

PUBLISHED 9/15/17

The Innovation Divide: Similarities and differences in how managers and staff view the transition to digital

BY ALEX T. WILLIAMS

ONLINE AT:

www.americanpressinstitute.org/

- Overview
.....
- The skills and training that media workers value
.....
- Views on news quality and industry trends
.....
- Freelancing, service, and self-promotion
.....
- Recent work experiences and future plans
.....
- Summary and implications
.....
- About the methodology and sample
.....
- Download PDF, topline and questionnaire

Editor's note: Rather than slow, the pace of change in news in 2017 appears only to be accelerating. McClatchy's new chief executive recently announced a program to speed up digital transformation in the newspaper chain's 31 newsrooms. The multi-million dollar Knight-Lenfest Newsroom initiative (of which API plays a role) has expanded its team-centric process to accelerate organizational change at local newspaper companies. And leaders at the New York Times have gone public to answer questions about the future of editing at the paper after announcing plans to eliminate the stand-alone copy desk. Against that backdrop, API is releasing a fresh look at data gathered from more than 10,000 people who studied journalism and communications. This new analysis assesses the differences and similarities between managers and staff in journalism. The new report was written by Alex Williams, who is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School.



To what extent do newsroom leaders and the journalists who work for them agree on what constitute the biggest challenges facing the news industry? Are managers and staff in agreement when it comes to new approaches such as data journalism, gathering information from audience metrics, and experimenting with new revenue approaches such as sponsored content?

Given the degree to culture impacts how successful legacy organizations can be in making changes, the answers to those questions can be a major factor in the future of news.

For a research fellowship centered on this concept, I've taken a deeper look at data from the American Press Institute's 2015 survey of more than 10,000 journalism and communication school graduates, plus a previously unreleased sample of news managers from American Society of News Editors and Radio Television Digital News Association. In sum, this report analyzes survey responses of 1,604 managers and 3,579 staff members in the media industry to gauge their comfort level with new technologies, the challenges they face in their daily jobs, their views about the journalism industry more broadly, and their career experiences in 2010-2015 (see Methodology and Sample). While the data is from 2015, we believe the attitudes about long-term issues, and the differences between managers and staff, remain as relevant as they were then.

The results of the survey suggest that managers are more comfortable embracing new digital practices and technologies, managers and staff members report similar experiences and frustration with cut backs, and that staff members are more critical of sponsored content and media owners. A key implication of these findings is that compared to managers, staff members are less comfortable with certain new digital applications and less interested in learning about new business approaches.

“

The views of managers generally resemble the 'business side' that focuses on audience metrics and embracing new streams of revenue while the views of staff more closely align with the 'editorial side' that focuses on creating content and preserving news quality.

”

While managers and staff share some similarities, the overall picture that emerges from the survey is still one of lingering silos. The views of managers generally resemble the “business side” that focuses on audience metrics and embracing new streams of revenue while the views of staff more closely align with the “editorial side” that focuses on creating content and preserving news quality.

Some may see this as a natural extension of managers focusing on the “big questions” while staff focus on what they do best: producing journalism.

But innovation reports, studies of best practices, and individual case studies have concluded that this traditional set up may stymie change. Innovation often requires workers throughout the organization to share the same goals and views. Seen from this perspective, the contrasts between managers and staff may illustrate the need to more clearly communicate how new strategies fit within existing norms and goals. Conversely, managers may need to listen more to staff concerns to iterate new approaches.

“

Innovation often requires workers throughout the organization to share the same goals and views.

”

Among our notable findings:

- **Managers want quicker adoption of technology.** When asked about the biggest challenges facing journalism, managers are more likely than staff members to believe that traditional media companies need to adapt faster to new technology (39% vs 30%).

