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Maybe I'm wrong

Part of the truth about the challenges of Danish documentary film on DR and TV2

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Context of this report

A bit of history

For the author of this report as well as many other journalists and directors, Danish documentaries, both journalistic investigative and cinematic narratives is the most distinguished and significant work we can do. It does something to you when you can overthrow ministers, expose abuses, change the narrative in a whole population and make those responsible accountable, document warcrimes or love stories and so so much more. Perhaps even secure a place for yourself and your story in the history books.

For decades Danish film directors and producers have carried loads of international awards off the stages and in Denmark, investigative journalists have constantly pushed the boundaries of revealing and socially relevant documentaries. There is reason to be proud of this development as it moves on.

The two major public service channels, DR and TV2, have always been the proud mother of Danish documentaries. Many journalists and directors owe TV2 and DR a great deal of thanks for making room for the stories on their channels. For more 30 years Danes used to gather at work or school the day after another reveal or cinematic experience for what in English would be called a "water cooler moment". Over a cup of water – in Denmark probably more of a morning coffee – we have shared our indignation or enthusiasm. We have had the same experience at the same time, dictated by the evening's program on our Television. Often have we shared the experience with more than 1 million other Danes when the stations' program management decided to change Denmark with a single documentary or series.

Power is shifting

The power of the Television stations and the great shared experiences began to slowly disappear around the turn of the millennium, when first TV2 https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/TV_2_Play and later DR <https://www.dr.dk/om-dr/fakta-om-dr/drs-historie-2006-2010> turned online.

As viewers and listeners we were now given more and more responsibility and power to decide for ourselves when we wanted to watch the news, entertainment programs and documentaries.

With the increased digitization, also in the major newspapers and newspaper houses, the monopoly on daily news dissemination and TV viewing disappeared. The big "coffee machine moments" became fewer and fewer and are today now mostly about big live events such as finals in the world of sports or finals in the big entertainment programs where you don't want to miss a big moment.

In 2012, the Danish market for films, series and just a few years later also the entire field of documentaries changed when Netflix took over Denmark. Both TV2 and DR embraced the digital reality where audience would watch broadcasts when we had the time and desire. TV2 Play were launched in 2012 and in 2014 DRTV came along with their full blown streaming service

In the first years DR and TV2 mostly had to worry about the big Netflix investments in fiction. But it wouldn't take long before the American streaming giant started to move in on the danish treasure of storytelling: The documentary film and the documentary series.

A new reality

The days when a Danish documentary only aired Thursday evening on a DR or TV2 flow channel at a certain time were soon over. Fortunately this didn't make the two public service stations lower their arms.

Today a Danish-produced documentary is now instead being used to get new customers for TV2 Play or more viewers for DRTV. The documentary itself is no longer a single stand alone. Now it is the initiator of major campaigns. First viewers and users are invited to the documentary's premiere day when the stations' digital and analogue marketing on their own channels and in the news broadcasts ensures maximum attention. Shortly after the second wave starts when users are retained with follow-up digital formats in articles, audio and video. With this massive exposure the stations still sometimes reach more than 1 million viewers and users but collected on different platforms and channels.

The documentary has become the stations 'heaviest weapon' in the battle for viewers, customers and for setting the news agenda. A reality that TV2 in 2018 with the words of the then channel manager now content director, Lotte Lindegaard, was interpreted as an already year-long strategy that made a significant difference for the station. <https://omtv2.tv2.dk/nyheder/2018/09/dokumentar-rykker-paa-baade-tv-og-streaming/>

DR has faced reality and in 2022 presented their vision for the documentary's role in the news. The current editorial director of DR Documentary Mikala Krogh and the then editor-in-chief of DR News, Thomas Falbe, stated that the documentary for DR was now among the most trendsetting news genres when it came to setting the agenda for the public conversation. <https://www.dr.dk/om-dr/moeddr/dr-deler/se-videoen-fra-dr-deler-thomas-falbe-og-mikala-krogh-fokuserede-paa>

Dark future

There is a lot of Danish and international research on news in general and it is not optimistic reading. A 2024 report <https://ruc.dk/nyheder/ny-rapport-flere-danskere-overvaeldes-af-maengden-af-nyheder> from the Center for News Research at Roskilde University shows that the amount of news is now so overwhelming that many avoid news all together. On the other hand, the report also shows:

"That Danes continue to have a high degree of trust in the news media. In Denmark, trust in news is generally at 57 percent, which is the same level as last year. If you take a closer look at trust in various news media, the top of the trust pyramid consists of Denmark's largest traditional media brands, namely the two public service TV stations DR and TV2, as well as morning newspapers and niche newspapers. Trust in these media is far above the average of 57 percent for almost all media users, and at the same time, only a few percent of Danes express outright distrust of these media."

If you want to remain a pessimist you can read the annual report from the Reuters Institute which in 2024 is based on a YouGov survey of more than 95,000 people in 47 countries representing half of the world's population. There is no shortage of discouraging data for the future of the news media where both the business eco system is challenged and trust in the media is struggling. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>

Finally, there is also a clear trend towards the use of SLAPPs, - Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation - which is an increasing challenge for both producers and TV stations in a time where the truth is becoming more and more unheard.

SLAPPs aim to shut down critical speech by intimidating critics and draining their resources, undermining their active public engagement.

<https://www.ecpmf.eu/slapp-the-background-of-strategic-lawsuits-against-public-participation/>

https://commission.europa.eu/news/new-eu-rules-protect-against-strategic-lawsuits-against-public-participation-enter-force-2024-05-03_en

For this report, it has been a lot more difficult to find valid research and studies specifically about the investigative and socially relevant documentary. This perhaps because the genre may now be perceived as part of the overall news production as described by both DR and TV2. Perhaps more specific research on the documentary genre and its derivative effects could be interesting in the future?

There is hope

There is always an American study for you to lean on when you cannot find documentation for your theses. When dealing with danish documentaries on TV2 and DR in this report it is not necessarily sufficient to translate American findings one to one to Danish conditions. Factors such as political, economic and cultural differences can play a decisive role.

But if hope and inspiration are to be found one can dive in to a report from The Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI), based at American University's School of Communication in Washington DC. <https://cmsimpact.org/report/the-state-of-journalism-on-the-documentary-filmmaking-scene/p/the-public-trust-in-documentary-is-it-earned/>

The report says that trust in documentaries is greater than trust in news.

” As traditional journalistic outlets, especially local journalism, have declined (Abernathy, 2020), documentaries as a medium people trust become ever more important to examine. Documentary is a unique format, for its combination of immersive storytelling and its claim to truthfulness—a claim that includes factual accuracy, the meaningfulness of the story, the independent stance of the storyteller, and good-faith treatment of participants. This combination has engendered remarkable public trust in documentaries, at a time when public distrust has grown with much commercial media.”

Unfortunately, the report also says that conspiracy theorists have taken advantage of that trust and created pseudo-documentaries to give their own delusions more validity.

But let's stick to hope and solid data. In Denmark, you can find it at the Danish Film Institute The Institute has created an excellent digital tool where you can find knowledge about who and how many people watch documentaries on DR and TV2. Data is based on 150 documentaries and documentary series published since 2019 and five years on.

<https://www.dfi.dk/branchen/viden-om-publikum/hvem-og-hvor-mange-ser-dokumentar-paa-tv>

The data shows that there are still plenty of Danes who want to watch documentaries.

That is why it is so important that stations and producers do their best to present reality. When a documentary hits it can send massive pressure waves through our reality and leave traces in our trust or distrust of systems, companies, organizations and not least our fellow humans.

The background to this report

Let me clear up things right away.

I am burdened by a long experience as an investigative journalist, director and producer of a large number of primarily revealing or investigative TV documentaries. My first documentary aired more than 25 years ago.

In recent years I have moved more and more away from the documentary and sought other ways to tell my stories, often in sound or writing. But once you've been as far into the production of documentaries as I have been, a state where you dream your script at night, are forever connected to and responsible for some of your sources and characters, and not least when you see how big an impact your films can create, you'll never be quite the same again.

I've always been proud of my profession and most of my films because they often made a difference. But it wears you out and luckily there are always even more skilled journalists who want to overtake you.

So I've put myself on pause...

