Rocha says the most important of those conditions was that advertisers had to try a range of different ad formats. This allowed them to see what the app had to offer.

Rocha says he was expecting a quick take-up from advertising agencies and large companies. One thing that surprised him was just how fast local advertisers bought into the new platform.

Along with former print clients, Rocha says that *La Presse* has managed to secure new clients based on *La Presse+*'s content. The publication's lifestyle section, *Pose* (which was created specifically for *La Presse+*), has attracted a number of food,

fashion, cosmetic and travel clients. He says these advertisers weren't attracted to print, at least not for the past few years, because advertising in a newspaper didn't fit with their brand.

Once *La Presse* secures an advertising client on the tablet it attempts to retain them by providing detailed performance reports. The reports tell advertisers how many people viewed their ad for one second or longer, how many people interact with the ad, and click through rates to the advertisers' websites. In addition to these metrics, advertisers are able to see the metrics of other companies that advertised in the same section. This allows them to compare ads and determine best practices. Rocha says this creates a "system for guaranteed improvement" for clients.

Rocha says that past clients pay around the same advertising rates as they did for print to respect their history with the company. New advertisers pay more. This is justified by the fact that *La Presse+* has a higher circulation than the print product, and they are able to "prove" to advertisers how well their ads score with audiences.

There is no formal relationship between the Star Touch and *La Presse+* advertising teams. But Rocha says that having the Toronto Star in the tablet market has come with some benefits. He says that some advertisers will share artwork between the two publications. Rocha says that Star Touch has also helped *La Presse+* get more clients in the Toronto market by raising awareness of tablet as a platform for advertising.

Having advertisers involved with the development of the product from the beginning played a significant role in *La Presse+'s* initial and current success. But the

fact that *La Presse+* is now achieving record circulation numbers would not have been possible if the product didn't revolve around its most important client – the audience.

Audience Buy-In: Make the audience the core & everything else will follow

For this project to work, *La Presse* ensured its development was completely audience-centered. Pineau says *La Presse* conducted a great deal of audience research to determine what shape the tablet app might take.

It created customer research and marketing unit in the early stages of the project. Pierre Arthur who leads this group says this was a new approach for *La Presse*. It wasn't needed for the print product, which had been done the same way with reasonable success for 130 years. As well, he says they weren't just recreating the old product. They were "starting with a clean sheet of paper," So learning and knowing what the audience wants became a critical part of the puzzle.

"There were many reasons why we were successful, but certainly one of them is an appropriate place for the consumer at the table," says Arthur.

There were many phases in *La Presse+'s* development, including a significant amount of brainstorming within the newsroom, but as the product came together, it was put through the rigours of user testing. Test users would spend 25 minutes reading the app on an iPad in a reading lounge created by Arthur and his team. Participants would share their feedback, but they were also observed with cameras that had been installed overhead. From this testing management learned a great deal about the product. For example, if there were too many photos in a photo gallery or if they were boring, people would tune out. People would also tune out if

the text was too long. As well, Arthur and his team could watch as some readers swiped continuously through an edition, bringing home just how important it was to produce tablet articles that caught readers' attention.

Arthur says the secret to user testing was to make sure each participant came in and provided feedback four or five times. "The first time they come in they were a little bit overwhelmed and, I hate to say it, but inebriated by the experience. So they give you outstanding scores and there's no critical eye to the material they are seeing," he says. "By the third or fourth visit, then the amazement had died away."

To ensure not all of the focus of the new app was on design, *La Presse* also placed an emphasis on the quality of journalism that would be included in *La Presse+*. The content, though less text-heavy and more visual, would uphold the same level of journalistic standards *La Presse* had established for itself over the preceding century. As a result, the iPad app included all of the sections that had been part of the printed newspaper. As well, *La Presse* created a new investigative team that Pineau says would help reinforce that *La Presse* was still a source of serious journalism, despite moving away from its traditional platform.

The resulting product is a slick app that now contains all of the news that was once crammed into the paper, and then some. The opening screen features a number of the best photographs and articles from that day's edition. Readers have the choice of swiping their way through the app page by page, or choosing their desired starting point by tapping on one of the home screen headlines.

Audience Buy-In Tactic: Making Use of the Communications Team

Despite the company's intense desire to get rid of its print product, *La Presse* knew that disrupting its audience's daily traditions would have to be handled gently. The communications team played an important role in phasing out the print edition by clearly communicating the changes to the audience. Pineau says they are kept in the loop on all changes and they always try to prepare for any complaint they may receive regarding any changes.

Pineau says *La Presse* spent two and a half years preparing for the end of the print product. Based on feedback it received from audiences, *La Presse* even extended the life of the print product by two years to ensure audiences were ready for the change.

By February 2016, audiences had bought into the new tablet app. So there was little fallout for *La Presse* when it followed through on ending its 130-year print tradition.

Selling the concept to audiences was one thing. Implementing the project internally and getting buy-in from staff was something else. Like the *Toronto Star*, this newsroom needed to convert a journalistic culture that valued paper and long-form text into one that had an equal appreciation for digital content and visual design. Working in *La Presse's* favour was a similar culture shift it undertook in the early 2000s when it redesigned the paper and its contents to grow its circulation.

Staff Buy-In: A Head start on cultural change

La Presse made a significant shift in the early 2000s when it began emphasizing visuals in its print edition and eventually on its web site. This laid the

groundwork for yet another shift in newsroom culture in 2010 when Guy Crevier started transforming the publication into a tablet-focused operation.

One of its first major changes came in 2003, when the paper introduced a daily two full-page spread that would appear on pages A2 and A3. This meant that the newsroom needed to produce enough features to fill that space seven days a week. Then the publication shifted to more visuals and photographs on its pages. This began transforming *La Presse* into a more visual publication. It meant getting its journalists to appreciate the value of improved graphic design and photographs.