- **Managers say they are more comfortable with new digital practices and technologies than staff members do.** Managers are more likely to be “very comfortable” with content management systems (47% vs 31%), layout software (23% vs 14%), project management tools (23% vs 11%), graphic design (19% vs 13%), HTML (16% vs 10%), and using digital tools to verify information (50% vs 44%). Staff members are more likely to report that they do not use these tools in their jobs.
- **Managers place greater emphasis on data journalism and audience metrics.** Managers were more likely to emphasize fluency with data (39% vs 31%), understanding audience data (32% vs 22%), and conducting audience research (31% vs 26%) as important for someone in their field.
- **A growing problem in the industry may be overworked employees.** In the past five years, the majority of managers and staff members reported having duties added to existing job responsibilities (68% vs 62%). Relatedly, for both managers and staff members, the biggest obstacle affecting their ability to do their job is “organization resources and staffing” (59% compared to 47% of staff members).
- **Staff members feel less secure in their jobs.** 74 percent of managers reported feeling at least “fairly secure” compared to 67 percent of staff members.
- **Managers and staff members have experienced cutbacks at similar rates.** In the past five years, members of both groups have personally experienced layoffs (13% in both groups), pay cuts (15% vs 14%), and furloughs (10% vs 9%).
- **Outside of their primary jobs, managers donate more time while staff members freelance more.** Managers are more likely to have donated their skills to a charitable group (53% vs 44%). Staff members are more likely to have performed freelance work (33% vs 22%).
- **Staff members are more skeptical of financial questions such as sponsored content and aggregators.** Staff members are more likely to believe that sponsored content crosses ethical boundaries (58% vs 50% of managers) and that news aggregators should compensate journalists (61% vs 58%).

The skills and training that media workers value

As media organizations adapt to the contemporary media environment, greater emphasis is being placed on incorporating new digital practices and technologies, analyzing audience data, and experimenting with new business approaches. Despite much consternation over whether news organizations are changing too quickly or not quickly enough, less is known about how media workers themselves view these new trends.

The survey probed this phenomenon by asking whether the respondent was comfortable with specific technology or applications, what skills are important for someone in his or her field, and what skills they would pursue additional training for.

The digital practices that we asked about revolved around five types:

- interacting with readers (e.g. reader comments and social media)
- interacting with readers (e.g. reader comments and social media)
- digital reporting skills (e.g. using databases in reporting and using digital tools to verify information),
- building web content (e.g. content management systems and project management tools),
- creating visual content (e.g. graphic design and page design software),
- and coding languages (e.g. programming languages and html).