...Right up until the day in the summer of 2023 when the program director of Danish daily newspaper Berlingske's edition of Radio 24syv, Simon Andersen [https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Andersen_\(editor%C3%B8r\)](https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Andersen_(editor%C3%B8r)) asked me if I together with journalist Kurt Strand <https://kurtstrand.dk/> and journalist at Information, Ida Nyegård Espersen [would https://www.information.dk/ida-nyegaard-espersen](https://www.information.dk/ida-nyegaard-espersen) would be part of the so-called "Spies Commission" <https://open.spotify.com/show/3G6JkPSNXrICWvU7JhduyA>

Kurt, Ida and I were together with the insanely talented 24syv journalist Niels Frederik Dybdal Rickers <https://www.linkedin.com/in/niels-frederik-dybdal-rickers-6487a9150/> would among other things, investigate whether the one-man army and freelance journalist Bo Østlund had any basis in the many points and claims in his podcast series, which he published under the title "Simons Spies" - character assassination in primetime?" The occasion for Bo Østlund's podcast and our subsequent commission was the DR documentary series "Spies and the Morning Bun Ladies" https://www.dr.dk/drtv/episode/spies-og-morgenbolledamerne_-heidis-farlige-rejse_323553, which painted a rather revealing and sometimes shocking picture of the late Danish travel agency king, multi millionaire, womanizer and sadist Simon Spies.

The documentary series was an important story. But it had a number of journalistic weaknesses and received criticism from the commission. A criticism that also affected Bo Østlund and Danmarks Radio. <https://journalisten.dk/kulegravning-spies-dokumentar-mangler-dokumentationen-for-central-paastand/>, <https://journalisten.dk/spies-kommissionen-bo-oestlund-var-ikke-helt-neutral/>

For me personally the work on the Spies Commission was something of an abrupt awakening. Firstly I was provoked by the fact that the Spies documentary presented unsubstantiated claims that a long-dead Simon Spies could not defend himself against.

To this day I have no doubt that the documentary was right and could document most of its claims. But a crucial story about a woman who allegedly let Simon Spies break her arm for money was never documented. The team behind the DR documentary never found the woman but still stuck to the story about her. In the program “Q&CO <https://open.spotify.com/episode/40vPgZWNgtxgEKHSH7VOSe> I was highly critical of DR and the production company behind the Spies documentary, Laud People, <https://laudpeople.dk/>. I told them that their project would not pass exam at the School of Journalism.

The defense from DR and Laud People was that the story of the broken arm was "legally still on target", as they stated referring to law professor Sten Schamburg-Müller <https://ekstrabladet.dk/underholdning/filmogtv/spies-dokumentar-mysteriet-om-den-braekkede-arm/9414598?ilc=c>

For me it was poor journalism completely off target.

But something happened to me in that process. I started to ask myself if I had committed the same sin in my documentaries. Tightened my narratives beyond what was provable and journalistically justifiable?

I could not answer no to that question unequivocally.

And then where do you go with that doubt? After walking in circles for a while I ended up turning to the Constructive Institute at Aarhus University <https://constructiveinstitute.org/>.

I sent Constructive Institute an application for a Fellowship that among other things said:

” For decades, news and investigative journalists have constructed their stories based on the premise that negativity is positive, often failing to paint a broader picture or present the nuances of the stories they are addressing.

An exposé of questionable conditions in a specific nursing home frequently becomes emblematic of the entire elderly care system. Likewise, an exposé of a deceased eccentric business leader with a penchant for manipulation and inappropriate relationships with young female employees becomes a canvas where extremely coarse and undocumented allegations are displayed. However, there is no recourse, as lawyers have asserted that the program's claims fall within the bounds of press ethical rules...

In the coming decades, therefore, we risk, in my opinion, constructing our stories based on the demand for legal validity, thereby downplaying healthy journalistic curiosity, judgment, and the ambition to effect positive change.

Danish broadcasters and TV production companies have a proud national and international tradition of producing revealing TV documentaries. However, recent years have seen an increased public debate about the possible shortcomings and tunnel vision of documentaries, rather than leading to a meaningful discussion about the content and perspectives of the stories themselves. As a result of this trend, legal considerations have become an increasingly significant aspect of idea development, research, interviews, scripts, and final production.

Balancing between the poles of negativity and law, we risk undermining journalism and the opportunity to strengthen the democratic infrastructure and the public's trust in our profession and institutions.

I believe that a new path, a new language, can be discovered in TV documentaries, where the ambition to expose is always accompanied by a desire to inform and propose solutions. This necessitates a departure from journalists' and editors' belief that they always possess the full truth without accountability for subsequent developments. What if, instead, we publicly embraced doubt, advocated for editorial choices, and encouraged debate and engagement? However, this requires that lawyers no longer serve as rubber stamps for obviously problematic stories or impediments to editorial development. Law is not journalism!

With nearly 30 years of experience, I am confident that I can identify pitfalls and propose solutions, having been an integral part of the development myself. Therefore, I feel compelled to give back to my profession, armed with the insight, responsibility, and recognized voice that I possess. The TV documentary is the most powerful weapon in the journalistic arsenal and simultaneously the editorial product with the greatest immediate impact on the population and decision-making processes. Consequently, a zero-error culture prevails, where everything published must withstand legal scrutiny and appear as eternal truth. Yet, no journalist has ever had that luxury. Instead, documentaries risk faltering on parameters such as objectivity, relevance, nuance, and solution orientation.”

Acknowledged!

It all appears a bit lofty. But nevertheless the original thoughts about my own profession have guided me through my investigations and findings in this report. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the Constructive Institute for trusting a doubter. And I owe TrygFonden at least as much thanks for funding my Fellowship based on the idea that positive social communities, and participation in civil society and democracy can also be created and carried forward if journalism becomes even better.

Acknowledged!

I got off badly convinced that it would not take me many hours to prove my claim that lawyers are largely to blame for very bad journalism. Perhaps it would take a few more hours to prove my second claim that documentary journalists always want to serve up the ultimate truth.

I was wrong.

Acknowledged!

The challenges of Danish Documentary Cinematography is a complex story with many truths. Everyone involved wants the best, do the best they can under the given framework. Perhaps it is more a question of a systemic flaw that is welded harder and harder together in a mixture of tradition, faith and fear. So maybe now is the time to dare stop and look at the construction. Imagine if things could be done differently and better.

For the benefit of both journalism and the society we serve.

Research Design

From the beginning it has been my goal to gather knowledge from editors and/or editorial directors at DR and TV2 with insight into documentaries and news. For this report personal interviews have therefore been conducted with an editor from DR, an editor from TV2 and a senior editor who has worked for both DR and TV2 and therefore has been able to point out similarities and differences between the two public service stations. All of them have more than 10 years of experience in the field. A single one more than 20 years.

The two editors from DR and TV2 are in direct contact with the external production companies that deliver documentary programs to their station. In his roles at DR and TV2, the Managing Editor has taken a larger and more faceted editorial leadership position without direct contact with the external production companies.

It has also been my plan to collect knowledge from journalists, directors and producers of documentary films should be found within the field of the independent production companies.

Firstly it is an environment that I myself have great insight into as I have worked with documentaries based in the private production field throughout my professional career.

Secondly I have deliberately excluded TV2 and DR's internal directors and producers in order to reduce the risk of the bias that may exist when you are so close to the editorial and financial decision-making process. In this context the production companies are front-line soldiers who stand further away from the mothership.

Thirdly the many debates and criticism about Danish documentaries in recent years have very often been based on external productions.

For this report interviews have been conducted with six different journalists, directors and producers of documentary films. All with more than 10-15 years of experience in the profession and some with 25 years of experience.

The goal for selecting the participant from both the production environment and the TV stations has been that everyone should have a certain track record that enables them to see the development over several decades and not just represent the present.

The original idea was to conduct a quantitative survey with both the editors and the production companies. This has been replaced by a qualitative interview study in both groups.

As for the editors I have assumed that more is not necessarily better. I trust that their colleagues would say the same thing with less significant nuances.

As far as the production companies are concerned it was for a long time my wish that I should conduct the survey together with the Producers' Association where we would reached out to the members together. After some initial conversations and email exchanges with the Danish Producers' Association, I began to doubt whether a quantitative study was the way to go. I identified 10-12 relevant companies with a special interest and competencies in in-depth and investigative journalism. With an expected response rate of 30-40 percent in a quantitative survey, I could expect 4-5 participants in the survey. Therefore I chose to increase the number of respondents with personal interviews of 6 participants in a qualitative study.

All interviews were conducted on the basis of a questionnaire designed for the two groups. This to ensure comparable answers. The personal interviews have made it possible to ask in-depth and follow-up questions which would not be possible with a questionnaire survey. Answers to questions in the questionnaire as well as follow-up questions outside the questionnaire were subsequently analyzed for coincidences/comparisons.

All participants in this study are anonymized. It is a fairly small industry and world that I move in and I wanted to ensure the safest and most open space possible for the interviews where no one had to think about the next order or collaboration. Hopefully it can also remove the risk of speculation about participants' self-interests and/or politically correct responses.

All the participants in this study has been presented with the report before publishing.

The two Professors from the Social Science Department at Aarhus University that has contributed with interviews for the two separate articles have been presented their article before publishing.