“It was a struggle to make that accepted by most of the newsroom people,” says Pineau. “Because, for them, it was heresy to have a picture instead of a headline at the top of the page.” But management, which he was at the time, wanted to be more visual – so that’s what they did.

By 2005, the newspaper had 20 graphic designers, a large number for a newspaper of *La Presse*’s size. Managing editor Eric Trottier recalls visiting the *New York Times* around that time and learning they only had five designers on staff. When *La Presse* made these changes he says that its readership increased, and it started to gain worldwide attention for its graphic design work. Once the changes started to pay off, management really started to get buy-in from staff.

Around the time *La Presse* redesigned its print edition, it also created a new entity called *Cyberpresse* to handle its online presence. Some like Pineau lost their web jobs and journalists were hired from web portals such MSN and Sympatico to run *Cyberpresse*. By 2008 *Cyberpresse*’s audience growth had stalled at 800,000

unique monthly visitors and it was the fourth most-visited website in Quebec (Trottier).

In 2008, to increase web traffic, Crevier returned web work to his newsroom. This was a welcome change for the 225 employees who Trottier said were getting ever-more nervous about *Cyberpresse* eventually eliminating their jobs. But with the change came great expectations from *La Presse* management. Trottier told his staff: “You wanted to be part of the future, our future is the web... so you’re going to think first for the website and after you’re going to think for the newspaper.” One year later he says that the website was up to 2.7 million unique visitors per month. “How did we do that? By [using] the quality of our newsroom,” he says.

Like most newspapers in the country, *Lapresse.ca* didn’t generate enough online revenue to compensate for the overall losses the paper was experiencing due to the rapid decline in print advertising. This eventually led the paper to develop its tablet app.

One victory for *La Presse* during this period was getting a head start on building a newsroom culture that appreciated design and digital delivery. But as it would soon learn, getting buy-in from staff on the tablet edition still came with significant challenges.

Staff Buy-In

As managing editor of hard news Alexandre Pratt recalls, staff buy-in took a long time. The newsroom wasn’t included in the initial development stages of the product. Ideas started with the technology group then rolled into the newsroom.

This was difficult for the journalists because the newsroom had always been the centre of the business. This left many journalists feeling excluded.

Pratt believes that for the first year and of half of development work there was no relationship between the newsroom and the tablet group. He thinks many of the journalists did not believe in the product to the beginning because there was nothing concrete for them to see. For them, it was just “high-level talk.”

It wasn't until the journalists were included in the brainstorming, about midpoint between the conception and the launch of the tablet edition, that they started to buy in. About three quarters of the newsroom in these brainstorming sessions were asked questions like “if money were no object, what would you do.” They were asked how they wanted to tell stories, and how many people they needed to do the job well. Pratt said that management followed through on many of the staff suggestions brought up in these meetings. Then, Pratt says they started producing small editions with primitive tools. At this point the newsroom started to feel part of the project.

Once *La Presse* developed the platform, it faced similar challenges as the *Toronto Star* discovered when it started asking journalists to start thinking tablet first. The same legacy culture persisted at *La Presse*, despite having made strides toward a more visual product in the early 2000s. Journalists still thought about stories in numbers of words. In this case, it was even more extreme. Staff at *La Presse* knew that its print edition had an expiration date. Yet management needed, journalists to have faith in the tablet edition, which hadn't proven itself as an alternative for delivering news.

A turning point for this newsroom came soon after the launch of *La Presse+* when Trottier sounded the gong that sits outside of his office and entered the middle of the newsroom with an iPad in his hand. Holding an iPad in the air, he told staff “from now on, I will read you and judge you based on what you’re going to do on this... I don’t want to read the newspaper anymore and I’m asking you to do the same.” He said that he needed to make it clear to his staff that “this was our path and this was going to be our future.”

Trottier says that they’ve met with management teams from about 30 other newspapers since 2013. He says there is a common sentiment among all of them. They are afraid of telling their journalists that they are going to change. “And I say ‘why? Why are you afraid?’” says Trottier. “Everybody in the business thinks that the journalists don’t want to change anything. Yes, but you’re the boss. Tell them that you want to change and maybe they will say yes.”

Despite a clear message from management about expectations, Pineau stresses that buy-in doesn’t happen all at once and sometimes not at all.

We don’t need to have everyone on board at the same pace and at the same time. We accept that maybe ten per cent of the people will be early adopters and fast learners. There is a chunk of 40 per cent who will see the successes of the top 10 per cent and they will want to follow and they will. And there is 40 per cent who want to buy in but they don’t know how because they are shy or they think they lack the technical skill, so we hold their hand until they get it and then they do. Then there is the bottom 10 per cent... at some point they either retire or quit, or they get on board three years later.

Pineau says that it's just the reality that some staff won't accept the changes. It's management's job to accept that and get on with it. As long as there aren't too many people resisting the change, he says they just try to let these people work on what they are good at. There are other factors as well that helped enable buy-in from staff following the launch.

Staff Buy-In tactic # 1: The Secret Weapon

Pineau says that it isn't rocket science, but what he values most in helping make this transition is a trainer, named Jean Marc Heneman. Heneman is particularly suited to the position as a former computer engineer who enjoys working with people. Most important, he's patient. "He can tell someone where the on-off button is on a computer ten times without getting angry and at the same time he can work with developers and speak their language," says Pineau. He describes Heneman as his secret weapon, because he is able to help journalists having trouble with the platform, but also able to act as their voice when speaking to programmers. This makes them feel heard and part of the process.

