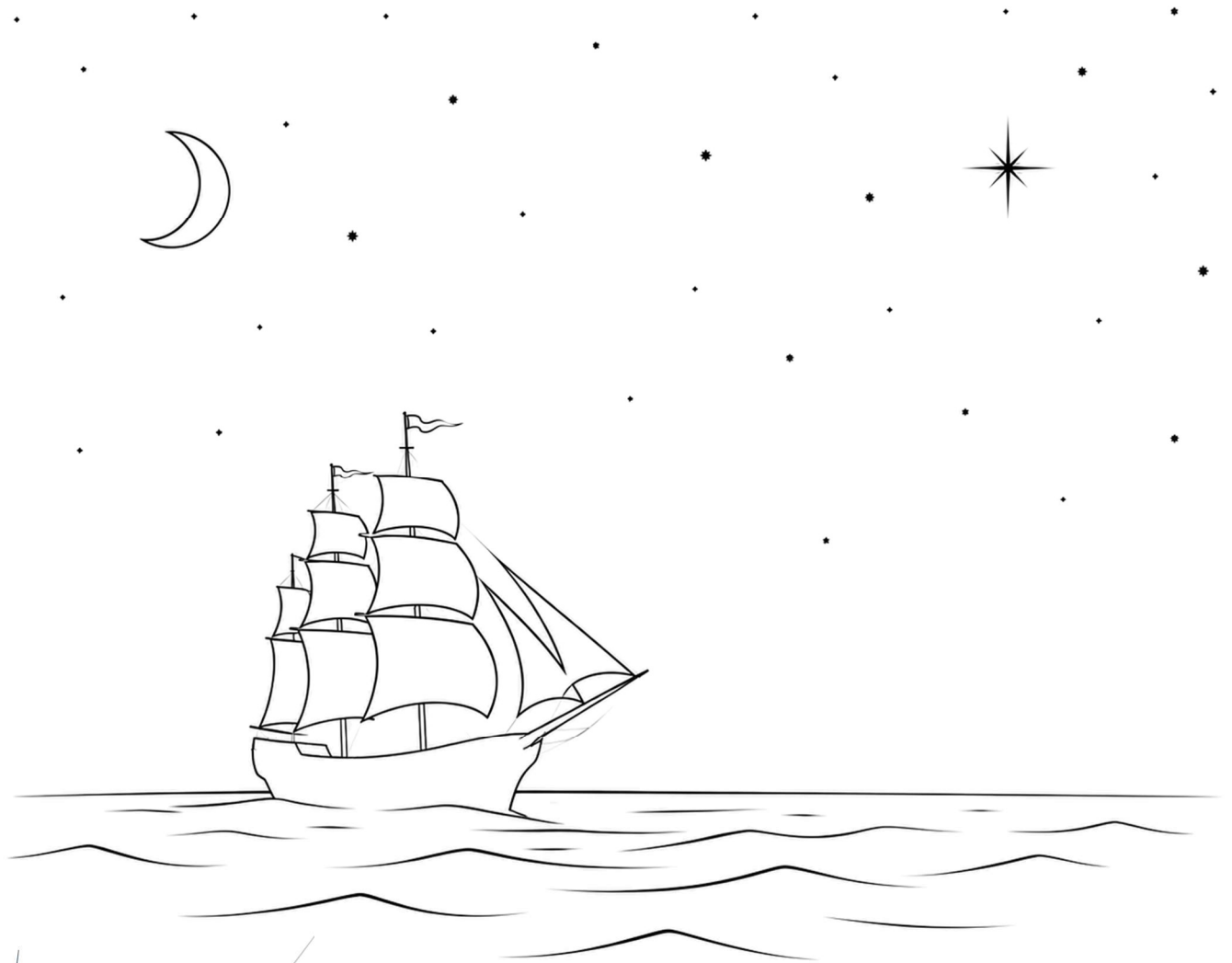


The North Star

A model for embedding constructive journalism



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Contents

Abstract	P. 2
Introduction	P. 3
What is constructive journalism?	P. 5
Industry cases	P. 9
Ingrid Tinmannsvik, NRK and Demo	P. 9
Benedikte Fjelly, NRK	P. 13
Kristina Lund Jørgensen, TV 2 Fyn	P. 17
Brian Holst, Midtjyllands Avis	P. 22
Nanna Holst, TV 2 Kosmopol	P. 26
Psychology and leadership	P. 29
Conclusion and model for embedding constructive journalism	P. 33
References	P. 37

Abstract

In recent years, a growing trend has emerged of Danes deliberately avoiding the news. One explanation is a news agenda dominated by negative stories, conflict and war.

In an effort both to win audiences back and to provide a more accurate picture of the world, a number of media organisations have chosen to focus on constructive journalism.

This report examines how media organisations can embed constructive journalism in their editorial culture and journalistic practice. It does so through interviews with a number of media leaders in Denmark and Norway, all of whom have previously been through such a process.

In addition, the report looks at “social identity theory of leadership” — a psychological theory that can be applied when working to embed new journalistic values.

In the conclusion, the report brings together the key points in a model that media leaders can use if they are facing a similar process of embedding constructive journalism in their own organisation.

Introduction

Like many other parts of society, the media industry is undergoing major change in the twenty-first century.

New technologies, new players and new habits have challenged the way traditional media organisations operate. In recent years, another serious phenomenon has also become increasingly visible: more citizens are deliberately avoiding news and journalism.

Each year, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism publishes its Digital News Report, which offers in-depth insight into the media industry across the world. Among other things, the report examines how widespread news avoidance is. In the 2025 report, 27 per cent of Danish respondents say they often or sometimes actively try to avoid the news.¹

In 2017, the figure was 14 per cent.²

The trend is moving upwards, and there may be several reasons for this.

Across all markets, the 2025 report shows that avoidance is partly driven by the fact that the news has a negative effect on one's mood (39 per cent), that they feel “worn out” by the amount of news (31 per cent), and that there is too much coverage of conflict/war (30 per cent) and politics (29 per cent).

Naturally, many media organisations want to reverse this development. Partly to increase revenue, and partly to strengthen democracy by contributing to a better-informed public.

With that in mind — that people feel the news puts them in a bad mood and overwhelms them — a constructive approach to journalism has begun to gain ground in several media organisations. This approach includes, among other things, producing fewer stories, but giving them more depth, while placing greater emphasis on solutions and nuance in the coverage.

Nordjyske is one of the media organisations that does not have a strong tradition of using constructive methods in its journalism, but which wants to make greater use of them.

I was therefore sent to Constructive Institute as a fellow to examine how a media organisation can carry out the kind of transition and implementation required to embed a more constructive approach to journalism.

Because, as with any other change a management team may want to create, there is a risk that the changes remain in the manager's PowerPoint deck rather than becoming part of the organisation's working culture.

¹ Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025

² Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022

In other words: how do you actually embed a constructive approach in an editorial organisation? And just as importantly — how do you maintain that focus over time?

During my fellowship at Constructive Institute, I have listened to inspiring talks by professionals and experts in society and journalism, discussed journalism with the other fellows, and taken courses at Aarhus University on voter polarisation as well as work and organisational psychology.

In preparing this report, I have interviewed a number of professional media leaders in Denmark and Norway who have previously been through precisely this kind of transition towards more constructive journalism. In addition, I have looked at a relevant psychological theory that can be applied in leadership work when such a transition is to be put into practice.

All of this is described throughout the report.

The idea is that this report allows others to stand on the shoulders of those who have already been through a similar implementation process.

In the conclusion, I bring the threads together in a model that media leaders can subsequently use if they want to embed a more constructive approach to journalism in their own newsroom.

