CIPD

*Championing better
work and working lives*

Landing transformational *change:* Closing the gap between theory and practice

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 140,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Acknowledgements

News UK case study

'All three News UK titles struggled to adapt to customers wanting their news online, via tablets and on phones.'

1 Context

News UK publishes leading titles: *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*, which together comprise Times Newspapers Ltd (TNL) and *The Sun*, which is News Group Newspapers. *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* between them won ten British Press Awards for 2014, including Newspaper of the Year for *The Times*.[1] *The Sun* is read by over 10 million readers every week.[2] Within four months of its release in August 2014, the digital edition had over 100,000 paying subscribers. Total paid membership across *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* was up 10% year-on-year at the end of October 2014 and Times Newspapers Ltd posted its first operating profit in 13 years for the year ended 30 June 2014.[3]

Five years previously TNL had posted annual losses in excess of £70 million. Classified advertising was dropping, print newspapers were in decline but nobody had cracked the challenge of making money from news online. Barriers to entry to publishing news were diminishing. Within News UK print journalists typically did not want to be digital, because print brought in the revenue. The sometimes isolated digital teams considered print journalists to be following the dinosaurs. They had valuable skills but not necessarily those of an experienced print journalist. The executive saw the writing was on the wall without fundamental change to the business.

All three News UK titles struggled to adapt to customers wanting their news online, via tablets and on phones. With each digital innovation each title at TNL had bolted on to their main editing suite extra software and an extra team.

'We just could not carry on adding more and more battalions of people to do this work for us.'

'We were making a pretty big loss certainly on The Times *and thinking, "Well, how does this end?"'*

The spaghetti of IT systems across News UK became uneconomical to support. The knowledge of how the 15-year-old system had been set up was held by only a few individuals, creating a risk. Both the technology and the titles as organisations were too inflexible to provide what customers wanted.

The titles are ultimately owned by News UK, part of News Corp. The titles have governance designed to ensure their independence. The managing editor of each title works for the editor and has responsibility for the business side of the title, allowing the editor to focus on the content. The newsroom workforce is referred to as editorial staff or the journalists.

2 Preparation for change

News UK planned a change in culture and to install an IT system which could be used by all the titles to publish to every platform:

---

[1] http://www.news.co.uk/2015/03/the-times-triumphs-at-the-press-awards/
[2] http://www.news.co.uk/what-we-do/the-sun/
[3] http://www.news.co.uk/2014/12/growth-across-the-board-for-the-times-and-the-sunday-times/

'We needed education, new technology and at a fundamental level to change the workflow processes of every individual.'

Let's say England have just lost to Bangladesh at cricket. Rather than just thinking about the 8pm print deadline, journalists needed to be thinking about what to do on the website right now, on tablets and on smart phones.

They wanted all formats to be on an equal footing, rather than print being king. News UK made a bold decision: it would not provide journalism online for free. The digital products would go behind a pay wall. To justify charging, the quality of them needed to be as great as in print. Experienced print editors and digital specialists would need to work together.

The Newsroom 360 programme was signed off by the then CEO of News UK. The programme was a big commitment: £27 million over three years. A senior person at *The Sun* recalls from 2011:

'The CEO at the time made it very clear that his challenge to all of us was … to be as radical in our thinking as possible. … When the CEO is saying that to you, you listen.'

New software would enable all editorial staff to publish to every format, making it easier for 'print dinosaurs' to use their skills to publish digitally. In this sense, technology change would enable organisational change. However, to get the titles to agree to the same technology, the titles would have to start collaborating, rather than defining themselves in opposition to each other. In that sense, cultural change would enable technology change.

The executive sponsors chose the leadership for the project team carefully. The programme director combined a general consultancy background with experience of implementation of change at a large scale, knowledge of News UK and an eye for detail:

'[The programme director] is very good at reassuring people because she is just straight down the line … not political in any way … it was quite a consistent trait of the people who were accountable for this project and I think that helped a lot.'