Staff Buy-in tactic #2: Success breeds success

For the most part, though, what Pineau and others have observed in the newsroom is that once people recognize the success of the product or their peers working on the tablet, they want to get on board.

"When you see your colleague do something great, then you want to do it," says Pratt. Almost every participant of the 13 interviews at *La Presse* said the same thing.

When the tablet launched *La Presse* had all-staff meetings once a week to highlight the work of a graphic designer or editor. “When you hit the jackpot, maybe one time every four, then everyone else wants to do it next,” says Pratt. The sessions were so effective that management is thinking about bringing them back to encourage the team to keep doing good work.

Staff Buy-in tactic #3: Staff Need to be Equipped with Tools to Succeed

Eric Trottier convinced Crevier to purchase 300 iPads for the newsroom. Some people didn’t use them, but most did, says Pineau. It was a considerable expense, but necessary because it was a tool that journalists needed to do their jobs. It also showed to his staff that he and the management were totally committed to the project. Trottier says that it made such an impact in *La Presse*’s transition that he considers this one of the most important pieces of advice that he gave to the *Toronto Star*.

Vestiges of Old Culture Still Linger

Most managers will agree that the culture has made a significant shift toward embracing the tablet. However, the old print culture does still linger. News editors Malorie Beauchemin and Martin Pelchat know this from experience, dealing with their 55 hard-news journalists every day. Pelchat says that journalists will always suggest submitting an 800-word story.

“We have reporters who come to us and offer or propose a story in pieces. We have really good reporters who take it upon themselves to be super reporters and super users of the features that were available on the tablet,” says Beauchemin.

“But we still have people that we have to convince every day to do something different.”

She suspects it is difficult for journalists who have done the same thing the same way for so long to change the way they work. Especially some of the busier journalists in the political bureaus who are producing two or three articles a day, were asked to do even more.

Leadership Buy-In: One Hundred Percent Buy-In is Critical

Both Pineau and Trottier say management buy-in on the tablet project was critical for the success of *La Presse's* transformation. As the project started to gain traction all managers had to be on board with the changes. If they weren't one hundred per cent on board, they were released from their positions. Pineau says that within the two years leading up to the launch, approximately half of the newsroom management changed.

“When I give advice to others, I tell them to get rid of the managers who don't want to change. Or – even if they hesitate to change,” says Trottier. “You won't change anything if there's too much hesitation.”

He says that getting rid of staff isn't easy, but if you want to save your company difficult decisions need to be made. “You just close your eyes and say ‘let's go,’” he says. “This is what I saw my boss doing and that's what I did. It was the only way.”

A committed management team is also important because disruption requires complete resolve and the courage to make difficult decisions. Many people

at *La Presse* talk about the transition from paper to the tablet as having to start with a fresh slate or a blank sheet of paper.

“We had to put the newspaper in the garbage and start from scratch,” says Trottier. “It was tough of course because everything that you do, it’s not good anymore.”

They also got rid of old apps. “When we introduced *La Presse+* in 2013 we already had an app on tablet, so we killed that. We also killed our .pdf paper on tablets. As soon as we had a number one app for the tablet, we killed everything else to make sure that people were going to the product we want them to go to” says Pineau. In addition to the old app they also killed a crossword app and an app for hockey.

Pineau says the decision to pull the plug on the old apps wasn’t easy. Management had doubts about getting rid of them, but unlike the *Ottawa Citizen*, which brought back its old apps after releasing the new ones, *La Presse* stayed the course. “We had some complaints from readers, maybe a few hundred,” says Pineau. “But in the end you have to focus on what is strategic for you.”

What was strategic for *La Presse* was eliminating anything that might take away from the success of their new tablet app. Not only did these apps fragment the audience for *La Presse+*, but it was also a distraction for staff being asked to focus as much energy on the tablet edition.

Ultimately, it was this need to focus on the tablet that provided the impetus to get rid of the paper. “We had some complaints about the paper and we managed

them, we replied to people. We explained. We held hands to make sure they had a nice transition to the tablet,” says Pineau.

Leadership: A Clear Vision, Commitment and Leading by Example.

One of the greatest blocks to implementing innovation is fear of failure, which is why successful innovators “rely on their ‘courage to innovate’—an active bias against the status quo and an unflinching willingness to take smart risks—to transform ideas into powerful impact” (Dyer 27). This is particularly important for *La Presse*, which aggressively pursued an unproven digital strategy.

In their book *Innovators DNA*, Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen found that “innovative companies were often led by founder entrepreneurs, leaders who excelled at discovery and who were not bashful about leading the innovation charge” (168). While Crevier may not be the founding entrepreneur of *La Presse*, he approached this change with a clear vision of what he wanted to achieve, and an unwavering commitment. Having gone through similar transitions earlier in his career he says he knew what to expect. But he warns, “there’s one point when you implement a change like this, where it is so huge and profound that you get to a point where the old culture doesn’t work and the new culture isn’t implemented. That’s the ugly part.”

His personal tactics for leading an organization through a change like this are to “Be confident, determined, and communicate well.”

A Culture That Encourages Experimentation

As *La Presse* settles into its new identity as an almost completely digital news organization, the company continues to look ahead to new ways of delivering news and what might come after the tablet app.

To help facilitate continuous innovation Dyer et al. suggest that companies should create a senior position focused on this task (168). As manager of continuous improvement, this is Pineau's job.

He says that whenever someone has an idea they would like to try, his default answer is always "yes, do it." He says that there are always budget constraints to consider, but there are also ways of experimenting that don't cost a lot of money. Often they will borrow equipment, they will make use of free trials on software, and they go to hack days (events where the tech community can network and share knowledge). As well, he says that *La Presse* journalists can spend one day a quarter working on personal projects and once a quarter Nuglif, *La Presse's* spin-off tech company, holds lab days where staff can experiment with new technologies.