Thomas Lee

Journalist at Nordjyske

Fellow at Constructive Institute, 2026



What is constructive journalism?

Before constructive journalism can be embedded in a newsroom, there needs to be a shared understanding and a common conceptual framework for what constructive journalism actually is.

The term “constructive journalism” carries many different connotations among journalists — including a number of misconceptions that can lead to resistance in the newsroom towards this kind of journalistic approach.

The University of Southern Denmark, together with a range of contributors from Denmark and Norway, has produced a Danish-Norwegian white paper on constructive journalism. The purpose was to clarify what the term actually covers, and how it has been defined and put into practice by a number of media organisations.³

Among other things, the white paper points out that, just as there are different approaches to investigative journalism, there are also different approaches to constructive journalism.

Despite these differences, the fundamental aim of constructive journalism is the same: “to describe the world more accurately, and that power can be scrutinised in ways other than those used in traditional journalism”.⁴

This is done, among other things, through a focus on solutions, an ambition to provide a more nuanced — and therefore more accurate — picture of the world, and a stronger emphasis on involving the audience in the journalistic process.

All of these elements have been implemented in different ways in the everyday work of newsrooms.

Constructive Institute and the three pillars

Constructive Institute, which was founded in Aarhus in 2017, is probably the most influential promoter of the constructive approach to journalism in Denmark.

The institute uses the model known as The Constructive House, where the ambition is “to contribute to democracy through critical, constructive journalism”.⁵



³ Konstruktiv Journalistik. Behov og baggrund, mål og modeller. En dansk-norsk hvidbog, SDU, 2024

⁴ Konstruktiv Journalistik. Behov og baggrund, mål og modeller. En dansk-norsk hvidbog, SDU, 2024

⁵ Håndbog i konstruktiv journalistik 2025, Kristina Lund Jørgensen og Jakob Risbro, Constructive Institute, 2025

The path towards that goal rests on three pillars, which form the foundation of constructive journalism.

The first pillar is about focusing on solutions.

Once a piece of journalism has identified a problem, the next question is whether anyone has solved the same problem — or a similar one — in a way that could provide inspiration.

Here, the journalist must remember to be just as critical of the potential solutions as of the problem itself. Is there evidence that this solution actually works? And can it be applied to the issue being covered?

The second pillar is about covering the nuances of a story.

The world is rarely black and white, and journalism should not be either.

Journalists may have a natural tendency to focus only on problems. But in constructive journalism, according to the model, it is important to “see the world with both eyes” and to strive for the best obtainable version of the truth.

This can be seen, for example, when media organisations produce explainers that help audiences understand a complex issue, or when they test myths and preconceptions in an important area of coverage.

The third and final pillar in the model is about audience involvement. That journalism should facilitate debate and include citizens.

In some places, this has been done by asking audiences which topics and questions are currently on their minds. Elsewhere, it has involved hosting public debates, open editorial meetings or live blogs where audiences can ask journalists and experts questions about a particular issue.

Constructive Institute has also developed a matrix model which shows how constructive journalism differs from fast-paced breaking-news journalism and investigative journalism, while also underlining an important point: constructive journalism cannot stand alone, but should be

understood as an extension of other forms of journalism.

	Breaking News	Investigative Journalism	Constructive Journalism
Time	Now	Yesterday	Tomorrow
Goals	Speed	Uncover	Inspiration
Questions	What? When?	Who? Why?	What now? How?
Style	Dramatic	Critical	Curious
Role	Police	Prosecutor	Facilitator
Focus	Drama	Crooks and Victims	Solutions and Best practice

Figure:
constructiveinstitute.org

As described in the white paper published by the University of Southern Denmark: “Only once all three phases have been completed can it be called constructive journalism.”⁶

Other practical applications and definitions in the industry

Although Constructive Institute has a strong voice in the field of constructive journalism in Scandinavia, it is not alone in having developed its own model for constructive journalism.

Over the years, several media organisations have created their own models and definitions of what constructive journalism means to them.

Later in this report, I will look more closely at, among others, Midtjyllands Avis’ KLIO model and TV 2 Fyn’s compass LINK.

At the Dutch media outlet De Correspondent, a ten-point manifesto has been developed to describe the organisation’s values. According to the white paper, the seven points that relate to journalism are:⁷

- We are your antidote to the daily news grind
- We fight stereotypes, prejudice and fearmongering
- We don’t just cover the problem, but also what can be done about it
- We collaborate with you, our knowledgeable members
- We don’t take the view from nowhere. We tell you where we’re coming from
- We want to be as inclusive as possible
- We believe in transparency and continued self-improvement

In a similar way, both the Danish media outlet Zetland and the Dutch university Windesheim have formulated principles and values that align with the aims of constructive journalism.

Gerd Maria May has also developed the FINT model, which has been used by a number of media organisations in Scandinavia — most recently, among others, at Nordjyske.

With its focus on Community (Fællesskab), Inspiration, Nuance and Trust, the model helps build stronger loyalty to, and interest in, journalism.⁸

⁶ Konstruktiv Journalistik. Behov og baggrund, mål og modeller. En dansk-norsk hvidbog, SDU, 2024

⁷ Konstruktiv Journalistik. Behov og baggrund, mål og modeller. En dansk-norsk hvidbog, SDU, 2024

⁸ Konstruktiv Journalistik. Behov og baggrund, mål og modeller. En dansk-norsk hvidbog, SDU, 2024

Resistance towards constructive journalism and its perceived tension with conventional journalistic practice

As mentioned earlier, the term “constructive journalism” carries different connotations for different journalists. Because of misconceptions, the constructive approach is sometimes dismissed as happy-go-lucky journalism that uncritically focuses only on positive stories.

That, however, is based on a misconception.

“Critical” is a word that appears repeatedly across the industry when constructive journalism is defined — both at Constructive Institute and at individual media organisations, including Midtjyllands Avis and TV 2 Fyn, which are included in this report.

At Constructive Institute, it is framed like this: constructive journalism must begin with a societal problem.

If there is no societal problem, it is not constructive journalism.

In Denmark, journalists have for decades been trained in the classic VISAK criteria.⁹ News values intended to help journalists and editors assess whether a story is “good” or not.

As the respondents’ answers on why they avoid the news suggest, the criterion of “conflict” may have been allowed to play a little too dominant a role in how stories are angled and assessed — and, as a result, in the overall news agenda.

But journalists’ focus on detecting and uncovering problems is not only natural; it remains important.

Human beings are naturally alert to what may be dangerous, so that we can act and survive.

From a constructive perspective, journalism should still describe and uncover the major problems in society.

Constructive journalism is not the opposite of investigative and critical journalism — rather, it is a further development of it.

Where critical, investigative journalism is meant to uncover problems, constructive journalism should lift its gaze and look ahead: how can this problem be solved?

So what is constructive journalism?

Despite the different definitions and models used in both the Danish and international media industry, there is a certain degree of overlap in what defines constructive journalism.

It is journalism that approaches the world with nuance, critically examines potential solutions to problems, and engages in dialogue with its audience.

⁹ Significance (Væsentlighed), Identification, Sensation, Timeliness (Aktualitet) and Conflict

Industry cases

During my fellowship, I have interviewed a number of media leaders from Denmark and Norway, all of whom have been involved in efforts to embed constructive journalism in their own media organisations.

In the following pages, I describe who they are, what they have done as part of that work, and the key points and lessons that can be drawn from each case.



Ingrid Tinmannsvik

Former project lead at NRK and current editor-in-chief at Demo

"It would never work if it were just a fancy strategy and a set of PowerPoint slides with impressive words – not unless people have a concrete way of putting it into practice."