OpenA ChatGPT 4.0 has been used for analysis, segmentation and extracts as well as design of this report's front page. All machine made material has been touched, checked and edited by a human.

The transcription tool Good Tape has been used to write out the interviews. All interviews except one on Teams have been face-to-face and recorded on audio.

I have made a conscious choice not to review specific documentaries in order to avoid appearing as an editorial judge or commentator. A difficult exercise for a man who is often not shy about expressing his opinion in the public space.

It should be noted that the following programmes have formed part of the basis for the deliberations behind my project. Several of the programmes among many more have also been part of the conversation during the interviews but this has deliberately not been included in this report.

https://www.dr.dk/drtv/serie/spies-og-morgenbolledamerne_323550

https://www.dr.dk/drtv/program/groenlands-hvide-guld_506795

https://www.dr.dk/drtv/program/forfulgt-af-politiet_413660

<https://play.tv2.dk/serie/den-sort-svane-tv2/1>

<https://play.tv2.dk/serie/operation-x-tv2/sex-loegn-og-stoettekroner-adb45431-80ee-477c-98c7-a9b293d15a04>

<https://play.tv2.dk/program/plejehjemmene-bag-facaden-1a59575c-5590-4300-82a2-b55c8ec8737a>

Q&A Documentary Producers

EXTRACT – DOCUMENTARY PRODUCERS

This analysis is based on interviews with six producers, journalist or directors who work with investigative and socially relevant documentaries. The focus has been on their experience of the collaboration with the TV stations, the editorial freedom and the balance between form and content.

The producers find that they work in a structure where many considerations – in terms of form, pace, platform and image – squeeze into the editorial space. Several express frustration that the journalistic craft becomes secondary when the focus is directed towards communication and presentation.

"We are rarely told that something is not good enough journalistically – but often that it needs to be cut differently or packaged differently."

A recurring theme in the interviews is that collaboration with editors can be positive and safe – when the relationship is good. But many also experience uncertainty about decisions and responsibilities, especially when several actors interfere in the process.

"There are lots of talented editors – but we need one person to own the project all the way through."

The producers emphasize that a new kind of performance culture has emerged, where they are pressured to oversell their ideas in the pitch phase. At the same time, they experience an opposing demand for control and precision in production. Several people are talking about a crisis of confidence.

"We are asked to deliver something that breaks the boundaries – but only if it can stand in three lines and withstand a legal check."

Despite this, all manufacturers express a great commitment to their work. They are motivated by the desire to make a difference – and by the passion for stories that can change something. But they are looking for leadership that dares to take the lead – and stand up for it.

"It takes courage to make an investigative documentary. It must also take courage to lead it."

Question 1:

Have you experienced a development in the collaboration with TV2/DR?

• **Yes: 6** • **No: 0** • **Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All six filmmakers are experiencing a significant change in the collaboration with the stations. Several new considerations are mentioned – especially law, branding and streaming – that characterize both form and content. DR is seen as heavier and more institutional, while TV2 is perceived as more commercial and marketing-driven. More producers feel drawn into the broadcasters' strategic and risk-driven decisions.
- *"DR still thinks in terms of classic public service – but everything has become more cautious."*
- *"TV2 wants to do something with documentaries – but it's very much about marketability."*
- *"It's no longer just a question of journalism – now it's about format and brand."*
- *"The collaboration has become more top-down – there are more layers and more considerations."*
- *"They're starting to think streaming first – it's changing everything from pace to form."*
- *"We must constantly document why we do what we do – it was not like that before."*

Question 2:

Have budgets evolved over the past 10-20 years?

• **Yes: 6 • No: 0 • Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All producers experience that their budgets have increased nominally, but not in line with requirements and costs.
- *"It looks like they have increased, but in practice we have much less to do with."*
- *"It has become more expensive to produce, but the money has not kept up."*
- *"They give us a little more, but also expect more – so in reality we have lost."*
- *"When rights, clips and music take up half of it, there is not much left for journalism."*
- *"Budgets have been lifted by 25%, but demands have increased by 50."*
- *"We are running faster to cover the same ground – financially we are behind."*

Question 3:

Can you afford to stop a documentary once it has been put into production?

• **Answer: Yes: 1 · No: 5 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- The majority say that it is economically unrealistic to interrupt production. The consequences are so great that most continue, even with serious problems along the way.
- *"It would cost us too much – so we complete almost no matter what."*
- *"You're gambling with the whole company if you stop a production."*
- *"We simply do not have enough buffer to take that loss"*
- *"It's a calculated risk – but we can rarely afford to press stop"*
- *"It only happens if it's life or death – otherwise we'll continue."*
- *"There is too much at stake – we risk bankruptcy if we give up."*

Question 4:

Do you have a surplus on all your documentaries?

- **Answer: Yes: 0 · No: 5 · Don't know: 1**
- **Tendency:**
 - There is broad agreement that profits are the exception. Many projects are running in the red, but are accepted to maintain relationships and access to the broadcasters.
 - *"We rarely make money on the project itself – it's the investment that counts."*
 - *"Some projects cost us money – but we say yes to keep the relationship."*
 - *"We know it will be red – and we will do it anyway."*
 - *"There is prestige and future in delivering – the money often does not come immediately."*
 - *"You don't get a profit, but maybe access to the next big thing."*
 - *"It's almost a rule that you lose a little – and hope you win on the next one."*

Question 5:

Have you deliberately produced one or more projects in the red?

• **Yes: 6** • **No: 0** • **Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Everyone has done projects with an expected minus in order to achieve something else – e.g. access, recognition, rights or influence. It is seen as an investment in the future.
- *"We have made films that we knew would be negative – but that we could not say no to."*
- *"Deficits can be strategic – it provides access, networks and visibility."*
- *"Sometimes you buy your way to legitimacy – even if it costs."*
- *"It's calculated loss – you hope it pays off later."*
- *"We are taking a breather now because we believe it will create value in the future."*
- *"It's often the only way to tell the big stories."*

Question 6:

Who is most most willing to take risks?

- **TV2: 4 • DR: 1 • Even: 1**

- **Tendency:**

- TV2 is often mentioned as the most brave especially in terms of form and narrative. DR is perceived as more reluctant, especially on sensitive topics. A single person experiences balance.
- *"TV2 dares more with form – they want something new."*
- *"DR pulls the brakes faster – especially when it comes to language and angle."*
- *"At TV2, we have to take chances – they are willing to test boundaries."*
- *"TV2 seems curious, whereas DR seems worried."*
- *"DR is more thorough – but also more cautious."*
- *"I actually experience them as quite equal – just in different ways."*

Question 7:

Have you experienced wishes/demands from the stations for changes in the program that may exceed your budgets?

• Yes: 6 • No: 0 • Don't know: 0

• Tendency:

- All participants confirm that broadcasters are increasingly making new demands along the way. This applies to content, legal matters and form. This creates unpredictability and frustration.
- *"We have experienced changes right up to handover."*
- *"They ask for things that are not in the contract."*
- *"It feels like hitting a target that is constantly moving."*
- *"You start with one agreement – and end with another."*
- *"It creates uncertainty and extra costs."*
- *"They want more than we have agreed – and they get it because we don't dare say no."*

Question 8:

Have the requirements for documentation changed?

• **Yes: 6 • No: 0 • Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- There is agreement that the requirements for submission material have increased – both technically, legally and in terms of content. This requires more resources and more documentation.
- *"Delivery is almost a production in itself now."*
- *"It requires a thousand appendices and details we were not asked for before."*
- *"It takes as long as making the film."*
- *"We hand in more documentation than documentary."*
- *"There are checklists, Excel sheets, and lawyers on every page."*
- *"It's not enough to have a good film – you also have to be able to prove everything about it."*

Question 9:

Have the workflows changed?

• **Yes: 6** • **No: 0** • **Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All six companies confirm that the demands from the broadcasters have changed their working methods. This applies to planning, risk assessment, and forms of cooperation.
- *"We plan differently – we have to be able to defend every cut."*
- *"Everything must be ready for the lawyer – that governs our narrative."*
- *"We do more on paper than on footage."*
- *"We spend a lot more time on contracts and sources."*
- *"It's like making a documentary with one hand on your back."*
- *"We do journalism, but think like civil servants."*

Question 10:

Is there freedom for change when production is underway?

- **Yes: 2 • No: 4 • Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- The majority find that there is less room to react during the process. The course and content must be approved early. However, one respondent still feels that the freedom is there.
- *"We are rarely allowed to follow a feeling – everything has to be planned."*
- *"It's hard to improvise when everything is approved in advance."*
- *"The spontaneous is squeezed out of the process."*
- *"There is less room to let history shape itself."*
- *"We improvise – but afterwards it has to be approved."*
- *"I still think we have room for intuition – but it requires trust."*

Question 11:

Have the requirements for formats and narrative forms changed?