To foster a truly innovative environment, employees need to know they have the freedom to fail. Managers must view failure a learning experience rather than something to fear. Jeff Bezos, Amazon billionaire and owner of the *Washington Post* told the authors of *Innovators DNA* "If the people running Amazon.com don't make some significant mistakes... then we won't be doing a good job for our shareholders because we won't be swinging for the fences" (Dyer 27).

Web editor Thomas de Lorimier arrived at *La Presse* five years ago from CBC. He describes the mood in this newsroom as "relaxed." If mistakes are made, staff

aren't made to feel bad about them. Instead he says "your boss will meet with you and ask you what happened and how can we correct it." He says it's a more scientific way of working. One staff member described the work environment as so relaxed that "it's almost to a fault, but never to the point where things are out of control."

Block: Technological Limitations

As the newsroom becomes digital, the limitations of both the available technology and the technological skills of journalists risk standing between this newsroom and innovation.

Lorimer's perspective is most likely influenced by his role as web editor, but he stresses the need for more digital literacy in the newsroom. "I don't think everyone needs to learn how to code," says Lorimer. But, he adds, it would help if more people had a greater appreciation for technology and the value it brings to the newsroom. As an example access to information requests will often result in 5,000 pages of information or 11-million-line datasets. Having data journalism skills are essential for sorting through the information, finding a story, and presenting it to the audience. As the environment becomes more digital, it is crucial to have more journalists who are comfortable navigating this more complex information environment.

La Presse is ahead of most newsrooms in its digital offerings. But as it continues to make progress and adopt new digital tools, its journalists will need to be even more proficient in learning how to use new technologies.

Lorimer demonstrated a recent automated map-making tool that he and his team had just created. What would once take a designer an hour can now take a few

minutes (using Google maps). It took about a week to develop this tool, which will ultimately save countless hours of work. Automation saves time and helps when working to deadline. Hockey games often don't end until 11:00 pm or midnight and the production deadline is 1 am. Developing more automation tools could ease deadline pressures.

Trottier says absolutely that technological limitations - not culture - are currently the biggest block in the newsroom. "It will always cost more than you think. It will take more time than what you thought and it won't give you everything that you need," he says. "We have about 300 projects for the tablet that won't be made this year because they are not able to do them. We probably could, but we would have to hire another 100 people in technology."

Research, Development and Life After Tablet

Crevier says "yes" when asked if the paper has started thinking about what comes next, with the intonation of "course we have." *La Presse* will build on its existing mobile, tablet and desktop products. But he makes it clear that it doesn't "want to take one product and push it everywhere." Instead it wants to target specific audiences with each platform and to be relevant, depending on the technology. For example, he says that for mobile, people are looking for quality more than depth.

The growing popularity of the phablet, which is a large-screened smartphone, has *La Presse* wondering whether this is its next audience. Pineau says it has developed a phablet version of the iPad app, but for strategic reasons there is so far no decision about releasing it. "We have huge time spent numbers [on the

tablet app],” says Pineau. “We are afraid that those time spent numbers will go down if we release the app for phablets because people don't have the same relationship and behaviour on phablet as they have on the tablet.” The same goes for the iPhone. He says he has seen *La Presse+* on an iPhone, but it doesn't want the product available on smaller devices because it will reduce the level of engagement its readers have with the tablet version.

Research and development is ongoing at *La Presse*. The department that developed the iPad app has been spun off into a new company called Nuglif. It is responsible for improving the existing iPad app, but also for developing new technology that will build on the company's current digital offerings. Overall, Nuglif serves two purposes. First it is where experimentation and development takes place without the distractions that come with running a newspaper. It also provides another revenue stream for the company. It is hoping that it can sell the software that runs *La Presse+* to other newspapers. Its only customer as of winter 2016 was the *Toronto Star*. But Pineau says that over the past 18 months it has had visits from many European countries, the US and Latin America, interested in purchasing the tablet software. Crevier says that he needs another two or three clients in addition to the *Star*, to maintain his technology group of 100 to 150 people. This will allow it to continue developing the app and to continue innovating for the future of digital news delivery.

Conclusion

La Presse's transition from page to screen wasn't seamless and still faces challenges internally as it converts its legacy newsroom culture into one that is

totally committed to digital delivery. However, three years after launch, with record-breaking audience numbers and a relatively healthy bottom line, this newsroom is an interesting case study for implementing similar significant innovation projects. *La Presse* had to contend with the blocks that come with being a legacy news company that meant working to create a culture among its journalists that appreciated more visual and less text-heavy storytelling.

An important conclusion from *La Presse*'s experience is the importance of buy-in at all levels of the organization when implementing a large scale innovation project. At the leadership level, a clear vision and commitment to the project sets the tone for the rest of the organization. Complete buy-in from management facilitates decision-making for the innovation and sets the tone for the rest of the staff. Complete buy-in from staff may be impossible, but as *La Presse* demonstrated, inclusion in the project, good communication and training are ways to help staff get used to new ways of doing things.

Equally important is how audience buy-in influences journalist buy-in and facilitates a cultural change toward the new product. Multiple interview participants stated that journalists become more motivated to succeed on the new platform when they see their peers succeed and when they know that audiences are actually reading their work.

Even though they are still working to get the last few staff members on board with the project, the implementation phase of *La Presse+* is complete and the company is now looking to what comes next.

This doesn't mean that this news organization has found the magic bullet to guarantee its future success. Trottier says that the sales team is making 75 per cent in advertising revenue compared to when it was both the paper and tablet. Its earnings are still strong, however, it's not enough for *La Presse* to survive on. Trottier says he's happy with what he and his team have achieved, but he needs more newspapers to follow its lead in tablet delivery, and the *Toronto Star* to succeed, or the tablet won't be as appealing to advertisers. "If we're alone like this, we're going to die," he says.