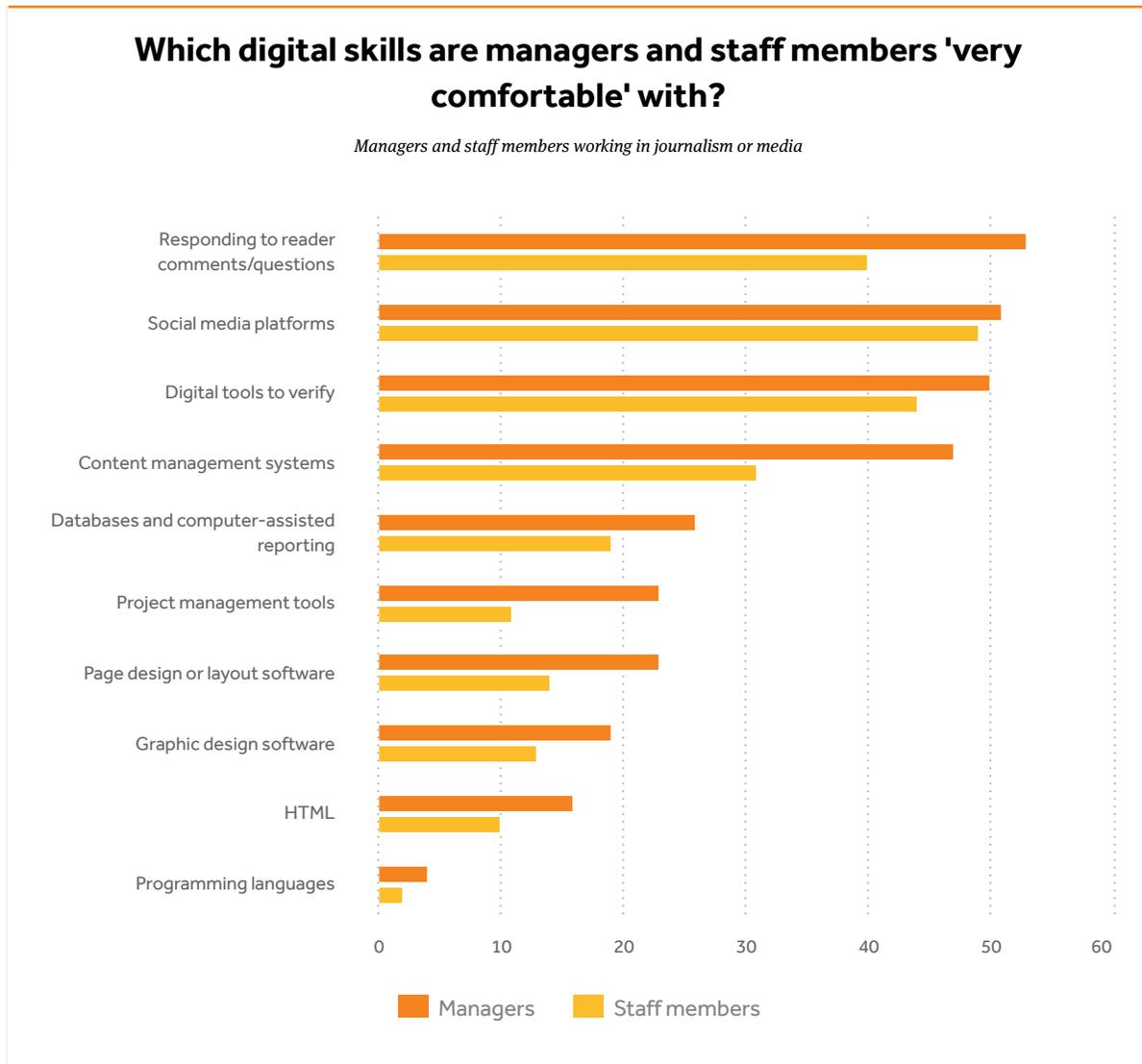
To reflect the breadth of abilities that media workers may find important, we asked about 23 types of skills. These skills fell into seven broad categories: audience metrics, content creation, new digital tools, fluency with the business of media, newsgathering and writing skills, career development, and media law and ethics.

Taken together, the results suggest that managers are more comfortable with new digital tools and place greater emphasis on audience research, learning about new data and metrics, and learning about the best practices of other organizations. In contrast, staff members are more likely to report that they do not use new digital tools in their job and to focus on learning skills related to creating content or career development.

These differences could be explained by one or both of the following causes:

1. A division of labor, with managers focusing on learning new trends while staff members focus on content creation, and
2. Workers who are more comfortable with technology are more likely to be promoted to manager.

Indeed, for each of the 10 digital tools we asked about, managers were more likely to be “very comfortable.” Of note, there are significant differences when looking at responding to reader comments (53% vs 40%), content management systems (47% vs 31%), databases and computer assisted reporting (26% vs 19%), page design and layout (23% vs 14%), graphic design (19% vs 13%), and HTML (16% vs 10%). Despite some calls for media workers to learn how to code, only 4 percent of managers and 2 percent of staff members said they were very comfortable with programming languages.