• **Yes: 6** • **No: 0** • **Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All respondents feel that formats and requirements for narrative forms have become more standardized and controlled. It's all about length, structure and style.
- *"We get templates that are almost scripts."*
- *"It's about fitting into the format – not about finding the best form."*
- *"There's less room for experimentation."*
- *"They want what they know – not what they haven't seen before."*
- *"We are often asked to adjust so that it fits better with a certain series shape."*
- *"It's hard to convince them of something that doesn't look like the last successful one."*

Question 12:

Has focus on the legal work changed?

• **Yes: 6** • **No: 0** • **Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All six participants mention a sharp increase in legal requirements – both in relation to contracts, consents, obfuscation and fact checks. Law now occupies a central part of the production.
- *"We have lawyers on board early on – it has become part of the package."*
- *"It feels like doing journalism with a lawyer in the neck."*
- *"Everything must be approved and documented in advance."*
- *"There is less room for journalistic choices – because the law comes first."*
- *"We spend an enormous amount of time dealing with rights and responsibilities."*
- *"The legal aspect is the biggest bottleneck today."*

Question 13:

Do you spend more time on the legal work with a production?

• **Answer: Yes: 6 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Law now occupies all phases – from development to editing. Several mention that in practice, the law helps shape the narrative and constitutes a kind of new editorial role.
- "We work almost more with law than with journalism."
- "It has become a regular part of our workflow."
- "There is no meeting without legal considerations."
- "Law has changed the way we cut."
- "We are constantly thinking in terms of what we can prove – not just what we can tell."
- "It feels like the law is there as an invisible editor."

Question 14:

Has the work with documentation increased?

• **Yes: 6 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All respondents feel that the requirements for documentation have been tightened. This applies to written agreements, background research, sound recordings and source management.
- *"We must be able to document everything – including our doubts."*
- *"It's not enough to know it – you have to be able to prove it."*
- *"They ask for logbooks, email correspondence and tapes."*
- *"We spend an enormous amount of time documenting our documentation."*
- *"It feels like mistrust – but we have no choice."*
- *"We almost make an extra layer of documentary about our work process."*

Question 15:

Is the cooperation with the TV station characterized by trust or control?

- **Control: 5 · Trust: 1 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- The majority feel that trust has been replaced by control. This applies to both editorial interference and legal management. A single producer still experiences trust, but as an exception.
- *"We are being checked in detail – it wasn't like that before."*
- *"Trust is good, but control is standard now."*
- *"It's more surveillance than cooperation."*
- *"They want to see everything – before we are allowed to finish."*
- *"We have to account for every choice – otherwise it will be stopped."*
- *"I still experience trust – but it's definitely not the norm."*

Question 16:

Has source management become more difficult?

- **Yes: 6 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All producers point out that it has become more difficult to work with sources – especially in cases with legal or political sensitivities. Sources are more nervous, and the requirements for documentation make the process more difficult.
- *"People withdraw when they hear the word 'documentary'."*
- *"They don't dare to come forward – not even anonymously."*
- *"It takes enormous trust, and we often start with distrust."*
- *"They get scared when they hear that it is going to be shown on DR or TV2."*
- *"We spend more time reassuring sources than interviewing them."*
- *"Law and fear have ruined a lot of stories before we got started."*

Question 17:

Have you experienced sources who have resigned for fear of legal consequences?

• **Yes: 6 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- There is a consensus that it has become much more difficult to get contributors to come forward with their names and faces – especially in cases where power and responsibility are challenged. Several mention fear of reprisals and lawsuits.
- *"We get no before we have even asked about the case."*
- *"People don't want to be associated with criticism or conflict."*
- *"They are afraid of employers, family and lawyers."*
- *"We end up with anonymous sources, and that weakens credibility."*
- *"Even strong cases drop out when they feel the pressure."*
- *"Almost no one dares anymore – unless it's about something harmless."*

Question 18:

Has the collaboration with organisations and authorities changed?

• **Yes: 5 · No: 1 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Most have experienced that it has become more difficult to gain access to closed or power-bearing environments. Organizations and authorities are more controlled and dismissive – often with reference to GDPR and internal policy.
- *"They close the door immediately – 'we don't appear on TV'."*
- *"Everything has to be approved centrally – and it often ends with a no."*
- *"They're afraid of saying something wrong, so they don't say anything."*
- *"Even small institutions now require written agreements and controls."*
- *"It takes enormous negotiation to gain access – and it rarely succeeds."*
- *"I still have luck with it – but it has become more difficult."*

Question 19:

Have you experienced that lawyers, private advisors or PR agencies from outside try to stop the project before and during production as well as shortly before publication?

• Yes: 6 • No: 0 • Don't know: 0

• Tendency:

- All six mention new forms of resistance: legal pressure, lobbying, image control, surveillance, and attempts to influence content. SLAPP threats are mentioned by several as a growing phenomenon.
- *"We are monitored and challenged from day one."*
- *"Lawyers' letters come long before the program is cut."*
- *"They try to pressure sources and editors – without us seeing it directly."*
- *"It's all about image control – and we're standing in the way."*
- *"We are attacked in public before we finish the film."*
- *"They know how to hit us – and they use it."*

Question 20:

Have you experienced legal threats against you as a person or your production company?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 3 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- Half have experienced direct legal threats directed at themselves as individuals or companies. This creates uncertainty and can seem like a deliberate strategy by powerful counterparts.

- *"I received a registered letter about defamation – before the program was finished."*

- *"There was my name in a lawyer's letter – it does something to you."*

- *"We were notified of a subpoena if we used a single clip."*

- *"I haven't tried that – but I've always thought it could happen."*

- *"We have not experienced threats – only questions and reservations."*

- *"So far, I've been spared – but I know it happens to colleagues."*

Question 21:

Is there a demand for sharper angling today than 10-20 years ago ?

• **Yes: 6 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- There is unanimity among the participants that the requirement for a sharp angle has grown. This is especially true in development and pitch – and is about both communication and marketing. Many people find that it affects the complexity.
- *"They want one sentence that encompasses everything – and it's rare that reality works like that."*
- *"We're being pressured to choose a villain – and that destroys the nuances."*
- *"It's more about how it sells than what it says."*
- *"Everything must be able to be explained on a pitch map."*
- *"We go from observation to conclusion – and that's not always healthy."*
- *"Scripts become communication – not investigations."*

Question 22:

Does the sharp angle affect the nuances?

• **Yes: 5 · No: 0 · Don't know: 1**

• **Tendency:**

- The majority find that the desire for simple stories often stands in the way of the journalistic nuances. This is especially done in the organisation and in the collaboration with editors and PR.
- *"We're told it's too complicated – even when it's the reality."*
- *"It has to be able to be said in one sentence – and that makes it difficult to be precise."*
- *"We simplify to make it accessible – but it takes away the depth."*
- *"It's hard to be allowed to show that things can be undecided."*
- *"There is no room for intermediate calculations."*
- *"I'm not sure if we're doing enough – or too much."*

Question 23:

Have you been asked to remove or rephrase facts?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 3 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- There are shared experiences. Some have experienced demands for changes in the facts, which according to them affected the accuracy. Others have not experienced it, but express concern that it can happen in stressful situations.
- *"We were told that it had to be rewritten – because it was too complex."*
- *"An editor asked us to take out something that was otherwise factually correct."*
- *"We changed the wording to avoid debate – not because it was wrong."*
- *"I haven't experienced that – but I know others have."*
- *"I've been lucky – but I fear the grey areas."*
- *"We've never changed the facts – but we've talked a lot about how it's said."*

Question 24:

Have you been asked to change the form or narrative to better fit the channel's format or desire for PR?

• **Answer: Yes: 5 · No: 1 · Don't know:**

• **Tendency:**

- Most producers have experienced demands for changes in form, style and narrative so that it fits better with the channel's wishes for branding and PR. This affects editorial freedom and creative space.
- *"We had to remake it so that it looked like a previous series."*
- *"The PR department had wishes for pace and structure."*
- *"They wanted it to look like a certain campaign."*
- *"It was changed to fit into primetime – not because it was better."*
- *"It became more marketing than storytelling."*
- *"I haven't experienced it – but I've heard about it from colleagues."*

Question 25:

Have you experienced that broadcasters oversell your production in their PR?

• **Answer: Yes: 4 · No: 2 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Several have experienced that the marketing promises more than the production can cover. This can disappoint viewers and create pressure on the production company. Some accept it as part of the game.
- *"They wrote something in the press release that we never promised."*
- *"It was sold as a revelation – but we didn't have a smoking gun."*
- *"It was more sensationalist journalism than facts."*
- *"We were asked for quotes that were sharper than we wanted to stand by."*
- *"I think they hit the tone well – that's accurate."*
- *"We have a good dialogue about how we communicate it."*

Question 26:

Have you ever found yourself overselling an idea to get it through?