Conclusion and Key Take-Aways

As this research project comes to an end on a snowy day in early April, 2016, the Canadian newspaper landscape has changed dramatically since the project began sixteen months ago. In spring 2015, Postmedia acquired Sun Media's English print and online properties setting a new precedent for media concentration in Canada. The \$350-million deal, which was approved by Canada's Competition Bureau, meant that Postmedia would own the two major daily newspapers in Ottawa, Calgary and Edmonton (it already owned the two major dailies in Vancouver). In January, 2016 the two newsrooms in these cities merged, which means that now one newsroom produces content for two different papers. At the same time, Postmedia cut 90 jobs across the country. Three significant players in the *Ottawa Citizen* transformation project, Andrew Potter, Carl Neustaedter and Drew Gragg, were no longer with the publication as of spring, 2016. On January 1, 2016 *La Presse* finally followed through on its promise to end its weekday print edition, but not before laying off 158 people just a few months prior. Forty-three of these layoffs were newsroom staff. One hundred of the layoffs were directly tied to the termination of its weekday print edition (Bradshaw "*La Presse* to Eliminate 158 Jobs, Continue Transition to Digital Media"). At the *Toronto Star*, 13 people were laid off from its new tablet team in January, 2016. The same month, Torstar Inc. shut down the 149-year-old *Guelph Mercury*. Two months later, John Cruickshank stepped down as publisher of the *Toronto Star*, telling staff that the position was better suited to someone with "more recently acquired tools and skills" (Cruickshank).

On the surface, the Canadian newspaper industry is a bit of a grim scene. But much of the change that has taken place over the past sixteen months has actually been quite encouraging. As the country's newspapers continue to absorb the impact of shrinking print advertising revenues and an ever-declining print readership, they have made significant progress in transforming their newsrooms for a digital future. Most large Canadian dailies have implemented ambitious innovation projects designed to attract audiences on multiple platforms, including the three publications included in this project.

Shifting away from a deeply embedded print culture has been one of the greatest feats for these legacy publications. In the process they have let go of products and processes that have long defined them.

The information in this report comes from 30 first-hand accounts of those involved in three of the most significant innovation projects in Canadian newspaper history. Collectively they have helped to provide a better understanding of what variables stood in each newspaper's way as they were making change and what factors helped move the projects along. Much of the information collected is consistent with the literature.

All three publications have committed to digital strategies that knock their print product from its pedestal and prioritize news making for the screen. This confirms they are no longer locked in to a mindset that believes print can sustain them into the future based on the fact that it has been a relatively successful business since the late 1800s. As suspected, they have moved beyond the block of "pathology of sustained success" (Kung, Picard and Towse). However, blocks

associated with the print product remain. The default setting for many *La Presse* journalists is to pitch stories for print, by telling editors how many words they are going to produce. At the *Toronto Star*, discussions about page one are still part of the daily newsroom routine. Writers at the *Ottawa Citizen* often had no idea what their print stories looked like on the tablet edition until someone from the tablet production team actively sought them out and showed them. A culture where print is valued over digital products still exists in these newsrooms. It doesn't suffocate the digital strategies, but it does cause a significant amount of friction. When management consultant Peter Drucker said "culture eats strategy for breakfast," he was right.

When asked, most participants didn't say that legacy technology was a major inhibitor to innovation. Each newsroom had been equipped with relatively new computers and had the tools it needed to work efficiently on the various digital platforms. Rather than legacy technology, it is limited access to new technology that poses the greatest block for these newsrooms. Newsrooms like *La Presse* say they could do more with their digital properties if they had the staff and financial resources to develop new tools that allowed for more automation in the production of graphics, maps and charts. The *Ottawa Citizen's* mobile platform is also limited in what it is able to offer audiences because it hasn't been optimized to accommodate different mobile phone screen sizes.

The potential for internal processes to block innovation exists, but does not appear to have impeded innovation in the newsrooms studied in this project.

Rather, process was perceived as a complicated puzzle each newsroom spent a great deal of effort and resources attempting to solve.

A significant variable that most legacy newsrooms must contend with as a potential block to innovation, which wasn't included in the literature review, is their ability to adjust corporate structure to accommodate their new digital operations. Unions ensure journalists are treated fairly by their employers. However, in this role, they have the potential to limit how organizations are able to reorganize and restructure during an innovation project. The *Toronto Star* is currently working with its union to sort out how it can staff its newsroom with lower-paid digital staff. The *Star's* position is that it cannot continue paying legacy wage rates for new staff. A legitimate concern of current staff and their union is that this will create a two-tiered class system within the newsroom.

Considering the challenges they were up against, the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Toronto Star* and *La Presse's* commitment to their respective innovation projects was both impressive and inspiring. There is much to learn from these publications about how to implement a successful innovation project in a Canadian newsroom. Each case study presented a number of blocks and enablers specific to that publication, but there were also many commonalities in the findings. The following are the key findings and common themes that arose from this research project.

Key Findings

- 1. Centralization at Postmedia has inhibited newspaper innovation in Canada.**

Now that Postmedia owns a total of 150 community and daily Canadian newspapers, its scale may allow it to build larger audiences across the country making it more attractive to both print and online advertisers. Scale also allows the debt-ridden company to find cost-saving efficiencies in the business by centralizing operations. But centralization also comes at a great cost to Canadian journalism and newspapers.