Case background:

Ingrid Tinmannsvik has been one of Norway's leading voices in constructive journalism in recent years.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she launched NRK's dedicated section Lyspunkt — "Bright Spot" — which brought together hopeful stories from across NRK at a time when the news agenda was, understandably, heavily dominated by the pandemic and its consequences.

She later became responsible for rolling out constructive journalism more broadly

across NRK. Since then, she has become editor-in-chief at Demo, the Norwegian sister publication of Denmark's Zetland.

Tinmannsvik therefore has experience implementing constructive journalism in a large organisation with established routines that had to be changed. At the same time, she is now building a media outlet from the ground up, giving her insight into what it takes to create a newsroom where constructive journalism is part of the foundation from the very beginning.

Communication, shared ownership and specific goals

When Ingrid Tinmannsvik looks back on NRK's work to embed constructive journalism, the first thing she mentions is the importance of bringing people together. In her view, ownership

has to be shared widely, and the organisation needs a shared conversation about what constructive journalism should mean “for us”.

She therefore brought together employees from different departments and different levels of the organisation. The aim was to ensure that ownership of the project and the mindset behind it did not sit only with Ingrid herself or her own department but was embedded more broadly across NRK through this network of ambassadors.

Together, this group of employees helped formulate NRK’s own definition of constructive journalism.

- We went through quite an extensive process, considering many different alternatives and discussing where we stood at NRK. That gave us a shared language, and that was absolutely essential.

Having ownership across different parts of the organisation, and identifying ambassadors early on — from senior management to the newsroom floor — was extremely important, Ingrid Tinmannsvik explains.

As project lead, Ingrid travelled to NRK’s different newsrooms, where she taught them what constructive journalism is, showed examples and helped them with practical tools and the development of specific goals. In this way the approach was put into system in each individual newsroom. She sees this as one of the keys to success.

- It would never work if it were just a fancy strategy and a set of PowerPoint slides with impressive words — not unless people have a concrete way of putting it into practice.

The goals can vary from newsroom to newsroom. In one place, it might mean writing into the working schedule that a specific employee is responsible for working on constructive stories. In another newsroom, it might mean introducing a rule that audience questions must always be included when programmes are broadcast.

Not every newsroom can be measured against the same requirements or goals. That is why it is important for each editorial team and newsroom to help define what success looks like for them, Ingrid Tinmannsvik says.

- Those who manage to make it tangible are the ones who succeed. Those who simply say, “now we also have to remember to be constructive,” tend not to succeed as well.

Clear up misunderstandings

Ingrid did not encounter any strong resistance to constructive journalism within the organisation. However, like others in similar roles in the media industry, she did come up against misconceptions about what constructive journalism actually means.

- The term constructive journalism is both loved and hated, but more than anything it is misunderstood.

My experience was that as long as I explained properly what it actually is, much of the resistance disappeared. Because once people understood it, it became very hard to disagree with.

- When SVT first made a push for constructive journalism, they focused very heavily on the solutions-oriented aspect. But that was too narrow. We met less resistance at NRK because our definition was broader.

Responsibility

Another decisive factor in whether the transformation succeeds — and whether the focus is maintained — is having someone who is responsible for driving the move towards constructive journalism.

At one point, Ingrid Tinmannsvik moved into another role at NRK, and the position she had previously held disappeared. In her assessment, this also led to a decline in the amount of constructive journalism being produced at NRK.

- Awareness drops when that role disappears. It was absolutely crucial to making it work, and it disappeared too soon. Management hoped that by then the constructive output would continue on its own, but it didn't

A new start

Today, Ingrid no longer works at NRK. Instead, she is co-founder and editor-in-chief at Demo — the Norwegian sister publication of Denmark's Zetland.

In that sense, she now finds herself in a different situation. She is no longer trying to change the workflows and journalistic values of an existing newsroom. Instead, she is establishing them in a new one.

But although the starting point is different, there are still many similarities in how a leader should approach the task. Employees still need to be brought together and involved in the conversation about which journalistic values matter to them.

- I don't know whether we need to talk that much about the specific word "constructive". It is more about how we ensure nuances, how we show solutions, and how we measure success in our own context.

- It will shape our approach to journalism from the start. But I want the team to be part of defining exactly how, so that everyone feels ownership of it.

Another reason to bring people together to talk about journalism is that it allows the newsroom to discuss the process of getting used to producing constructive journalism.

- I want to hear what they have done before that might fit under this umbrella. Then people begin to realise, “Ah, this is not something entirely new — I have already worked like this before.” An important part of succeeding is helping people understand that, in different ways, they have already been doing this throughout their careers.

For other media organisations that want to strengthen their focus on constructive journalism, Ingrid Tinmannsvik sums up her most important advice as follows:

- It should not just be a manager coming back converted from a workshop and deciding that this is the new thing. You have to start by finding out: What does constructive journalism mean for us? From there, you need to turn it into an actual system, with someone responsible for it and a clear plan for what you will do, how you will do it and in what way.

Key lessons and takeaways:

- A designated person with responsibility is important over a longer period of time
 - This person should spread knowledge of constructive methods, clear up misconceptions and help journalists and editorial teams create systems and set goals that support the ambition of doing constructive journalism
- Ownership must be shared widely
 - Bring together employees and managers from different departments and involve them in defining what constructive journalism means for your organisation. This creates shared ownership across the organisation and establishes a common understanding and a shared language
- Create systems and set goals
 - The constructive approach must be made as tangible as possible. It should be adapted to each individual newsroom and formulated in a way that works in practice
 - If there are no specific goals to work towards, constructive initiatives will disappear in the pressures of everyday newsroom life, where old habits take over
- Explain and clear up misconceptions
 - Explain in person what constructive journalism is, so that misconceptions can be addressed and a shared understanding and framework can be built
 - Make it motivating and inspiring, and give journalists practical tips on how to get started
 - Show strong examples of constructive journalism



Benedikte Fjelly

Former project lead at NRK's regional division,
current head of news at NRK Buskerud

"No one should think that this is easy, simple or straightforward to bring about. It requires someone who has ownership of it."

Case background:

Benedikte Fjelly, who works as head of news at NRK's regional newsroom in Buskerud, spent two years, from 2023 to 2024, as one of two project leads for constructive journalism at NRK.

The other project lead, Ingrid Tinmannsvik (see the dedicated section on her case) was responsible for strengthening constructive journalism at NRK across the organisation.

Within NRK's regional division, it was decided that there was a need for a project lead dedicated specifically to the regional division — someone who could travel to

the individual regional newsrooms and work with them directly.

It was Benedikte Fjelly who took on the role of project lead in the regional division. She therefore has experience with embedding constructive journalism across a large organisation in which each regional newsroom otherwise works in its own way.

Perhaps more than most, she has extensive experience with the practical work of embedding constructive journalism and has been able to see, across NRK's regional newsrooms, what has worked.

Training and the fight against misconceptions

NRK has 13 regional newsrooms, all of which had to be introduced to constructive journalism — a focus that had been decided at a strategic, organisation-wide level within NRK.

As project lead in the regional division, Benedikte Fjelly was therefore tasked with visiting all of the regional newsrooms and teaching the journalists about the constructive approach to journalism.

Benedikte did not have formal management responsibility for the many editorial staff across the 13 regional newsrooms.

Her role was partly to train staff in constructive journalism, and partly to give the newsrooms

practical suggestions on how they could make it part of their everyday work. In some regional newsrooms, she also helped get projects off the ground by providing hands-on editorial support.

The course Benedikte Fjelly ran for employees was based on some of the tools they were already using in their daily work. The idea was to make it easier for them later on, when they had to apply a constructive approach themselves.