• **Yes: 5 • No: 1 • Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Most people admit that they have sharpened an idea more than reality can bear – often in the pitch phase – in order to gain access to development or production. Several refer to it as part of the necessary strategy.
- *"We wrote it more dramatically than it was – and hoped we could find it along the way."*
- *"That's how the game works – you have to catch them on two lines."*
- *"We promise a little more, and then we adjust down along the way."*
- *"It's calculated – and I know everyone does it."*
- *"I try to stick to reality – but it's hard to get the green light without a strong hook."*
- *"We have been close to the limit – but not over."*

Question 27:

Has it become more difficult to deal with ethical dilemmas?

• **Yes: 4 · No: 2 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- A majority find that ethical issues take up more space and have become more difficult to handle in light of greater demands for transparency, law and communication. It is about both participants, framing and consequences.
- *"We spend more time discussing consequences – and we have fewer definite answers."*
- *"Ethics take up more space – but it is also more politicized."*
- *"It's harder to balance considerations when there's also law and PR on top of that."*
- *"We have to be honest, loyal and distinctive – and that's not always possible."*
- *"I don't think it's more difficult – but it requires more overview."*
- *"We have good internal discussions – but there is a lack of common guidelines."*

Question 28:

Can form overshadow content?

• **Yes: 5** • **No: 1** • **Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- Many point out that the visuals, the editing and the communication can create a different effect than the substance itself. This can lead to skewed representation or unnecessary conflict.
- *"We edit too hard – and that changes the meaning."*
- *"The images control the viewers' emotions more than the facts do."*
- *"It gets dramatized – and then you lose nuances."*
- *"Even when we say it correctly, the shape can provide a different experience."*
- *"We try to be loyal – but it's difficult when pace and instruments are in control."*
- *"I think it's a general problem throughout the industry."*

Question 29:

Have you received criticism for a documentary? Reasonable/unreasonable?

• **Yes: 6 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All have experienced criticism. The criticism comes from the cast, authorities, experts and the audience. Several people mention that it is part of the game.
- *"We made a sober film – and were accused of smear anyway."*
- *"You are never free from criticism – no matter how thorough you are."*
- *"People react to their feelings, not to facts."*
- *"It's often about who feels affected – not about whether we were right."*
- *"We've received tough feedback – even when we had documentation in place."*
- *"The criticism is not always factual – but it is always there."*

Question 30:

Do you find that the PR preparedness of the broadcasters has grown?

• **Yes: 5** • **No: 0** • **Don't know: 1**

• **Tendency:**

- Five out of six experience a significant boost in PR preparedness – both in terms of early involvement, communication requirements and consideration for launch. One respondent is in doubt, as it has not yet been a dominant factor in their own productions.
- *"We had a plan for PR before we had a cutting plan. That says something about what is weighted first."*
- *"You think in press release before you think in narrative – it's a new reality."*
- *"It matters a lot how it is sold – and we have to think about that early on."*
- *"Press people come into the room much earlier – sometimes before filming is over."*
- *"PR has gained almost the same status as content. It changes our entire workflow."*
- *"It's not something I've noticed too much – maybe it's different from case to case."*

Question 31:

Do you feel that editorial independence has decreased?

• **Yes: 4** • **No: 2** • **Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- The majority of the producers believe that their editorial room for manoeuvre has become smaller – either due to more agencies, stronger management or broader considerations. Two still experience a great deal of freedom, but as something that requires negotiation.
- *"We have less elbow room – and more control."*
- *"It feels like we're doing commissioned work – not standalone productions."*
- *"There is always an expectation of how history will land."*
- *"We have to navigate the wishes of both the editor, the law and communication."*
- *"I still feel like I have freedom – but I have to fight for it."*
- *"It depends a lot on the relationship with the editor."*

Question 32:

Do you find that you have to take into account the broadcaster's reputation?

• **Answer: Yes: 6 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All companies mention that they are increasingly taking into account how the production affects the broadcaster's reputation. This applies to both the choice of subject, language use and presentation. Many do it unsolicited – others experience it as an invisible expectation.
- *"You are constantly thinking about how it will be received – also by the media."*
- *"We must be able to stand up for it – together with the broadcaster."*
- *"We formulate ourselves with PR in mind."*
- *"Even word choice is adjusted to avoid unnecessary confrontations."*
- *"It's in the air – that it must not damage the brand."*
- *"There are considerations we take that are not going anywhere."*

Question 33:

Do you feel more like a supplier than a creative partner?

• **Answer: Yes: 5 · No: 1 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Five out of six producers feel that their role has changed from creative collaboration to more delivery-based production. It is experienced as a shift towards less influence and greater distance from decisions.
- *"We deliver a product – we don't create it together anymore."*
- *"It feels like we're executing other people's decisions."*
- *"We've become part of a pipeline – not a creative space."*
- *"There is a long way from idea to joint ownership."*
- *"We still have a dialogue – but the decisions have been made in advance."*
- *"I still experience collaboration – but it takes more work to achieve."*

Question 34:

Have you experienced that the broadcaster distances himself from you if criticism arises?

• Yes: 4 • No: 2 • Don't know: 0

• Tendency:

- The majority have experienced that the broadcaster in the event of criticism or stormy weather tries to abdicate responsibility and place it with the producer. This applies both publicly and internally. Two respondents feel that they have been supported.
- *"We were on our own when the press started calling."*
- *"It was communicated as if we had made all the choices on our own."*
- *"They didn't mention that they had approved everything."*
- *"We were made responsible – also for something they had wanted."*
- *"In my case, we were backed all the way."*
- *"We stood together – but I know that doesn't always happen."*

Question 35:

Have you done journalism that you were in doubt about?

• **Yes: 2 · No: 4 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Most producers answer that they vouch for their journalism – even under pressure. However, two admit that they have had doubts about precision or reasonableness in individual cases, especially in the case of speedy processes or ambiguous cases.
- *"We had too little time – and it got in our stomachs."*
- *"I wasn't entirely comfortable with a wording, but it was approved."*
- *"We discussed it thoroughly, but I stood by it."*
- *"There were grey areas, but no doubts."*
- *"I trust what we're doing—even when it's hard."*
- *"We are our own first critics – we should be."*

Question 36:

Do you find that there is less room for conflict material?

• **Yes: 4 · No: 1 · Don't know: 1**

• **Tendency:**

- A majority of the respondents believe that there has been less willingness to engage in conflict-heavy topics. It is about risk, resources and doubts about reception. A single respondent has not experienced any change.
- *"We're told it's too controversial."*
- *"They don't want to touch certain topics anymore."*
- *"We should preferably not step on anyone's toes."*
- *"There is more caution than before."*
- *"I still experience the possibility of conflict – but it requires more preparation."*
- *"It's about courage and mandate – and both have become smaller."*

Question 37:

Is there room for complex narratives and context in a documentary?

• **Yes: 1** • **No: 4** • **Don't know: 1**

• **Tendency:**

- A clear majority believe that documentaries are increasingly reduced to dramatic narratives and lose nuances along the way. Only one respondent believes that sufficient context is provided. Many people lack the time, formats and courage to make the stories more complex – and to trust the viewer's ability to follow along.
- *"I don't think we take the viewers seriously enough – we are simplifying, and that makes the material poorer."*
- *"We are asked to clean up and clear out – it leaves a bit too black and white narratives."*
- *"There's no room for explanations – everything has to be quick and emotional."*
- *"I actually think the viewers can accommodate more – but we don't give it to them."*
- *"I think we're doing well – but it requires constant reflection."*
- *"It's hard to fit in with complexity – but that's where journalism lives."*

Q&A TV2 and DR

EXTRACT – DR and TV2 EDITOR'S INTERVIEW

This analysis is based on interviews with three experienced editors from Danish TV stations. The purpose has been to gather experiences, challenges and reflections on the collaboration with documentary producers, quality assurance and editorial responsibility.

Editors are increasingly finding that they have to act as both subject editors, gatekeepers and protectors of the organisation's integrity. They describe a development where the cases are getting bigger, the risk more pronounced, and the decision-making paths longer. At the same time, the relationship with the producers has become closer, but also more complex.

"We are on all the way, but it also means that we sometimes have to speak up when a story goes too far – or lacks evidence. It can cause friction."

All three editors emphasize that they support the investigative documentary, but that the conditions for it have changed. Requirements for documentation, communication, PR and risk management now play a greater role than before, and there is a demand for new tools to handle this responsibility.

"We are not afraid to take responsibility – but it must be clear who makes the decisions and when. Sometimes there are a little too many chefs in the kitchen."