Centralizing content production creates systems for content sharing at Postmedia's publications across the country, which results in diminished locally produced journalism. "Centralized news-gathering and opinions, including local news, do not add to the national debate that helps build a functioning democracy," said Unifor national president Jerry Dias in January, 2016 (Bradshaw "Postmedia Merges Newsrooms, Cuts 90 Jobs in Response to Financial Woes"). The quality of local journalism is also diminished when there is disconnect between the journalist writing a story and the copy's intended local audience. By eroding the quality of local journalism, Postmedia is self-sabotaging one of its most valuable differentiators over its digital competition.

Not only does centralization degrade local journalism, but it also has an adverse effect on innovation processes within the newsroom. Now that all Postmedia daily newspapers are intertwined with centralized content and production, change at one publication often means that the same change must also roll out at the other publications across the country. This inhibits publications from pivoting and adjusting specific parts of the company-wide innovation strategy to suit the needs of its local audience. If the *Ottawa Citizen* has wanted, for example, to change the

publishing time for its tablet edition, it would not have been possible due to its dependence on a centralized content hub.

As well, centralizing the innovation process also removes the impetus for newsrooms to innovate at the floor level. Christensen et al say that “the most innovative companies don’t relegate R&D to one unit. Instead, virtually everyone, including the top management team, is expected to come up with news ideas, which results in a democratization of innovation efforts” (Dyer, Hal B. Gregersen and Christensen 169).

By centralizing innovation, and creating a top down approach to change, Postmedia reduced the overall potential for experimentation in its own organization. As well, because it owns 45 per cent of daily newspapers in the country it has also eroded the amount of overall innovation taking place at Canadian newspapers. This doesn’t bode well for an industry that desperately needs to change and implement systems for change to keep up with the ever-evolving digital environment and compete with the ever-growing number of digital native publications and sites looking to poach its audiences.

2. Committed Leadership with Clear Vision Enables Innovation

Strong leadership is critical when implementing disruptive innovation because it is so counterintuitive. Instead of improving existing products and catering to higher end customers, it means targeting new customers with a new and lower-end product. The product is then improved over time with sustaining innovations that caters to customer needs. The idea is to secure new or underserved markets before anyone else has the chance to do so. There is high risk associated with disruption

because the products and new markets are still untested (C. M. Christensen). The only difference between *La Presse+* and a pure disruptive innovation is that disruptive technologies target the lower end of the market. Instead, *La Presse+* targets younger and more affluent audiences, which are more attractive to advertisers.

When leaders have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and are able to communicate well, it doesn't just enable the innovation, but it "energizes the process" (Adams). It also helps them stay the course when the strategy faces the inevitable naysayers.

One interview participant at *La Presse* said he thought Guy Crevier was "crazy" when he committed to developing an iPad app. *Toronto Star* editor Michael Cooke said that when a couple of guys from *La Presse* told him they were developing an iPad app to get rid of their print edition he "laughed in their faces" (Cooke). Several years later, Cooke's publication purchased *La Presse's* software and has an iPad app of its own.

As well, it is easier for managers to make difficult decisions when they know top leadership has faith in the innovation. Many of Crevier's staff didn't believe in the project at first, but they slowly bought in over time because of Crevier's commitment to the project. When *La Presse's* managing editor Eric Trottier faced the difficult task of releasing staff who weren't on board with the project, he says he knew it was the right thing to do because he was just following by example. "I saw my boss doing it and that's just what I did... it was sad for people who were leaving, but if you want to save the company you have to say 'let's go,'" says Trottier.

Strong leadership also promotes innovative thinking at the ground level by setting the tone for experimentation and rewarding new ideas. Vice president of continuous improvement Yann Pineau set this tone with staff, who know he will fund experimentation within the newsroom.

There are too many opportunities during a change like this to second-guess the strategy and pivot to something safer. It's clear from studying *La Presse's* transformation that without Crevier's style of leadership, this innovation project would not have succeeded. The project was enabled by his resolve and crystal clear vision of what he wanted the company to become.

"The real hero in this by the way is not us, the real hero is Guy Crevier," says Cooke. "If this works for us - it's Crevier that saved us, not me."

3. Newsrooms need to foster a design culture to enable successful screen delivery.

Newsrooms looking to implement screen-first digital strategies need to appreciate the value of graphic design and visual news delivery. This means having enough designers on staff to do the work. Newsrooms also need to actively foster a culture where designers are seen as part of the team.

For tablet delivery especially, strong graphic design is important because that is what catches the audience's attention. It gets them to stop swiping and draws them into a story creating longer engagement times (Olivier-Bras).

Star Touch's head of design Fadi Yaacoub says the biggest challenge he faced when he arrived at the *Toronto Star* was to "bridge between the culture they already had and design culture." Yaacoub is working to achieve this through regular

communication and meetings with staff to explain the vision of the new product. As well, as the *Toronto Star* developed its app, he held daily sessions with staff critiquing the work from the day before.

Tablet teams at all three newspapers faced the challenge of getting journalists to think like designers and designer to think like journalists. The *Star* found that having a clear set journalistic principles, like the Atkinson principles, helped guide its new graphic designers.

All three newspapers faced a challenge getting journalists to think visually before they go out to cover a story. Stories produced for the screen require more planning. Journalists need to know whether their story will be presented as traditional text or if it will be “chunked out” into sections or lists. Even for *La Presse*, which has a long-standing design culture, this has been a challenge (Olivier Bras).

4. A receptive audience enables change in the newsroom.

Doing things the same way and experiencing a relative level of success for more than one hundred years, newspapers faced no pressure to change. But with the Internet came a multitude of choices for where audiences could get their news. When it came time for newspapers to reinvent themselves after more than a century of thinking for print – it was critical for the audience to be at the table (Arthur). Audience-centred design helps to create a successful product, which ultimately leads to staff buy-in.