For example, NRK works with focus statements, which are meant to explain what a story is about in a single sentence. One of the exercises in the course was therefore to make sure these focus statements included a constructive element — for instance, by involving the audience or focusing on solutions.

One of the advantages of visiting the newsrooms in person and speaking directly with employees was that it made it possible to address and clear up some of the prejudices that can exist around constructive journalism.

Benedikte Fjelly says she has encountered both resistance to, and misconceptions about, what constructive journalism is.

Here it is important both to stand firm on the strategy that has been chosen and to engage in dialogue with the critics, she explains. It is also important to point out that the focus statement of a story must still contain a conflict, an imbalance or a disharmony. In other words, the story must still be based on the idea that something could be better.

- For me, it is important that constructive journalism is not about the king coming to visit. That is not constructive. It may be nice and perfectly fine, but the king coming to visit is not a constructive story.

- So, we must always begin with something that involves a conflict or an imbalance. And once employees understand that, my impression is that they also become more open to seeing this as journalism.

Set aside resources and make it a priority

NRK's regional newsrooms have taken different approaches to how they want to work with constructive journalism locally.

One of the measures Benedikte Fjelly has introduced in her own regional newsroom is assigning staff specifically to work on constructive journalism.

In Buskerud, two journalists are therefore not required to do radio shifts or otherwise take part in the regular work shift schedule. Their task is to produce constructive stories.

- That may be the approach that, in my view, has proved the most successful: that we actually have people who become specialists in constructive journalism and work almost exclusively with it.

Benedikte Fjelly says that the two journalists do not only produce strong stories; they have also won awards and inspired other journalists in the newsroom to work more constructively.

The risk of assigning specific employees to work exclusively on constructive stories, however, is that other staff may start to think they do not need to work with constructive angles themselves, because people have already been dedicated to that kind of journalism.

One way to counter that is to discuss at the editorial meetings how the stories already being worked on can be covered constructively. That is also an important point in the day-to-day life of a newsroom.

One practical piece of advice from Benedikte Fjelly is to stay with stories for longer, rather than jumping from one story to the next, as the news industry tends to do.

- The flow of information feels extremely overwhelming. New stories are coming in all the time. But if we stick with the issue we have put on the agenda and keep following up on it, then over time the coverage becomes constructive. Because then you will bring in more voices, you will find examples of solutions, and you may get input from the audience. So over time, I believe following up on a story is constructive in itself. Almost by definition, says Benedikte Fjelly.

In this context, it is worth noting that Benedikte Fjelly has found that many journalists see constructive journalism as something extra that has to be done on top of what they are already doing.

In NRK's implementation process, she has therefore focused on explaining to staff that constructive initiatives should not be added on top of everything else — they should replace something else.

As an example, she mentions that they had recently invited a hospital director into the radio studio for an hour-long Q&A with listener questions following the opening of a new hospital that had faced several problems.

- That is a choice. It is not an extra hour of broadcasting. It is an hour we were already going to broadcast. But we choose to use it to answer questions from listeners, Benedikte Fjelly explains.

In addition, the newsroom measures how many constructive digital stories are published. Although there is no specific target, the measurement itself helps keep production at a certain level.

Responsibility must be clearly assigned

Training staff and offering practical advice is one thing. But if implementation is truly going to succeed, it is crucial to have people in the organisation who are genuinely committed to constructive journalism, Benedikte Fjelly explains.

Looking across NRK's regional newsrooms, she sees that success in embedding constructive journalism into everyday editorial work depends heavily on the people involved.

She also believes it is very important to have project leads working with constructive journalism at an overall organisational level. NRK no longer has that, and in her view, it shows in the journalism being produced.

- No one should think that this is easy, simple or straightforward to bring about. It requires someone who has ownership of it.
- NRK felt that we could not have project leads forever. I thought we might have been able to continue — if not with two, then perhaps with one. Someone needs to have greater responsibility for it than others, because we can see that it is declining.
- It has to be worked on continuously. It has to be kept alive and maintained. People thought that would happen by itself. But it didn't.

Key lessons and takeaways:

- Invest resources in training staff
 - Clear up misconceptions and make the training as practical as possible — for example by building on journalistic tools that are already being used
- Make constructive journalism a priority and keep talking about it
 - Stand firm on your own, or the organisation's, decision that constructive journalism matters — and keep discussing it with staff
 - Make it clear to employees that constructive angles should replace something else, not be added on top of everything else. Stories become constructive when you stay with them
 - Assign employees who are genuinely committed to constructive journalism to work on that type of journalism. This helps ensure a steady production
 - Discuss constructive angles and opportunities in editorial meetings
- Clearly assign overall responsibility
 - There needs to be someone whose role is to highlight strong examples and keep pushing to put constructive journalism on the agenda. Otherwise, journalists fall back into old habits



Kristina Lund Jørgensen

Former editor for constructive journalism at TV 2 Fyn, current associate professor at The University of Southern Denmark

"We sat there with those ten definitions in front of us and combined them into one, so that all employees could recognise themselves in what constructive journalism meant at TV 2 Fyn."

Case background:

Kristina Lund Jørgensen has been chosen as a case for this project because, in her former role as editor for constructive journalism at TV 2 Fyn, she was involved in a major process of developing, embedding and running constructive journalism in practice. She has also been chosen because, at the time, TV 2 Fyn had an ambition to become Denmark's most constructive media organisation.

Since then, the regional broadcaster has shifted its focus, and Kristina Lund Jørgensen no longer works at the station.

Today, she teaches at the University of Southern Denmark and is working on a project that examines whether — and how — this shift in focus has been reflected in the production of constructive journalism at TV 2 Fyn. At the time of writing, this project is still in progress.

Kristina Lund Jørgensen therefore brings experience, reflections and insights from a major effort to embed constructive journalism in a local media organisation that set out to change both its workflows and its journalistic practice.

Embedding constructive journalism at Denmark's most constructive media organisation

Kristina Lund Jørgensen was hired by TV 2 Fyn in 2019 as the editor responsible for constructive journalism. Over a two-year period, she was to lead the work of embedding constructive journalism so that it became a natural part of TV 2 Fyn's news production.

The idea was not that every story in the news broadcasts or on the organisation's website should be constructive. Rather, the aim was to work with the journalists' mindset, so that they would naturally choose a constructive angle when it made sense to do so.

The first step was therefore to train all editorial staff. They were divided into ten groups, with each group taking part in a one-week course and workshop on constructive journalism.

The courses provided an introduction to the models also used at Constructive Institute, but they also included exercises and the production of prototype stories. This gave staff a practical feel for the approach and allowed them to work with what a constructive television piece might look like.

In addition to the training itself, the courses also proved to be a good setting for professional discussions — and therefore an opportunity to challenge some of the misconceptions, Kristina Lund Jørgensen explains.

- We had some really valuable discussions about where the boundaries lie, and about the misconception that it is just feel-good stories, or that everything on TV 2 Fyn had to be constructive. We were able to calmly clear up all those small misconceptions and have a very productive dialogue about them.

Kristina believes the courses gave the newsroom a strong platform for the rest of the process.

Involving staff

In addition to training and professional discussions about constructive journalism, the courses also included a process in which staff contributed their views on what constructive journalism should mean at TV 2 Fyn. In this way, employees were involved in the process, rather than having the vision for the organisation's journalism defined solely from the top down.

- We sat there with those ten definitions in front of us and combined them into one, so that all employees could recognise themselves in what constructive journalism meant at TV 2 Fyn, Kristina Lund Jørgensen explains.

The wording was brought together in the LINK compass — based on the Danish words for solutions-oriented, involving, nuanced and critical¹⁰ — which, together with three key statements, became the guiding values for TV 2 Fyn's constructive journalism:



LINK compass and the guiding values at TV 2 Fyn.