The editors also call for a common ethical and methodological language. They find that the manufacturers work very differently and that there is not always a common understanding of when something is well enough documented or reasonably formulated.

"The most important thing is that we talk openly about the grey areas. We know it's not black and white – but there must be a space where we can challenge each other professionally without getting defensive."

Question 1:

Have you experienced changes in the collaboration with the manufacturers?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three editors confirm that the nature of the collaboration has changed. There are greater demands on documentation, responsibility and alignment of expectations. At the same time, there is greater pressure from both their own organization and the public.
- *"Today, the collaboration is characterized by many more considerations – not just the editorial aspects."*
- *"It requires more preparatory work and more approvals – everything should preferably be thought through in advance."*
- *"Previously, we had fewer links and more direct dialogue – now there are many more agencies."*

Question 2:

Has cooperation with producers changed in terms of trust?

• **Yes: 2 · No: 1 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Two of the editors find that there is still trust, but that it is often conditioned by the producer's track record. One mentions that formalized processes have replaced the old informal trust.
- - *"It has become more mechanical. Trust is there, but with reservations."*
- *"If we know the company and the history is good, then there is trust."*
- *"Trust is important – but we also need to secure documentation."*

Question 3:

Have there been any changes in the distribution of responsibilities between station and producers?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**
- **Tendency:**
 - All three point to a trend towards broadcasters taking more responsibility – both editorially and legally. This is partly due to the increased external pressure and stricter demands from management and lawyers.
 - *"We are responsible – and we must be able to stand up for everything."*
 - *"The producer makes the content, but we take responsibility to management and the public."*
 - *"We have become more aware of what we send – and why."*

Question 4:

Has it become more difficult for the production companies to sell their ideas to the TV station?

• **Yes: 2 · No: 0 · Don't know: 1**

• **Tendency:**

- Several mention that the process of approval has become more extensive, and that the idea requires more documentation and clarification of both form and method before production starts.
- *"We need to see the whole story and the risk assessment before we say yes."*
- *"It's become much more formalized."*
- *"There are several layers before we can approve a project."*

Question 5:

Has it become more important to be able to document a methodological approach before approval?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- There is broad agreement that more thorough descriptions of methods are now required, especially in critical documentaries. It is both about ethics, law and being able to defend the product externally.
- *"We must be able to stand up for the method – also legally."*
- *"It's no longer enough to have a good idea – we need to see the whole toolbox."*
- *"The method has become part of the decision-making basis."*

Question 6:

Have there been increased requirements for internal written documentation?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**
- **Tendency:**
 - All three mention increased use of internal documents such as research documents, contracts, declarations of consent and rights forms. This is done both for reasons of legal responsibility and as an internal work tool.
 - *"There are far more appendices and underlying documents today."*
 - *"We save everything – including internal discussions – it has become a security."*
 - *"The documentation must be in order before we go live."*

Question 7:

Have the legal requirements for the production companies been tightened?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three editors mention that there is an increased focus on legal responsibility and precise contracts. They work more closely with lawyers, and this places higher demands on the producers' contractual overview.
- *"The lawyers are more involved – and it starts earlier in the process."*
- *"The contracts have become longer and more specific."*
- *"We have a closer legal cooperation – and that requires something from the producers."*

Question 8:

Is there a requirement for several approvals during a production?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- It is expressed that approvals are not only made in connection with pitch and rough cut, but also in connection with the choice of method, the conclusion of agreements and the preparation of central scenes. This is perceived as necessary, but also bureaucratic.
- *"We have fixed points where we have to approve elements – it's not just at the beginning and end."*
- *"It's become more step-by-step."*
- *"You have to be able to defend all elections – that's why we see it all early on."*

Question 9:

Does the TV Station have an increased focus on risk and protection against criticism from outside?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Editors are experiencing a stricter requirement for risk assessment in relation to personal sensitivity, impartiality, manipulation and reactions from sources. Several assessments are prepared and decisions are documented.
- *"We have to constantly think: how can this be read – and by whom?"*
- *"It's about being able to stand up for yourself – even when someone gets angry."*
- *"We need to get the whole risk picture out before we press start."*

Question 10:

Has the TV Station become more aware of sources that withdraw?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three editors feel that the withdrawal of contributors has become a larger and more complex problem. It is about law, ethics and press ethics – and about documenting the processes thoroughly.
- *"We have learned to expect someone to regret it – and we must be prepared."*
- *"It has become a standard part of the assessment: what if a cast member drops out?"*
- *"We do more interviews and document more thoroughly – but it's still difficult."*

Question 11:

Does the TV station have more focus on ethics than before?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**
- **Tendency:**
 - All point out that ethical assessments have become more systematic and take up more space in the editorial dialogue. This is due to both societal development and greater external pressure.
 - *"Ethics is no longer something we just feel our way to – it needs to be clarified explicitly."*
 - *"We take many more discussions, and we document them."*
 - *"In the past, we mainly discussed the angle – now we also discuss the consequences."*

Question 12:

Does the TV Station have an increased focus on source protection and sensitive information?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- There is a broad consensus that source protection takes up more space – both technically and methodologically. It's all about encryption, storage, research, and scene selection.
- *"We talk about it in every production – how sensitive is it and how is it handled?"*
- *"It's not just about anonymizing – it's about securing the entire process."*
- *"We have multiple layers of protection, including internally."*

Question 13:

Has the TV Station increased its focus on impartiality and conflicts of interest?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three say that impartiality has risen much higher on the agenda. This applies both in relation to the participants, research and the journalist's own role.
- *"We ask more actively about relationships – and document it."*
- *"Everything that may look like a coincidence, must be uncovered."*
- *"It's no longer something we leave to the journalist to assess."*

Question 14:

Has it become more difficult to use hidden recordings?

- **Yes: 2 · No: 1 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- There is still the possibility for use of hidden recordings, but the requirements for pre-assessment, documentation and management approval have increased significantly.
- *"We do it less often – and only with very clear reasons."*
- *"The law has been tightened – and that requires far more discussions."*
- *"There must be a clear publicist argument – and we must be able to defend it."*

Question 15:

Has it become more difficult to make confrontations?

- **Yes: 2 · No: 0 · Don't know: 1**

- **Tendency:**

- Editors find that confrontations are still used, but that they need to be better prepared and more balanced. They are now being assessed more critically by both internal and external bodies.
- *"It requires a higher degree of fairness – and we must be able to document the process."*
- *"We take more meetings about how and when confrontations are used."*
- *"It's a sharper weapon – and we need to use it more carefully."*

Question 16:

Has it become more difficult to make investigative documentaries with a hidden camera or undercover?

• **Yes: 2 • No: 1 • Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- There is agreement that it can still be done, but that it requires heavy documentation, management approval and clear ethical assessments. The risk is assessed higher today than in the past.
- *"It is possible – but it requires more basis and more discussions."*
- *"It has become harder to lift an undercover project – and not always possible."*
- *"We have to be very sure that it is necessary – and that we are doing it right."*

Question 17:

Has it become more important to ensure a balance in form and include the other party's perspective?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All three experience an increased demand for balance and nuance – both journalistically and formally. This is important for internal and external legitimacy.
- *"We take a critical look at the editing choices that create a particular mood."*
- *"There is a greater focus on whether the other side is included – and how they are produced."*
- *"It's not just about the facts – it's about how you draw the picture."*

Question 18:

Has it become more difficult to defend programmes that attract attention or debate?

• **Yes: 2 · No: 1 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- There is still a willingness to broadcast controversial programmes, but it requires more internal support, a longer decision-making process and preparation by management and PR.
- *"We still send the sharp – but we take longer to prepare it."*
- *"There are more people who need to be on target – and that requires more documentation."*
- *"In the past, we were faster – now everything has to be well thought out and approved."*

Question 19:

Is there increased attention to the documentary's afterlife (reactions, debate, lawsuits)?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- The editors agree that it is no longer about sending and forgetting. A documentary must now be thought into a longer afterlife and handled actively.
- *"We must be able to vouch for it, even when six months pass."*
- *"There are often reactions long after – and we have to be ready for that."*
- *"We strategize how we handle reactions."*

Question 20:

Has the relationship with the viewers become more important in the planning?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**
- **Tendency:**
 - An increased focus on the viewers' perception, experience and feelings is mentioned – both as an assessment parameter and as part of the decision-making basis.
 - *"We ask ourselves the question: how will viewers experience this?"*
 - *"It's not just about publicity value – it's also about reception."*
 - *"We pay more attention to the balance between purpose and effect."*

Question 21:

Does accessibility on digital platforms increase the pressure on the documentary's content and quality?