The business change manager was responsible for the communications and organisation change programme. She had HR experience within News UK. Her later replacement was a well-respected journalist. The business change manager was supported by an external consultant to add expertise on transformational change. The technology lead combined deep technical knowledge with an appreciation of change processes. The then CTO, now COO, supported Newsroom 360 on the steering committee and as an executive sponsor throughout, but over the course of this programme there were three different CEOs at News UK. With each change the team had to justify itself again. They kept the confidence of the executive:

'By demonstrating competence, being measured, being considered.'

Newsroom 360 had no power to force organisational change in a title. They could only suggest change. Journalists as professionals fiercely guard their integrity and the independence of the titles is protected by governance:

'It has been a challenge for us to implement change from a sort of neutral position.'

Senior editors were wary of change that might jeopardise the print products, which are still the major source of revenue, but felt secure that nothing would be done to them without their consent.

Over the course of five years the digital strategy crystallised:

'We're not going to chase everything that's out there. We're going to do something that's us.'

Stakeholder engagement
The cultures on each title were distinct:

'The Sun guys are very, very different from the Sunday Times guys, for example.'

A person from the managing editor's office in each title was seconded to Newsroom 360. The title leads' relationship with each other helped Newsroom 360 navigate the political landscape between the titles:

'We chose the right title leads to make sure they got on and understood that we needed to have … as many common standards as was possible.'

They were the interface between titles and change. Their long-term involvement meant they brought a level of optimism about the project to the titles and protected the titles from inappropriate change.

The title leads seconded to Newsroom 360 communicated, communicated and communicated some more back to the floors. They publicised opportunities to influence the change:

'A big part of this change programme was to try and get people to take responsibility … for defining that change themselves and then implementing it.'

> *'Much of the communication was by email because of the practical difficulties of getting everyone off a newsroom floor at once, particularly on a daily title.'*

Editorial speak highly of the openness and listening skills of the title leads. They were clear about the long-term benefits; people felt able to approach them with issues. Their openness was in stark contrast to the previous deeply ingrained need-to-know approach.

Much of the communication was by email because of the practical difficulties of getting everyone off a newsroom floor at once, particularly on a daily title. Newsroom 360 had a website setting out the vision, where to find the team and inviting people to visit. They went to the floors to communicate, right to the desks where people sat:

'It was important to make sure people understood this was transformation which happened to have a tech element.'

Journalists can be a difficult audience:

'They're quite a challenging group, which is, of course, what they're paid to do constantly.'

However, the sudden closure of the *News of the World* in 2011 meant they were *'a lot more receptive to having the conversation'.*

Newsroom 360 ran events for all editorial staff in the offices. Those *'went down very well because … it was an investment in their craft'.* There was also training for certain people on mobile journalism and social media.

All these communications, events and training opportunities were under the banner of Newsroom 360, to get people thinking.

There was also communication aimed at galvanising the Newsroom 360 team. The team gathered on Friday afternoons on the Newsroom 360 floor. People were introduced, explained what they were doing on the project, there were shout-outs for achievements, and cake. It maintained a mood of optimism and broke down divides between editorial and technology.

Visioning
'We went through a whole series of workshops … that involved a number of people from the newsrooms across all three papers … this thing called "Magic and Baggage" … for what is really, really good and you want to keep and what … you want to discard.'

Getting journalists from different titles together was unheard of. Newsroom 360 also took senior people from each newsroom offsite:

'The managing editors never even sat in the same room as each other and had meetings.'

Newsroom 360 did not want the three newsrooms to go in three different directions this time. Early visioning for common workflows was difficult. The team tried to take any emotion out of decision-making and get down to logical argument.

Ways of working workshops were used at various stages, by both 360 and One Team (see further below). They used real scenarios:

'The helicopter crash in Vauxhall happened … on a day that we were talking about a particular strand of ways of working. … We said, "How are we going to tell that story in a year's time when we've got this system?" … you've got your head of news sitting there and you've got your head of publishing sitting there … and you're then bouncing ideas around.'

An early workshop for senior members of *The Sun* also used an artist to capture the vision for *The Sun* as it was discussed.

Digital Leaders
The Digital Leaders programme deliberately took three people from each title and from digital as well as print:

'They wanted to foster this collaboration, and just to try and spark off some ideas that could help the company.'