¹⁰ Løsningsorienteret, Involverende, nuanceret og kritisk

- We build on specific, documented problems and test solutions.
- We have the courage to understand everyday realities, portray nuance and provide clarity on complex stories.
- We inspire, engage, activate and listen to our audience, so that we can help move society in a better direction. Viewers should be able to see themselves and their lived reality reflected in our journalism.

The compass and the values were displayed in the newsroom.

COVID-19 and the third pillar

Once the training had been completed and the values had been formulated, the original plan was for each editorial team to produce a constructive series. That project, however, was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the pandemic gave TV 2 Fyn an obvious opportunity to experiment with audience-involving journalism.

Using the tool Hearken — now Loop Software — TV 2 Fyn allowed users to submit questions about the COVID-19 situation, which the newsroom could then help find answers to.

- At first, there were journalists in the newsroom who asked whether we were now supposed to become advice columnists. But it turned out that among all those questions, there were many with real journalistic relevance.

In addition to an ongoing Q&A with a health expert, the questions also led to actual journalism, some of which became among the most-read content during that period.

Clear requirements and goals

When the first wave of attention around COVID-19 had subsided somewhat, all editorial teams were expected to start working with constructive journalism in a more focused way.

Each team was asked to produce a series with a constructive aim, consisting of at least three episodes. This also gave staff the opportunity to try working with constructive journalism in longer formats.

Later, the LINK compass was also used as a direct KPI in editorial meetings. Each news broadcast had to include at least one constructive item, and the editors were given a form on which they had to indicate which story was the LINK story of the day. In a very practical way, this required the editors to consider constructive approaches in the day's editorial output.

About a year into the project, selected employees in each editorial team were appointed as ambassadors. The ambassadors and Kristina Lund Jørgensen held monthly meetings where

they could share strong examples and discuss how to bring constructive methods into the work of the newsrooms. According to Kristina Lund Jørgensen, this worked extremely well and also helped keep the conversation about constructive journalism alive.

Challenges and new priorities

Despite the many initiatives, there were also challenges along the way, Kristina Lund Jørgensen explains.

One of the challenges she recalls was that it was difficult to be an editor working across teams.

Each editorial team had its own manager with formal authority over the employees. In addition, the news editors had formal decision-making power on the day. That made it difficult, as an editor working across the organisation, to tell a team that they should do something in a particular way if the editor responsible for that area was not on board, Kristina Lund Jørgensen explains.

She therefore emphasises how important it is to involve not only the journalists in the project, but also the editors and managers who act as everyday gatekeepers.

- I think everyone in management has to be part of it. They really have to buy into it and really push it forward, because I think it is a bigger transformation than people realise.

A focus that faded

The project to embed constructive journalism ran until the end of 2022 and therefore ended up lasting almost a year and a half longer than originally planned, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From 2023, however, TV 2 Fyn had a new strategy. Among other things, this meant that there would no longer be a dedicated editor responsible for constructive journalism. After three and a half years of work to embed the approach, it now had to prove itself — and the LINK compass still remained part of the station's guiding journalistic values.

Kristina Lund Jørgensen does not yet have data on this, but her impression was that the constructive approach was forgotten a little too quickly in the newsroom after she stepped down as editor.

Both she and another colleague, who had since been a fellow at Constructive Institute, continued to work constructively and brought that mindset into editorial meetings.

- But in other parts of the organisation, the focus quietly faded away. And when you are no longer an editor, you also no longer have the mandate to say: “Remember what we learned not that long ago ...”

Kristina Lund Jørgensen thinks that journalists and editors may not be as focused on making sure constructive stories are produced if they are strongly driven by watchdog journalism.

- We are so wired for it, and so driven by the desire to expose something, that we think someone else can find the solutions. And we are also driven by the stories we find ourselves. Those are the ones we find most enjoyable to work on, compared with working with audience involvement.

Key lessons and takeaways:

- Involve staff in defining what constructive journalism should mean for the organisation. This helps create shared ownership of the new values
- Train staff in constructive journalism
 - Make it tangible and practical
 - Allow space for professional discussion and debate about the concepts and the journalistic approach, as this helps clear up misconceptions and reduces some of the resistance
- Set specific goals for both producing constructive journalism and keeping it part of the editorial conversation
 - For example, a requirement that each editorial team produces a constructive series
 - For example, at least one constructive item in each news broadcast
- A person with clear responsibility is important
 - The assessment is that when the role of editor responsible for constructive journalism disappeared, the focus faded too
- Support from the entire management team is important if the project is to succeed
 - Other editors and managers act as gatekeepers. If they are not on board, it becomes a challenge for the work of embedding constructive journalism
- Find or establish ambassadors in the newsrooms
 - They can exchange ideas, share experiences and highlight strong examples



Brian Holst

News and Silkeborg editor, Midtjyllands Avis

"It requires a lot of persistence. You have to stick with it, especially at the beginning."

Case background:

Brian Holst has led the work of embedding constructive journalism at Mediehusene Midtjylland — particularly at the Silkeborg newspaper where he works, Midtjyllands Avis.

Around five years ago, the media group carried out a survey in Silkeborg and Herning which showed that more than half of respondents felt it would have little or no impact on their ability to stay informed about what was happening in their local area if the newspaper disappeared.

Something had to be done to change that perception — and, at the same time, to reverse the decline in subscriber numbers.

One of the steps taken was to focus on constructive journalism. The aim was to build stronger ties with local citizens and to facilitate a healthy, constructive public debate. The overall vision is to make Midtjylland a better place to live.

Brian Holst's experience is interesting because, through his work, he has both helped establish new habits and workflows among journalists and managed to sustain the commitment over a longer period.

From vision to everyday practice

As the person responsible for embedding the approach, Brian Holst developed the KLIO model in collaboration with the editors-in-chief. KLIO is an acronym for their approach to constructive journalism, based on the Danish words for:

- Critical (Kritisk)
- Solutions-oriented (Løsningsorienteret)
- Involving (Inddragende)
- Follow-up-focused (Opfølgende)

To spread ownership more widely across the organisation, ambassadors were appointed at each media and sent on a one-week course at Constructive Institute.

Later, other employees also attended courses in constructive journalism. But the broader introduction across the organisation was initially carried out through workshops led by Gerd Maria May, who developed the FINT model.

According to Brian Holst, the workshops gave the journalists a good understanding of what constructive journalism was. The challenge, however, was that the focus became slightly too long-term. What Brian Holst felt was missing was a stronger emphasis on constructive approaches in the periods between the workshops.

- We wanted to be constructive every single day, says Brian Holst, who wanted the journalists to have a practical tool.

He drew inspiration from some of the formats Gerd Maria May was already working with. Together with her and the editor-in-chief, he developed 17 different constructive formats, visualised as bubbles.