• **Yes: 2 · No: 1 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- Two editors find that the increased exposure and accessibility online has made it more important to think about the big picture, precision and ethics. The third editor does not see any significant change.
- *"We have to think in terms of screenshots and quotation picks – everything can be taken out of context."*
- *"Digital exposure means we need to be even more precise."*
- *"I don't think it changes our requirements – we've always had to be precise."*

Question 22:

Have new considerations arisen in relation to social media?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three mention that social media is changing both the reception and the debate about documentaries. It requires greater preparation and responsiveness, and it affects both viewer relationship and program strategy.
- *"We will be hit faster – and must be ready to respond sooner."*
- *"The reactions come earlier and stronger – and often from unexpected quarters."*
- *"We prepare for criticism in the comments section – even before we broadcast."*

Question 23:

Has it become more important to involve the station's management in the development of projects?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- There is a consensus that management plays a greater role in decisions about documentaries. This is especially true for sensitive or expository projects.
- *"We need to get the management on board from the start – otherwise the project can't fly."*
- *"There is a closer dialogue upwards – and that gives a different dynamic."*
- *"The more controversial, the earlier we need to involve the executive board."*

Question 24:

Has it become more important to clarify the value and purpose of publishing?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**
- **Tendency:**
 - All three editors point out that it requires a greater degree of explicit reasoning for why a project is being made – and what it should contribute.
 - *"We must be able to articulate the purpose clearly – both internally and externally."*
 - *"We work more with purpose descriptions than before."*
 - *"It's about transparency and responsibility – and it starts with the purpose."*

Question 25:

Has it become more important to show the consequences of the documentary's methods?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- There is an increasing demand to make visible and reflect on the choice of method. It is both about ethics and about transparency towards the viewers and the public.
- *"We show more often how we have worked – it creates trust."*
- *"We can't just assume that people understand our method – we have to show it."*
- *"The documentary must also be able to explain itself – not just tell something else."*

Question 26:

Have you experienced that the production companies oversell an idea?

- **Answer: Yes: 2 · No: 1 · Don't know: 0**
- **Tendency:**
 - Several editors have experienced that ideas are presented at pitch in a form that is more ambitious or promising than what the project can actually hold. This is not necessarily experienced as deliberate misrepresentation, but as part of a competitive industry where there is a lot of pressure to "sell" the idea.
 - *"It has happened – and it makes the process more difficult when reality appears."*
 - *"It's not always in bad faith – but it creates problems in the collaboration."*
 - *"They are trying to sell – and then we have to help land it."*

Question 27:

Have the TV Station's budgets for in-depth and investigative documentaries evolved over the past 10-20 years?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three confirm that budgets have increased nominally (25–30% according to one), but obligations, legal requirements and expectations have grown even more. Therefore, the budget promise is perceived as insufficient in practice. At the same time, however, one says that in some cases, extra funds can be found if the need is well documented.
- *"Budgets have grown a little – but tasks have grown more."*
- *"If a production requires more, we often find a solution – we have become better at saying yes to the extra funds if it is justified."*
- *"Budgets have increased by between 25 and 30 percent. It's never enough."*

Question 28:

Have you experienced that lawyers, private advisors or PR agencies try to stop the project before and during production?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

• **Tendency:**

- All three editors have experienced various forms of pressure and influence from external actors – especially PR agencies and legal advisors who try to control or limit the editorial process. Everything from early interference, demands for meetings, to pressure on sources and attempts to shape the narrative are mentioned.
- *"30 seconds passed after we reached out, and then there was a large PR agency where everything went through."*
- *"The moment you almost start touching sources, you have a PR agency or a lawyer on the phone."*
- *"They want to play into the editorial and have suggestions on who we should talk to – it's a new normal."*

Question 29:

Are angles sharper today than they were 10-20 years ago?

- **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three editors confirm that the demand for sharp angles has grown. This happens both internally in the stations and as a result of the competition for viewers' attention. Today, pitch must often be able to be formulated in one sentence – and angles thus appear as a guiding mechanism right from the idea phase.
- *"There has been greater attention to it – both from the inside and from the outside. We must deliver sensational journalism."*
- *"The pitches need to be more exclusive. It has to be wilder. It has to be more chance-oriented."*
- *"There is a greater demand that you cut it sharply – it has become necessary to get responsiveness."*

Question 30:

Can the sharp angle affect the nuances?

• **Yes: 3 · No: 0 · Don't know: 0**

- **Tendency:**

- All three editors acknowledge that sharp-angle is a necessary part of communication, but they also express concern that it reduces complexity and flattens narratives. This can lead to documentaries losing ambiguity and unresolved aspects – and thus audience trust and quality.
- *"It's hard to be allowed to show that things can be undecided."*
- *"Who the hell is interested in black-and-white stories? Nobody. That is not good enough."*
- *"There is no room for intermediate calculations – it must be possible to say that in one sentence."*

Obvious agreements

Sharp angle as a premise

- Both producers and editors confirm that sharp-angle is an absolute requirement today.
- The pitch and idea must be able to be captured and communicated quickly – often in one sentence.
- Both sides express concern that it could harm nuances, but acknowledge the necessity.

The nature of the collaboration

- Both parties feel that the collaboration has become more complex and top-down.
- Producers cite streaming logic, branding, and legal considerations.
- Editors describe more instances, increased alignment of expectations and approvals.

Law as a governing factor

- Both parties confirm that law takes up much more space today than in the past.
- Producers describe it as controlling and call law 'a new editor'.
- Editors emphasize the necessity of the law in relation to responsibility, risk and external criticism.
- Law now plays a role in all phases: pitch, production, editing and delivery.

Ethics and method

- • Both sides confirm an increased focus on methodology, ethics and fact-checking.
- • Producers spend more time on source management and consent.
- • Editors require clear documentation of journalistic practice.

Public relations and crisis preparedness

- Both producers and editors mention growing PR focus.
- Producers feel involved in PR planning early on.
- Editors experience greater demands on communication and responsiveness.

Obvious disagreements

Control and responsibility

- Producers feel controlled and deprived of creative freedom.
- Editors see control as necessary and protective.
- Disagreement about whether management is done out of consideration or distrust.

Finances and budget

- Producers: Budgets don't keep up with requirements.
- Editors: Nominal increases have been made, and extra funds can be allocated if needed.
- Producers see the economy as squeezed and inadequate.

Pitch and overselling

- Some producers admit to overselling ideas to get them through.
- Editors sometimes feel misled and disappointed by reality.
- Both parties address mutual pressure in the idea phase.

Doubts/nuances

Trust and cooperation

- Producers: Trust is weakened, control dominates.
- Editors: Trust exists, but requires documentation and history.
- Tension field between expected autonomy and necessary responsibility.

Complexity and narrative

- Producers believe that complexity is lost in form and pitch.
- Editors do not express the same concern – value communication more.
- Disagreement about how much the nuances can and must be preserved.

Access and Contributors

- Both parties experience greater sensitivity and more difficult access.
- Producers are frustrated by secrecy and institutional barriers.
- Editors emphasize the protection of contributors and PR considerations.

A word from the Scientists

Gert Tinggaard Svendsen

Professor, Department of
Political Science, Aarhus
University



Control is loss of value

Gert Tinggaard Svendsen is a professor of political science at Aarhus University and one of Denmark's leading experts in trust, control, and organizational design. His research shows that the balance between trust and control in organizations isn't just a matter of culture—it has direct economic consequences. When applied to the television industry, producers resemble employees and editors function as managers—a crucial distinction, as the two groups naturally hold different perspectives on control, responsibility, and freedom.

The producers interviewed in this study express deep frustration over increasing control requirements.

“There are constant requests for lists, PowerPoints, sub-goals. Everything becomes highly formalized. It kills the desire to think creatively,” says one producer.

Another adds:

“We feel like we have to document everything—even things that don't make sense. It takes time away from the real work.”

Editors see the matter differently:

“We need to have things under control. When something goes wrong, we're the ones held accountable,” says one editor.

Another adds: “Mistakes are costly, so it's hard to give full freedom.”

Tinggaard emphasizes that control comes at a cost:

“The more you control, the more expensive it becomes. Control is in itself a loss of value.” In his so-called gaming model, an organization can reduce control costs by up to 25 percent simply by increasing trust—fewer checks, procedures, and less administration. But that takes courage: “If management continues with hidden control, gaming arises—meaning employees find ways to work around the system. That makes the whole machine inefficient,” he says.

Producers experience exactly this:

“We learn how to work around it. Sometimes we just do what's necessary to pass the control checks,” says one.

Another adds:

“You guess what's just enough to be allowed to move forward.”

Editors recognize the problem:

“We try to balance how much control we can let go of—but we don't always dare to take the chance.”