La Presse learned with the changes that it made to its print edition in the early 2000s and with the implementation of its tablet app, that staff buys in to the changes when it sees the new products succeed. *La Presse* Editor Malorie

Beauchemin says reporters are also motivated to buy-in when they see their peers succeed.

When the *Ottawa Citizen* changed its puzzles section, editor Andrew Potter said the negative feedback was “relentless.” He got more than 1,000 phone calls and emails of complaint. He blames this change for more than 3,000 subscription cancellations. That is bound to have a negative impact on staff morale. It can also result in staff losing faith in the innovation strategy.

To facilitate staff buy-in for innovation, newsrooms managers should consider regular communication with staff highlighting achievements and positive audience feedback. *La Presse* did this for a brief period after the launch of its tablet, and Beauchemin said it increased staff engagement in the project.

5. The audience needs to be an “appropriate” part of the change.

The audience does need to be at the core of innovation processes. However there is a point at which the audience can have too much influence.

Monitoring daily analytics has become routine at most news organizations. Both the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Toronto Star* have analytics displayed on large screens in their newsroom. Data helps provide insights into what stories are doing well, and what stories get the most engagement with audiences. It also indicates whether audiences are buying into disruptive innovations like the tablet app, or sustaining innovations like changes to website design. Analytics also show advertisers the audience potential for different digital platforms.

For news organizations like *La Presse*, where management and news editors get analytic updates by email every day before 10 a.m., their relationship with these

numbers can be complicated. The publication needs to grow its tablet audiences, which it can do with content it knows engages audiences. On the other hand, it also needs to publish drier, less engaging but important stories that it knows will score low with audiences. This is critical for it to maintain journalistic rigour.

“We’re only at the beginning of bringing in data to help the news leadership make better decisions day in and day out,” say Arthur. But he’s also emphasizes that it hasn’t replaced journalistic judgment. “That’s really, really critical,” he says.

La Presse news editor Malorie Beauchemin says that the numbers are a useful indicator, but she says they are not managing by numbers because “sometimes we need to tell our readers things that aren’t popular.” Using numbers to dictate content would betray *La Presse’s* commitment to serving its readers by producing journalism that serves the public interest.

Using analytics to improve graphic and story layout does not affect the journalism and could help improve user experience. *La Presse* artistic director Jacque Olivier Bras knows that screens with a photograph in the background are very popular.

Publications looking to stay true to their journalistic values (like the *Toronto Star* and its Atkinson principles) may want to consider devising internal policies that define how analytics are used in the newsroom to help improve the user experience for audiences, and control the degree to which they might negatively influence coverage.

6. It is critical to over-communicate the innovation project with staff to enable change.

Staff at both the *Toronto Star* and *La Presse* emphasized the need to be transparent about the changes and communicate excessively about the project with staff. The *Star's* Jon Filson says that the paper had so many town hall meetings, that staff eventually asked him to stop them. Looking back on the project he says that if he could do anything differently, he would communicate even more.

At *La Presse*, staff weren't involved in discussions about the project until more than a year after planning had started. As a result, many felt excluded. The paper didn't start seeing buy-in from staff until they were included in brainstorming and they felt they had a say in the tablet app's development.

To help facilitate communication about the project, these newspapers held weekly meetings with staff and managers. The *Toronto Star* used key staff members as "moles and snitches", as intelligence seekers on the newsroom floor to get a sense of how staff received the project and to communicate key messages to peers.

7. Leading through innovation management means accepting what you can and can't change.

Buy-in is crucial within the organization. Without it, change can't take place. You can implement all of these suggestions, and still, not get 100 per cent of staff on board. As Kevin Kelleghan points out in his book *Supervisory Skills for Editors, News Directors and Producers*, "most reporters do not manage change well in themselves, their newsroom, or in their work rules... the tenacity with which reporters cling to their customs when practicing journalism is legendary" (Kelleghan 57).

As *La Presse* experienced, it could eventually convert 90 per cent of staff to accept the new ways of doing things but there would always be that 10 per cent who

would not. The only control leadership has over this level of staff is to employ different strategies to enable buy-in. Dismissing dissenting unionized staff was not an option.

However, that is different among the organization's management. *La Presse* demanded 100 per cent buy-in from managers, recognizing that this was its best shot at getting buy-in from as many ground-level staff as possible. Managers who doubted the project were asked to leave. Letting these people go wasn't easy for the organization, but management decided it was necessary to ensure the overall success of the project.

8. These case studies confirm that newsrooms need to foster innovation at the ground level and create an environment in which failure is acceptable.

As each of these newsrooms attempt to keep up with changing audience habits and emerging technologies, they need to create a culture that fosters innovation and accepts failure while innovating.

Failure in both the *Toronto Star* newsroom and *La Presse* were treated like science experiments. Trial and error was a critical part of the process for the *Toronto Star's* Jonathan Kuehlein in sorting out the complicated workflows that would allow the tablet to operate in tandem with print and online publications. He and his colleagues experimented and re-calibrated until they got it right.

At the *Ottawa Citizen* the mobile team had freedom to experiment and produce content that was outside of the newsroom's traditional style. They created an online brand that has been well received by some social media audiences

(Twitter and Facebook). Postmedia has not released mobile analytic information, therefore it is still unclear how successful the mobile project has been with broader audiences.

Potential Areas for Future Study

This research project exposed topics and issues that may benefit from further exploration. Possible future areas of research that are extensions of this project include:

1. The internal and external impacts of merging competing newspapers newsrooms.

When this research began, editor Andrew Potter said it was the first connection Carleton University School of Journalism had had with the paper since it launched its four-platform strategy in 2014. It might be beneficial for the school to maintain this relationship and follow how the newsroom is adjusting, after merging with the *Ottawa Sun*. It would also be useful to track Postmedia coverage in Vancouver, Ottawa, Edmonton and Calgary to determine quantitatively whether local news has been diminished by this merger. A content analysis might also provide insights into whether specific issues receive different treatment in each newspaper.