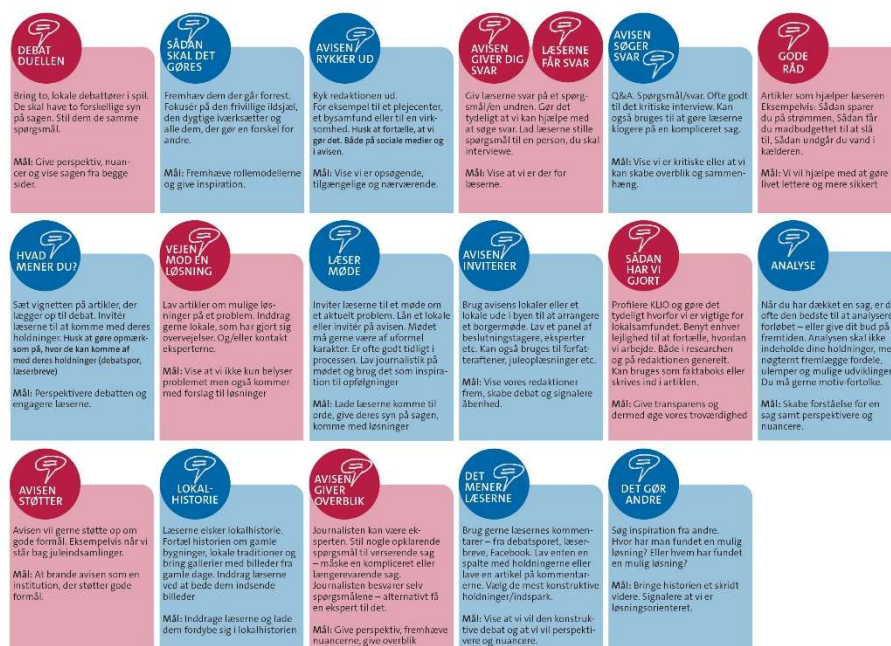
- We tried to look at the pillars from Constructive Institute, at the data, and at what I had generally learned about constructive journalism. How could we integrate all of that into these formats, Brian Holst explains.

All journalists were given a KLIO handbook, which described the formats in more detail, how they could be used and what kinds of stories they were suited for.

The bubble formats gave the newsroom a shared language.

They could also be placed on articles to signal to readers that the article had a particular journalistic approach.

The bubbles cover a range of formats, including “The Newspaper Goes Out”, “The Road to a Solution” and “The Debate Duel”. The idea is that the bubbles can be used as a practical tool when developing possible angles and follow-ups to a story.



The bubbles used by Midtjyllands Avis to make constructive formats tangible.

The bubbles have also meant that the newsroom stays with stories for longer than it otherwise would have done.

- We do not start by saying, now we want to make a “The Newspaper Gives You Answers” story. We start with what is happening out there — with the news journalism.

- Often, we have a good news story, or something we come across simply by keeping our eyes, ears and curiosity open, as we always do. But then we use these formats to build on those stories and cover them in constructive ways.

Although the bubbles have given the journalists a practical tool, one weakness of the model is that there are so many bubbles, and that some of them can be difficult to tell apart, Brian Holst says.

- For example, it can be difficult for some people to work out the difference between “The Newspaper Gives You Answers” and “The Newspaper Seeks Answers”. In that case, you have to go a bit further down and read up on what each one means. I think there may be slightly too many of them. On the other hand, there are no bubbles that we have never used, or that are never brought into play.

After working with the new focus and the bubbles for four to five years, Brian Holst has begun developing the model further. In time, this work is intended to lead to KLIO 2.0.

Clearing up misconceptions

Because the term “constructive journalism” is misunderstood in several places, both inside and outside the media industry, Brian Holst has also found it necessary to clarify what it actually means.

An internal survey conducted before the project began showed that some employees believed a constructive approach to journalism would make the media organisation less critical and therefore weaken the product.

- We have spent a lot of energy addressing the few critical voices there were. A lot of energy explaining that this is why we have the K in KLIO. That is where it begins. We are still critical, because we have to be, he emphasises.

Leadership focus

According to Brian Holst, it was possible to sense among some employees that the new focus on constructive journalism was seen as yet another initiative in a long line of attempts over the years to turn things around.

That is why it is important, Brian Holst says, for senior management to signal clearly that this is something the organisation is committed to. It is also important to make successes visible, recognise strong constructive work and highlight good examples.

In other words: sustained leadership focus.

- It requires a lot of persistence. You have to stick with it, especially at the beginning.

Despite the initial concerns among some employees, staff satisfaction has increased along the way.

- It is not as if we introduced free fruit or some special initiative that suddenly sent job satisfaction through the roof. So I think one explanation is that working with journalism in this way creates a different kind of satisfaction. People feel more strongly that they are making a difference.

Key lessons and takeaways:

- Make the transition tangible
 - Give journalists practical tools that make it easier for them to think constructively when working on their stories — for example, specific formats
- Maintain focus
 - Changing a journalistic mindset takes time
 - As a manager or editor, you have to keep pushing
 - Recognise and praise constructive efforts
- Clear up misconceptions
 - Clarify what constructive journalism is — and what it is not
 - Keep “critical” as a fundamental journalistic value

SILKEBORG AVISEN SØGER SVARET FIK DU LÆST VEJEN FREM

Midtjyllands Avis har brug for din hjælp: Send os spørgsmål om trafikken i Silkeborg Kommune

Om et par uger tager Midtjyllands Avis hul på et stort tema med fokus på trafikken i Silkeborg Kommune. Du kan være med til at bestemme, hvad der skal i avisen

Udgivet: 23. september 2024, 08.41 | Læsetid: 1 minut



Two years ago, Midtjyllands Avis actively asked its readers for input and suggestions for a coverage project on traffic in Silkeborg.

The newspaper received more than 400 responses and gained 200 new subscribers through the project. It is an example of how a media organisation can succeed with audience-involving journalism.

Screenshot: MidtjyllandsAvis.dk



Nanna Holst

Editor for involvement and dialog, TV 2 Kosmopol

"Staff can see in the numbers where we perform well. That kind of thing always makes an impression on analytical people."

Case background:

Nanna Holst is responsible for the audience-involving journalism at TV 2 Kosmopol, which is produced through the format Spørg Os — “Ask Us”. The format has now been running for several years, and during that period Nanna Holst also spent time as a fellow at Constructive Institute.

In addition to her own experience with embedding audience-involving, constructive journalism, Nanna Holst has also examined how audience involvement has been practised elsewhere in the media industry.

Responsibility matters

Spørg Os was launched as a concept at TV 2 Kosmopol in 2021 because the organisation wanted to do more audience-involving journalism.

Although the initiative has changed slightly over time, the core idea has remained the same: the newsroom finds answers to the questions that people in the coverage area are curious about.

According to Nanna Holst, she has previously experienced editors from different editorial teams contributing ideas for which questions should be put to a public vote. But when it came to actually producing the stories, they tended to fall by the wayside in favour of ideas the journalists had come up with themselves.

Today, the concept is therefore anchored in a team that journalists and interns rotate in and out of — but with Nanna Holst as the permanent editor.

Her experience here also aligns with what she has seen elsewhere in the industry: that the embedding and sustaining of a new journalistic focus often depends heavily on individuals.

- There needs to be someone like me who is willing to work with it every day, and who takes responsibility for making progress where possible — and for keeping at it again and again and again.

Nanna Holst has observed that the places where audience-involving journalism has succeeded are typically those where the editor-in-chief or other managers have actively asked for it.

The downside, however, is that if the focus depends on one person — for example an editor-in-chief — it can easily disappear again if that person leaves.

So if this kind of cultural change in the newsroom is to continue, it needs both management focus and support from staff.

Semantics and success

According to Nanna Holst, TV 2 Kosmopol has for several years been shaped by a constructive approach to journalism. But the organisation does not necessarily use the words “constructive journalism”, she explains — and stresses that the label is not important in itself.

In fact, she has found that, within the industry, the term “constructive journalism” can be a trigger word for some journalists.

- People have all sorts of strange ideas in their heads about it being soft or toothless, which I simply do not recognise. Constructive journalism starts from some kind of challenge or potential. So there is no contradiction at all. It is simply about when we stop, and when we move on.

Nanna Holst is one of the co-authors of the white paper on constructive journalism published by the University of Southern Denmark. Precisely because “constructive journalism” can be a trigger word, she spent considerable effort on defining it as a constructive approach to journalism.