Participants were challenged to think about News UK as a listed company as well as a media company. They visited New York to see how their sister publication, *The Wall Street Journal*, was already using the new technology. They spent half a day with the film maker Brian Storm and visited start-ups. There was a Q&A with Robert Thomson, CEO of News Corp, and dinner with senior people:

'It was just really interesting, not only finding out about other companies within the News Corp stable, but just more about our own company.'

Over the following six months there were three residential modules in the UK. These modules were facilitated by a leading thinker on the future of news and supported by HR:

'It was just good to be away from the office ... because you just don't have much time on a day-to-day basis.'

The participants designed digital projects and presented them to senior editors:

'That naturally evolved into greater collaborative working ... nearly three years later ... I now do talk to my counterparts on The Sun *all the time.'*

One participant describes how the project work made him acknowledge that change in the title would happen only if individuals made it happen.

Finally, there were personal development aspects; for example, a presentation from HR about dealing with different kinds of people. That included role-playing difficult conversations which might happen back on the floor about new digital projects.

On their return to the floors this handful of people spread the word. A section editor said her deputy came back with *'a real commitment to make the digital parts of [the section] work'*.

The programme had nine participants each time. The third time people campaigned to be picked. The impact is surprising given the small number of people involved relative to the size of the newsrooms. The early reaction of some senior editorial staff to participants' new ideas may have been negative:

'They basically batted us back.'

Yet within a couple of years:

'We have introduced many of the things we put up there.'

One participant notes that all nine participants on his course have been promoted to senior positions, increasing their influence.

This programme seeded missionaries of change in the newsrooms and, by careful selection of some people who were initially strongly opposed to change, created powerful advocates in a challenging audience. The following analogy describes the gradual change of the news floors:

'One participant describes how the project work made him acknowledge that change in the title would happen only if individuals made it happen.'

'There's a great story about eBay and how they changed their colour at the top of their website. Everyone complained ... they were forced to change it back the next day. And then they changed it subtly over a year, every day making it a slightly different colour. By the end of the year, it was the same colour that they had introduced ... and no one even noticed ... doing change like that is what [the participants] have now done. It's changing people almost one by one.'

The business change manager designed this programme and was described as a 'great creative mind'.

3 The change process

One Team
The Sun set up One Team. It developed out of the Newsroom 360 visioning workshop with senior people and early participants on the Digital Leaders programme from *The Sun* were involved. While consistent with Newsroom 360 philosophy, One Team was distinguished from Newsroom 360 so that any failures in or resistance to the technology change would not tarnish the reputation of the organisation and culture change on the title. *The Sun* was rolling out the new technology last and while the technology rollout had been largely successful in *The Times*, it had still been challenging and there were a few fixes to be delivered:

'We took the senior people from the floor ... to a hotel ... and ... put together a ... smell the coffee pack, because The Sun *has traditionally been this moneymaking monster ... see that trend? At this rate come 2017 is there going to be a paper?'*

As with the Digital Leaders programme:

'A number of people involved in One Team also went off and looked at other newsrooms ... they went to Germany ... Prague.'

One Team used volunteer ambassadors; there was a room people could visit to find out about One Team, and when the pay wall for *The Sun* was launched, *'we managed to get some traction behind the One Team stuff'*. They made sure the new editor was on board. A few months later in January 2014:

'Everyone went up onto the top floor of the old building and [the editor] said, "By the end of the year ... you will be working across platform ... it's our commercial future, it's all of our jobs."'

Exercises such as getting journalists to code an app were used to encourage a change in mindset. A number of pilots were started to get people working *'with a cross-platform mind'*, even before the rollout and move to the new building. One Team:

'Transformed the way that we consider our content, the way that we commission our content and the way that we publish our content.'

New building: 2014
The News Building is stunning and inspirational, adjacent to the Shard, with views across London. It brings all the companies in the News Corp stable together. The move has been used to promote integration within titles:

'For the two Times *titles, ... whereas previously they were on two floors each, they are now on one floor and I think that has made a big difference in terms of visibility.'*

The move provided an opportunity to integrate print and digital silos. The building also provides an

impressive location for hosting events for readers, supporting new approaches to generating revenue.