2. The Canadian Tablet Experiments

Many are quick to write off the success of *La Presse+* because of its outlier status as a French-language publication. There is still no specific reason to account for the success of *La Presse+*. There is, however, evidence that much of its success is thanks to effective innovation management in the newsroom. On the flip side, the *Ottawa Citizen* had a beautiful tablet app that failed to resonate with audiences. Some

speculate that it was due to its evening publication time, but there is no conclusive evidence to prove this. Further research could help answer these questions. It could also look at other tablet editions in Canada and around the world to determine whether this is a financially viable digital option for daily newspapers.

3. Measuring success on mobile

Mobile is an important part most Canadian newspapers' digital strategy. However, it is common knowledge that mobile does not generate significant revenues. How will news organizations define success on mobile? Is mobile's primary value that it is a good lead generator by driving traffic to more lucrative platforms like the website or tablet applications? Is it possible to be a successful news organization with just a mobile responsive website and not a mobile app?

4. The lack of female leadership in managing innovation projects

All three innovation projects studied were led by teams comprised mostly of men. Journalist Vivian Smith's book *Outsiders Still: Why Women Journalists Love – and Leave – Their Newspaper Careers* reveals just how few women are in leadership positions in newspaper newsrooms today. This could be explored further through the lens of innovation management to consider solutions to this apparent gender gap.

5. The right way to perform product turnovers with mobile and tablet applications.

Postmedia and *La Presse* had two very different approaches to phasing out old app technology after introducing new apps. When the *Ottawa Citizen* launched its 2.0 mobile and tablet editions, it removed its 1.0 apps from Apple's App Store. When

its sister publications in Montreal and Calgary launched their new apps, they left the old apps online for people to download. This created confusion in the market place.

La Presse on the other hand eliminated its old app as soon as it launched its tablet edition. It received complaints from audiences, but believed it should focus on one app rather than segmenting the audience over different apps. There is little literature explaining best practices for product turnover for mobile and tablet apps. This would be an extremely useful area of study considering many businesses, not just newspapers, are moving toward mobile delivery.

Conclusion

The concept of innovation “blocks” and “enablers” appears simplistic on the surface. However, it can be an extremely useful lens through which to interpret, implement and manage large-scale innovation projects in a newsroom. By actively seeking out and identifying potential blocks to an innovation project, legacy newsroom managers can come up with their own strategies to ease friction and enable change.

Newspapers across the country are working overtime as they continue to serve as archivists and watchdogs while simultaneously attempting to create new daily rituals on digital platforms. Innovation blocks and enablers will vary from newsroom to newsroom. But each case study demonstrates that print culture runs deep. Despite how progressive a newsroom might think it is, if it looks close enough it will find vestiges of the printed page in its daily routines, processes, and corporate structure. It is critical not to underestimate how powerful these can be in slowing down or preventing digital change from taking place. It is equally important to

understand that legacy newsrooms have significant power to enable the innovation that is so desperately needed to ensure another century of being in the business of daily rituals.

Appendix A: List of Interview Subjects

Note: Positions accurate on date of interview

Ottawa Citizen

1. Carl Neustaedter
Managing Editor and Senior Editor iPad Edition / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 25, 2015
2. Drake Fenton
Senior Digital Editor / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 26, 2015
3. Andrew Potter
Editor / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 27, 2015
4. Drew Gragg (observation – informal interview)
Deputy Editor / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 27, 2015
5. Charles Jaimet
Technologist / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 27, 2015
6. Alan Kors
Night Manager / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 28, 2015
7. Bruce Craig
Press Manager / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 28, 2015
8. Christina Spencer / *Ottawa Citizen*
Executive Producer, Politics / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 29, 2015
9. Joanne Laucius
Tablet Producer / *Ottawa Citizen*
May 29, 2015

Toronto Star

10. Tanis Fowler
Senior Producer, Star Touch / *Toronto Star*

June 8, 2015

11. Jennifer Wilson
Senior Editor, Toronto Star
June 9, 2015
12. Jonathan Kuehlein
Digital News Editor / Toronto Star
June 9, 2015
13. Jon Filson
Tablet Development Editor / Toronto Star
June 9, 2015
14. Irene Gentry
City Editor / Toronto Star
June 9, 2015
15. Erika Tustin
Digital Editor / Toronto Star
June 9, 2015
16. JP Fozo
Senior Editor, Digital Projects / Toronto Star
June 11, 2015
17. Fadi Yaacoub
Director of Digital Editorial Design / Toronto Star
June 12, 2015
18. Michael Cooke
Editor / Toronto Star
June 12, 2015

La Presse

19. Yann Pineau
Manager Continuous Improvement / La Presse
February 22, 2016
20. Thomas de Lorimier
Section Head of Web / La Presse
February 22, 2016
21. Guy Crevier
President / La Presse

- February 23, 2016
22. Éric Trottier
VP News and Editor in Chief / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 23. Alexandre Pratt
Managing Editor Hard News / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 24. Mélanie Thivierge
Managing Editor Soft News / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 25. Malorie Beauchemin
News Editor / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 26. Martin Pelchat
News Editor / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 27. Christian Geiser
Production Director / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 28. Jacques-Olivier Bras
Artistic Director / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 29. Pierre Arthur
Director of Research and Marketing / La Presse
February 23, 2016
 30. Jean-Marc Heneman
Trainer / La Presse
February 24, 2016
 31. Jean-Charles Rocha
Senior Director, Strategies, Advertising & Sales / La Presse
April 13, 2016

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