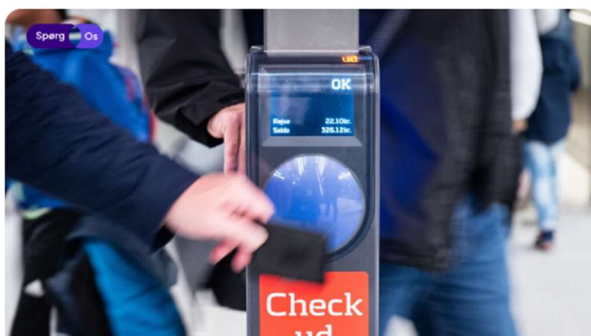
In general, Nanna Holst has not experienced any major resistance to either constructive journalism or the Spørg Os concept. And the critics who were there have, over time, been won over, she explains.

- We rarely win on clicks alone. Murder, violence and scandals are widely read, but they are often read quickly. Our articles have a long reading time. We typically win on traffic multiplied by minutes read.

- Staff can see in the numbers where we perform well. That kind of thing always makes an impression on analytical people.

Key lessons and takeaways:

- Think about how you communicate
 - The term “constructive journalism” can be a trigger word for some journalists
 - Even if you want your newsroom to produce more solutions-oriented, nuanced and audience-involving journalism, you do not necessarily have to call it “constructive journalism”
 - Highlight the successes — strong numbers will, over time, help convince the critics
- Someone must be assigned responsibility and a clear task
 - If audience-involving journalism is an area you want to develop, it can be useful to assign the task and responsibility to a specific place in the organisation, so that it does not fade away
 - This is because journalists and editors often prefer their own ideas to those of others
- Broad support is important
 - In media organisations that succeed with audience-involving journalism, there is support both from management and from the newsroom floor



● SPØRG OS
“Det giver ikke mening”: Hvorfor må ægtepar ikke dele mail hos Rejsekort?



● SPØRG OS
Gamle mobiler, kabler og hvidevarer sendes videre fra genbrugspladsen. Men til hvad?



● SPØRG OS
Hvorfor lukker metrodørene så hurtigt, at mange ikke når med?



● SPØRG OS
Slimet fedtemøg breder sig i fjorden: “Hvorfor er der ikke nogen, der gør noget?”

Each week, TV 2 Kosmopol puts audience-submitted questions to a vote. The question that receives the most votes is then investigated by the newsroom. Screenshot: tv2kosmopol.dk

Psychology and leadership

In addition to looking at industry best practice, it also makes sense to examine the underlying psychology at play in an organisation when you want to create change — as will inevitably be the case when introducing constructive journalism in a newsroom where it is not already part of everyday practice.

There are countless theories and models within occupational and organisational psychology. This report focuses on one that may be particularly relevant in a newsroom: the social identity theory of leadership.

The following section is based on the book "Ledelse i det 21. århundrede" by Thomas Jønsson, 2026.¹¹ The theory discussed here was chosen in consultation with the author, who is an Associate Professor at Aarhus University and course coordinator for Work and Organisational Theory.

A brief introduction to the social identity theory of leadership:

During the twentieth century, researchers found through laboratory experiments that simply being categorised as a member of a group affects how people behave and how they perceive others. This applies both to members of one's own group — the in-group — and to people from other groups. The group, or groups, against which one compares one's own group are referred to as the out-group.

According to the researcher Tajfel, social identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to a group, their emotional attachment to that group, and their evaluation of it.

There are countless groups, both formal and informal, which may be more or less important in a person's life depending on the context.

In a journalistic workplace, this could, for example, be the newsroom where a person is employed, or the professional group they belong to.

Jønsson's book quotes the researcher John C. Turner as saying that social identity theory is not about the individual in the group, but about the group in the individual.

In other words: which groups matter to the individual, and therefore to that person's social identity?

Groups are formed both by the similarities people share and by what sets them apart from others.

¹¹ Ledelse i det 21. århundrede, Thomas Jønsson, Akademisk Forlag, 2026

In the formation of these groups, whether formal or informal, it is not only what unites people that matters. What distinguishes the group from the out-group is also important in defining the group — and, by extension, the social identity of its members.

Two examples of groups could be journalists and politicians. These are two groups that often encounter each other in their daily work, and which will undoubtedly see one another as in-groups and out-groups.

The book describes the concept of the cognitive prototype, which essentially refers to how well a person fits with a group's identity.

To put it sharply, the journalist in an investigative reporting team who has brought down the most ministers and won the most Pulitzer Prizes would be seen as the most prototypical person in the group.

And prototypicality is precisely what matters when social identity theory is applied to leadership.

Van Knippenberg described in 2011 that a leader has more influence over a group the more prototypical that leader is.

It is therefore important that the leader both lives up to and actively practises the values and interests of the group. This can in itself become a challenge when the leader is a formal manager who, by definition, may be seen as belonging to a different group than the employees — namely the management group.

Nevertheless, a leader can work to strengthen the qualities that make them a prototypical leader in relation to the group's social identity.

A hypothetical example would be a manager of a newsroom that produces constructive journalism, but who only praises and pays attention to clickbait headlines. In that case, there is a conflict between the leader's behaviour and the group's social identity. This makes the leader less prototypical, which in turn reduces the leader's influence over the group.

As in many other contexts, communication is crucial in this theory of leadership. This is not only because the leader needs to be seen as a prototypical leader, but also because the leader can help shape the social identity of the group.

Hogg et al. have described how, especially in times of crisis, there is potential to redefine a group's social identity — particularly if the leader is able to formulate a vision for the future that is simple, but still attractive.

This is especially relevant given the situation the media industry currently finds itself in.

Another important element of this leadership theory is that the leader must create opportunities for group members to meet and collectively make sense of both the group itself

and the world around it. In this way, the members of the group can arrive together at a shared understanding of its values, and of how the group handles opportunities and challenges.

The point is that members can then identify with the group and its vision, which strengthens collaboration.

The social identity theory of leadership in a newsroom

I have chosen to focus specifically on the social identity theory of leadership because my clear hypothesis is that journalists, to a large extent, see their profession as part of their identity.

When you change the way journalists approach their work, the angles they are expected to pursue, and the way they assess stories, you are also fundamentally changing their self-perceived social identity as journalists.

How a journalist understands their social identity is, of course, highly individual. Some already see themselves as constructive, while others see themselves as critical watchdogs whose role is not to look for solutions. The common denominator, as I see it, is that the profession and the job play a significant role in journalists' social identity.

If that is the premise, then it is also important to understand the dynamics at play.

If we alter the definition of your identity as a journalist — and therefore the definition of your in-group — what does that do to your out-group, and to the way that out-group is defined?

In other words: if I am now expected to be constructive, am I still supposed to hold those in power to account?

When the role and identity of the constructive journalist are being defined in a newsroom, it is therefore extremely important to address the out-group explicitly — for example by making it clear that journalists must still approach those in power critically.

Involvement is also an important tool. If you are changing the way a group's social identity is defined, it is important to bring the group together so that its members take part in defining the group's identity and vision.

This report has described several times how media organisations have involved employees precisely in defining what constructive journalism means to them.

A top-down approach to leadership is not a sustainable strategy if you want to change journalistic working methods — and, with them, employees' sense of identity.

Once the organisation's own definition of constructive journalism is in place, this leadership theory suggests that it is beneficial for the leader to act as prototypically as possible. In other words, the leader has to “walk the talk”.

This can be done in several ways — for example by acting as a role model and helping produce the kind of journalism that reflects the group's vision and identity. It can also mean thinking carefully about which kinds of journalism are rewarded and recognised.