Business Intelligence Unit
To support the increased customer focus, the Business Intelligence Unit grew:

'Last year they were six, this year they're 60-people strong.'

It supports Marketing running Times+, a members' club which is part of the subscription for *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. Members get access to, for example, priority screenings of films and highlights of the Champions League.

The unit also supports titles in understanding their readers:

'We look at numbers of readers ... dwell time ... subscriber churn ... in much more granular detail ... that has come in the past couple of years.'

New responsibilities and iPads
Section heads were made directly responsible for the digital appearance of their product:

'At a heads of department meeting with the previous editor of The Times *... we had a ... three-hour morning session on digital, which is unheard of... "And who is going to do all of this? ... All you department heads, now, as of this moment, it literally is your responsibility. ... The editor here is going to tell you off if he doesn't like it."'*

Every section head was given an iPad mini so they could see the tablet edition.

Technology change

Design
The depth of detail involved in the successful rollout of the Méthode

multimedia publishing system to around 1,500 editorial staff is astounding. Detailed studies of the 'as-is' workflows were done to map the collective editorial staff's working patterns:

'We looked at … when you pair the pages … typesetting … font … what every night goes in to producing the print edition and the digital edition.'

The existing print products alone were 'sprawling'. The racing tables in *The Times* are produced in a very different way from the Property section of *The Sunday Times*.

'To-be' workflows were also completed. The successful operation of both an evolving change programme and technology programme simultaneously relied on perfect communication between the two. This was facilitated by 'gates' in the processes which stopped anything passing through until the implications for both streams of work were understood. Change continues:

'The best thing that we can do is create something that is flexible.'

Subject-matter experts and business analysts needed to work well together to achieve maximum transformation while protecting existing magic.

The change impact analysis, skills analysis and training approach followed. There was over 18 months of scoping, designing, building and testing before implementation:

'We brought a comms guy in and he managed the different types of communication that editorial received from the point at which we were going to tell them about

their go-live dates right through to implementation.'

Rollout

The rollout started in 2013 with *The Times*; continued in March/April 2014 with *The Sunday Times*; and finished in April 2015 with the completion of the rollout to *The Sun*. The team worked up to the time-critical news and sport.

The Newsroom 360 team expanded during implementation with section co-ordinators, implementation managers and training co-ordinators because editorial staff cannot come off the floor for more than about three hours at a time. Training was supported by masterclasses on the floor, breakout sessions and super-users (see below). Newsroom 360 went to the newsroom stand-ups. They gave away mini iPads to Méthode stars of the week.

Training comprised classroom sessions introducing the vision, known as the Prologue, and then computer-based sessions. The Prologue, delivered by consultants, took 30 people through how a piece of content gets from A to B and how each person in the chain is affected. It used pieces of paper and envelopes to simulate the files. It supported the culture change; it sought to build empathy for colleagues and collaboration.

In spite of what is widely considered to be some of the best systems training ever delivered in the organisation, rolling out a new system, particularly on a daily title, was always going to be challenging for editorial staff. A senior person describes:

'I was in a meeting once where someone said, "We've got to go back to [the previous system]," … and I was like, "No, we're not going to do that."'

'The successful operation of both an evolving change programme and technology programme simultaneously relied on perfect communication between the two.'

Holding the line had to come from the top. Newsroom 360 carefully kept the confidence of senior editorial people, thereby ensuring the line was held at the top. For example, training for the editors was personal rather than group-based.

Both systems had to be run in parallel to start with:

'We had a very hard, very hard few months.'

However, the editorial staff felt supported. One section editor recalls an executive from the steering committee being on the floor, asking what she thought could be done.

The editorial staff had the mentality to get the paper out every day:

'It taught me something about my colleagues, just their sheer resilience.'

Over the two-year rollout, every page of every edition of every title went out on time. The programme director is widely credited with great project management skills. The project *'has been kept on track and on budget in a very, very impressive fashion'.*

Floorwalkers and super-users
Floorwalkers were full-time IT experts and super-users were people from the titles who had been trained in depth on the new software. These were a great success:

'Most people's brains are in their fingertips so it's only when they start using it that they start asking questions.'