The Gaming Model and Rider Types

Tinggaard’s gaming model describes the daily tension between trust and control as a formula that must balance:

“If, as a leader, you focus only on control, you get a low overall value—because the cost of control outweighs the benefits. If you rely solely on trust with no control, you risk fraud and mistakes. The highest gain comes from finding the right balance between the two.”

He estimates that up to 25 percent of an organization’s costs can be eliminated if trust is increased.

Another key aspect of Tinggaard’s theory involves three behavioural types: Easy Riders, Hard Riders, and Free Riders. These labels don’t refer to personality traits but to system effects. Easy Riders benefit from the work of others without contributing—a negative outcome caused by an imbalance between trust and control. Hard Riders are the positive actors who carry the load for the group, going the extra mile even without being asked. Free Riders contribute nothing but still reap the benefits—also a negative behaviour.

Tinggaard warns:

“If you end up with too many Easy or Free Riders, the organization loses efficiency and cohesion.”

He gives an example from a public organization where employees began cc’ing their boss on every email—just to protect themselves.

“It doubled the volume of emails and wasted time across the entire office,” he says.

Producers in the TV industry describe a similar development:

“We’re always covering our backs—everything needs to be saved and documented.”

“You end up thinking more about what could get you in trouble than about making the best program.”

Editors also feel the consequences:

“We’ve had cases where everything ended up in the hands of lawyers. That costs—both in time and money.”

Tinggaard underlines that this fear of mistakes is costly:

“Trust isn’t just psychology—it’s money. If you can create a culture where people can be open about mistakes without fear, you also save on legal fees and conflict handling.”

He adds that even managers—in this case, editors—can behave like Easy Riders:

“If a leader covers themselves, delays decisions, and lets others take the risk, that can also hurt the organization.”

Tinggaard cautions against a zero-error culture:

“There’s no such thing in real life. That’s why you need to adjust gradually—try things out, learn from mistakes, course correct along the way. The complexity of real life makes it impossible to design perfect control systems from the start.”

Tinggaard’s conclusion is fairly clear:

“Everything points in the same direction—both theory and practice. There is economic gain in trusting your people more. But that requires leaders to let go a little—and that’s hard when the stakes are high.”

Producers want this trust:

“We make better programs when we’re allowed to think for ourselves.”

Editors understand the desire—but hesitate:

“We want to offer more freedom. But we’re also the ones who have to answer for the results.”

Read more about Gert Tinggaard Svendsen’s research:

[https://pure.au.dk/portal/en/persons/gert-tinggaard-svendsen\(12345678\).html](https://pure.au.dk/portal/en/persons/gert-tinggaard-svendsen(12345678).html)

Svendsen, G.T. (2025). **Trust.** Johns Hopkins University Press, USA.

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Michael Bang Petersen

Professor, Department of
Political Science, Aarhus
University



The Powers of a Sharp Angle

“We have a media economy that rewards sharply angled stories.”

Professor Michael Bang Petersen is one of Denmark’s leading political psychology experts. As the head of the research project *Power and Democracy 2.0*, where one of the focus areas is the power of the press and the role of media in democracy, he in this interview explains how journalistic methods like sharp framing, plausible deniability, and traces of misinformation erode trust in major public service documentaries.

Bang Petersen identifies a core challenge in the media industry: economic incentives or the pursuit of viewers drive journalism toward the dramatic and confrontational.

“We have a media economy that rewards sharply angled stories. That also applies to documentaries, which are often expected to stand alone as dramas.”

He stresses that storytelling strength is not the issue, but the cost is high:

“Even though people know a documentary is framed, their trust is eroded if the angle is too sharp.”

Producers and editors also feel the pressure from within:

“We must ramp up the drama to earn a place in the broadcast schedule. But we can feel it when it goes too far.”

“We’re constantly being asked to find what’s most ‘clicky.’ That comes at the expense of complexity.”

Trust also suffers under the strategy Bang Petersen calls *plausible deniability*—when the journalist or documentarian implies something without taking full responsibility.

“You put something out there but hide behind the narrator’s question or a neutral-sounding voice-over. That creates distrust because it feels dishonest.”

According to him, the method becomes even more tempting as documentaries are increasingly produced for streaming platforms, where attention can be converted directly into financial value.

“The business model rewards the documentary that generates debate—not necessarily the one that is most accurate.”

As one editor puts it:

“There’s a culture of using question marks to suggest more than we can really stand behind.”

A producer adds:

“It’s easy to wrap a claim in a voice-over and say, ‘It’s just an open question.’ But we know what we’re implying.”

Bang Petersen also warns against *epistemic manipulation*—where framing or selective facts give the audience a misleading impression without directly lying.

“I’ve previously criticized a documentary that left viewers with a conspiratorial feeling without saying anything explicitly false.”

Producers and editors recognize the mechanism:

“We rarely discuss how something affects the audience if it’s not technically incorrect. But maybe we should.”

“We know the trick of letting visuals and music imply what we can’t prove. But it doesn’t feel right.”

Comes with a price.

Trust in the media remains generally high in Denmark, but it’s being worn down in small increments, says Bang Petersen.

“We’re not seeing major drops, but we are seeing more thoughtful scepticism.” And trust isn’t just a feeling—it’s a social currency: Trust allows for fast decisions, common rules, and acceptance of complexity.

According to Michael Bang Petersen, there is a risk of trust eroding if we lose part of the glue that holds society together. A risk that both producers and editors see.

“I don’t think viewers realize how much we edit and shape. And it damages trust when they find out,” says one producer.

An editor adds:

“We have a reflex to be critical of politicians, but we lack a similar reflex when assessing our own methods.”

According to Bang Petersen, the consequence may be that citizens turn away from traditional media.

“People who feel overlooked or deceived seek information elsewhere. Not necessarily because they’re conspiratorial, but because they feel alienated.”

Michael Bang Petersen concludes with a call to responsibility:

“Journalists and documentarians wield great power over how we as citizens perceive reality. That’s a huge responsibility. So, they must also be able to look themselves in the mirror and ask: Did we do it in a decent way?”

Read more about Michael Bang Petersens’s research:

- Michael Bang Petersen at Aarhus University: <https://ps.au.dk/forskning/forskningsprojekter/hope>

- Power and Democracy 2.0: <https://magtudredningen.dk>

- ROPH – Research on Online Political Hostility: <https://ps.au.dk/forskning/forskningsprojekter/roph>

Summary

Perhaps this report draws up the perfect storm when pointing to lack of trust, lack of funding and lack of agency on both sides are subjects to be dealt with before the documentary eco system might shut down. Or perhaps this could be the starting point for slowing down, loosening up and reorganize the whole field of storytelling to come back even stronger.

Many of those interviewed describe a vacuum of responsibility: producers carry the risk, editors carry the reputation, but the organisation rarely provides a clear structure of support. The report suggests that editorial leadership must be involved earlier in the process—not only to approve, but to stand beside the teams creating the content. Trust is a recurring theme. The kind of trust that allows documentary journalism to flourish is not just about faith in the filmmaker. It's about institutions showing they are willing to take a stand when things get difficult. This report does not pretend to offer all the answers. But it does offer a space for reflection—on what has changed, what still works, and what we risk losing if we do not adapt wisely.

Maybe I was wrong. Maybe we all were. But the only way to find out is to listen—not to our fears or routines, but to the people who still dare to tell difficult stories in difficult times.

The people I spoke to didn't just answer my questions—they gave me a window into a part of our media industry that is under increasing pressure yet still carries deep purpose. In this new media reality, stories compete with an infinite feed of content.

Producers shared how traditional public service ambitions sometimes clash with streaming logic: a need for continuous engagement metrics and short-term visibility. The interviews reveal both pride and exhaustion. There's a shared sense that the work still matters—but the framework surrounding it is less forgiving than before. Editors face a balancing act: defending editorial freedom while mitigating legal and political risks. The pressure to deliver impactful stories without controversy is immense. Lack of time is a consistent theme.

The absence of clear, structured collaboration often means both sides operate in good faith—but without shared expectations. That leads to friction, especially under time pressure.

This report does not offer a checklist of solutions—but it does gather important signals. If we want Danish documentary film to remain relevant and courageous, we must ask the hard questions

Advices?

If the subject of this report was a canned tomato factory, both factory and tomato farmers would soon be of the market. The economy and the risk of making mistakes are nowhere near a healthy business model.

But this is not canned tomatoes. This is highly skilled and passionate professionals ignoring the laws of gravity because they just *have* to tell stories and make a difference to serve the public.

I don't have the solid answers to secure them from a crash landing. But perhaps we should start by sharing thoughts on what would happen if we looked at:

Same over all budgets - Fewer Documentaries

More nuances - Less sharp angling

More trust - Acknowledge mistakes

Reboot - Rebuild frozen structures