If the mission and vision are to incorporate constructive methods into a media organisation's journalism, it will not work if what is rewarded and recognised in everyday practice is traditional critical journalism with no constructive elements.

Key points from the social identity theory of leadership:

- Be aware that you are not only changing a working culture, but also employees' social identity as journalists
- Involve staff in defining what constructive journalism means for your organisation. This creates support and cohesion within the group
- Be clear in your communication — not only in how you define your own group, but also in how you define the out-group
- Recognise and reward the journalism that reflects the group's new social identity and vision
- As a leader, you need to act prototypically — that is, you must live up to the group's social identity and values in both communication and action

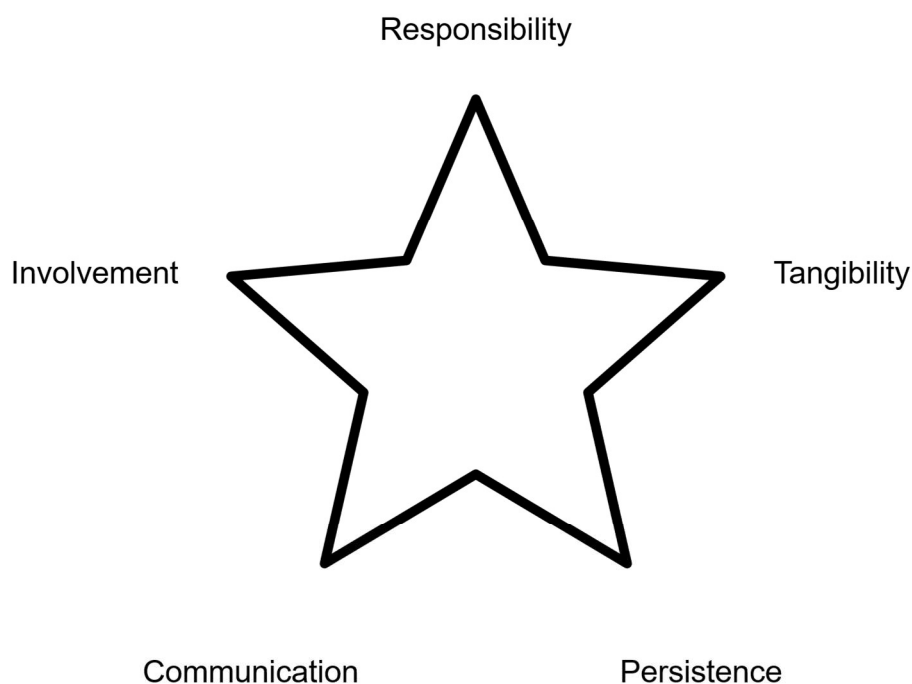
Conclusion and model for embedding constructive journalism

After examining how constructive journalism has been embedded in several media organisations in Denmark and Norway, I have brought together industry best practice and key insights from the psychological theory in the model below: the North Star.

Inspired by the real North Star, which has helped seafarers navigate throughout history, the idea is that leaders in the media industry can use the model as a guide if they want to embed constructive journalism in their newsroom and create a lasting cultural change.

Although the model is designed to support the embedding of constructive journalism, it can in many ways also be used in other contexts where the aim is to create cultural change in a journalistic workplace.

The North Star:



Responsibility

A recurring factor in all the case examples included in this project is that at least one person has had the task of embedding constructive journalism as a dedicated area of responsibility.

The experience from the cases shows that an implementation process of this scale requires someone to drive the work forward. Someone who keeps bringing it up, finds strong examples, and can help journalists and editors think in terms of constructive methods.

Several of the people interviewed for the cases point out that when that role disappeared, the focus on constructive journalism faded too.

The familiar ways of thinking and working are so deeply rooted in many journalists that, even after several years of focus, the use of constructive methods begins to disappear if there is no one there to keep pushing and to remind people of the constructive possibilities.

It is also important that senior management gives clear and explicit support to the person assigned the task. Working as an editor across teams is a challenging role, and without backing from the very top, there is no guarantee that the journalists, editors and middle managers who act as everyday gatekeepers will be receptive.

Involvement

In keeping with the spirit of constructive journalism itself, it is important to involve journalists in the process of defining your journalistic values and your approach to constructive journalism.

As a leader, you need to be aware that when you change the way journalists are expected to approach their profession, you are also affecting their self-perceived social identity as journalists. That is why it is important that they are involved in defining what constructive journalism means for your organisation, or what your journalistic values are.

If staff are involved in formulating your values, it also creates shared ownership across the organisation and helps strengthen employees' sense of belonging to the "group".

If it is not possible to involve everyone, select a group of ambassadors — both journalists and leaders from across the organisation.

Tangibility

Major changes are easier to work with when they are made as tangible as possible and built into clear routines and workflows.

This both makes it easier for journalists to engage with the change and commits the newsroom to actually putting it into practice.

One useful approach is to give journalists practical tools for how they can use constructive methods in their journalism.

In other organisations, this has been done, for example, by developing fixed formats that can be drawn on when needed, by offering tips on interview techniques, or by making constructive journalism a standing item on the agenda at editorial meetings.

When training staff, it can also be useful to show and articulate that they have used constructive methods before. Again, this helps make the approach tangible and shows that it is not some kind of rocket science they have never encountered before.

Another important point is to set specific goals that are adapted to the individual newsroom and formulated in a way that can work in practice.

This might mean that there should be at least one constructive article in each days newspaper, that the audience should be involved in the journalism at least once a week, or something else entirely. The most important thing is that it makes sense in the context in which the newsroom operates.

Once the newsroom has practical tools and specific goals, it becomes easier to turn the approach into a structured way of working — one that can be put into practice and, crucially, sustained in everyday routines.

If the aim is to ensure a certain baseline level of constructive content, it can be useful to assign specific employees to work on this type of journalism. This has been done successfully at both NRK and TV 2 Kosmopol.

However, if you choose this approach, it is important to make sure it does not lead the rest of the newsroom to think that they no longer need to use constructive methods because dedicated staff have already been assigned to the task. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Communication

As in so many other contexts, clear communication is crucial during an embedding phase.

The cases included in this report have not necessarily encountered major resistance within their organisations. But they have all, to some extent, encountered misconceptions about what constructive journalism is.

Regardless of whether management chooses to use the term “constructive journalism” or not, it is important to have an open, in-person conversation with journalists and a professional discussion about the journalistic direction.

Many journalists quite rightly have a strong watchdog instinct. In line with the social identity theory of leadership, it is important to spend time explaining and showing that constructive journalism is not at odds with being critical and holding those in power to account. Those in power are still the “out-group” in a psychological sense.

At the same time, it is important that management leads by example and acts as prototypically as possible. Show the good example and recognise the work that reflects the values you have set. If management says it wants more constructive journalism, but only

rewards classic, critical journalism without constructive elements, staff are unlikely to seek out the constructive opportunities.

Overall, clear communication is essential if you want to succeed in embedding constructive journalism in the working culture.

Signal that it matters, show support for the people responsible for the project, prioritise constructive stories, and make it clear that this is not just another extra task for journalists, but something that should replace something else.

Persistence

All change takes time, and changing an editorial mindset is not done in a week.

Think of it as a step-by-step process in which journalists take one step at a time, until the constructive approach to journalism eventually becomes second nature.

Embedding constructive journalism takes time. The examples from both NRK and TV 2 Fyn show that even after constructive journalism has been a priority for two years, production declines when the focus shifts and the responsible person or editor no longer holds the role.

An embedding process that is meant to last takes time, and it requires sustained effort — especially in the beginning. Without persistence, the substantial work done at the start will not have the intended long-term effect.



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