One super-user describes the initiative:

'If I've been able to make it work for myself, I'm going to be able to act more effectively as an intermediary than someone who is just a proselytiser for the system.'

'Two months before it went live I was full-time on the project … trying to produce dummy editions … trying to break it.'

They made judgements:

'We could work out at what point to stick to the change message … and at what point to say, "Look, you've just got to get the paper out."'

For example, as a guiding principle it is desirable to put content into the 'none-channel' from which it can be published to various platforms. However:

'We have live match reports which are taken as rolling copy and you basically have five minutes to turn them round and get them out the door. The idea of doing anything in the none-channel with that is just a pointless conversation.'

They could also:

'Work out the difference between user error and system error.'

They could report back true problems with the system as they became apparent, having filtered out user error.

Super-users knew the personalities on the titles:

'It's recognising who, if they are upset with the process, can actually affect the mood of the whole paper.'

Finally, they were buffers:

'[Journalists] had somebody to vent to with their frustrations in a way they wouldn't want to with someone who wasn't from the floor.'

Evaluation of change
It is difficult to tell what change is attributable to the programme:

'This all happened as the economy started to improve, so we can't necessarily measure it.'

'We created a climate of change and that accumulates value over time.'

However, circulation and subscriptions can be tracked:

'The circulation of The Times *has gone up.'*

'Digital products are now significant in our business.'

The employee survey reveals changes:

'The scores across editorial in particular were very low by comparison with where they were expected to be. … We repeated the exercise last year and the scores were much improved … I am not saying Newsroom 360 is a key driver of that, [but it is a] component part.'

Newsroom 360 can see change spreading on the floors. A digital team is now working with:

'…one of the most reluctant desks to embrace digital on The Times *… on a feature that will not appear in print at all.'*

Newsroom 360 gathered feedback on the systems training as the staggered rollout went along, deliberately seeking feedback at the most painful points of rollout so they could improve for the next title. At the end of the project the senior members of the team went round the stakeholders to gather their views:

'Generally people have said, "We think this has gone really well. This is a template for technology and change programmes in the future."'

Finally, a widely held view is:

'If you want a measure of success, they haven't been late on any off stone time of any title and they produce … let's say 64 pages for The Times and The Sun on a daily basis.'

4 Change achieved

News UK has implemented technology change, organisation change and moved buildings. The COO summarises:

'We have a truly reorganised multiplatform newsroom in The Sun. We have multiplatform in The Times and the reorganisation has started and continues there. We were perhaps naïve on The Sunday Times because it is published only once a week so the emphasis is still very much "print first" … [but] we are now on the beginning of a journey.'

Even on The Sunday Times there are substantial changes; a deputy editor talked about getting sponsorship for a supplement, having never considered this before Newsroom 360. There is a shift to thinking 'not just as a journalist, but also as part of a business'.

The head of digital at The Times and The Sunday Times reports:

'My team is at the heart of the newsroom … and at the beginning of morning conference, there's at least five minutes talking about digital. … That is a transformation.'

On The Times the digital sports editor reports:

'I [now] sit next to the deputy sports editor and in front of the sports editor … my role now also involves editing on the print side as well. People on the print side … are involved in commissioning digitally as well. All of those things are overlapping and much more so than five years [ago].'

As the editors' focus on digital increases:

'Obviously it's in the section heads' interest to be interested.'

The value of resistance to certain changes is explained by considering an alternative:

'We could have been entirely focused on breaking news at 8 o'clock in the morning, midday, 5 o'clock in the evening and at the end of it say, "Now just shove it all in the print edition." That would have been the wrong move. I think history probably bears that out.'

The rate of change is careful because:

'Our print sales are doing very well. Advertisers still pay an awful lot more for print advertising than they do for digital.'

As one managing editor comments, you have to be ahead of the readers but not too far ahead.

Finally:

'We introduced a system without the customer noticing. … You can put an edition produced six months ago next to the edition produced this morning and you would not be able to tell the difference.'

Ironically this absence of change is a sign of the success of the programme.

'My team is at the heart of the newsroom … and at the beginning of morning conference, there's at least five minutes talking about digital. … That is a transformation.'

CIPD