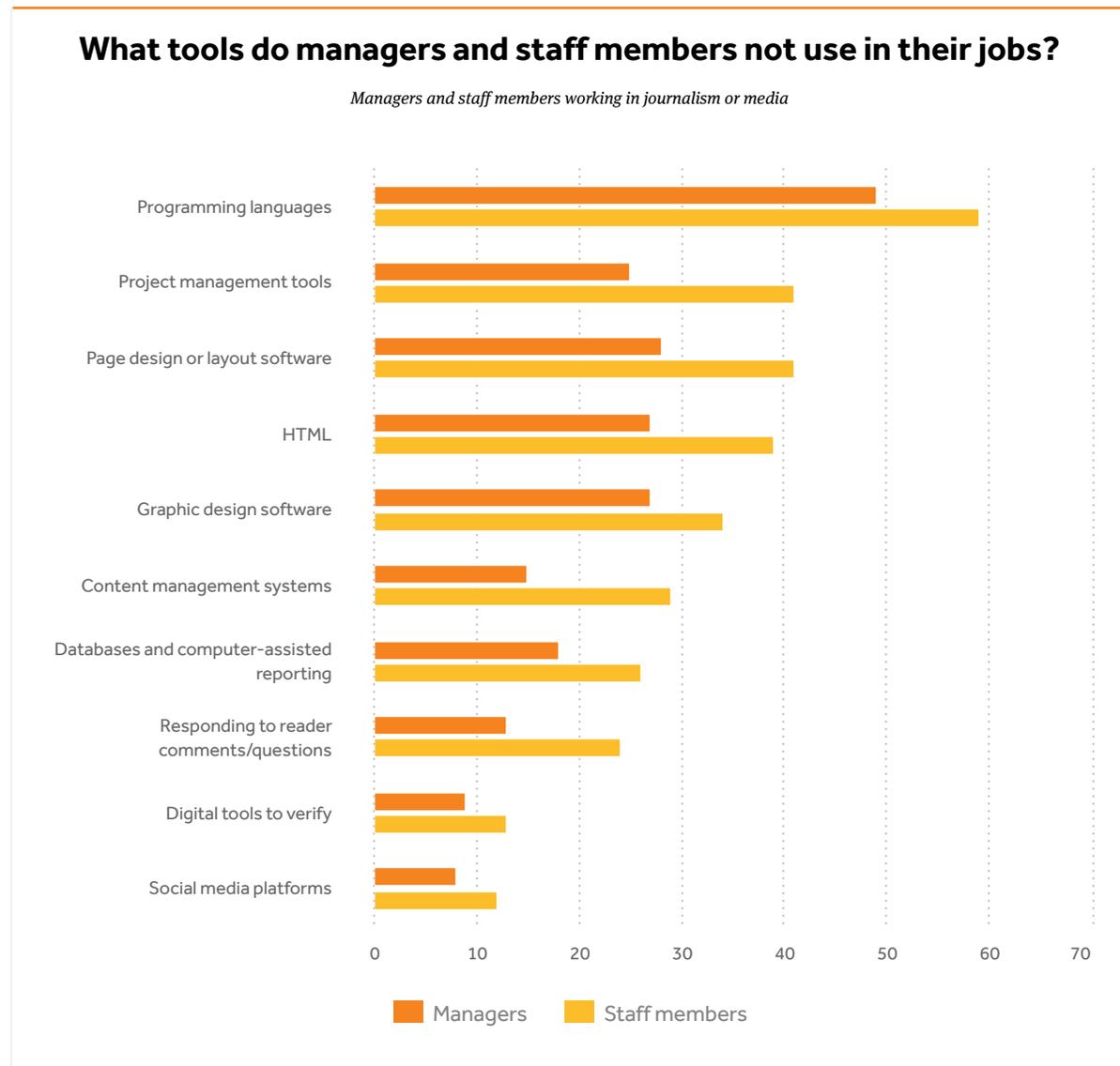


Data Source: Question: How comfortable are you employing each of the following technologies or digital practices for your job?
 Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
 Original report: “Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media.” 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

In general, we also found that younger people were more comfortable with new digital tools. However, when grouping workers by age, we find that managers are usually more likely to be very comfortable with these digital tools than staff members.

A division of labor may help explain some of these discrepancies, as staff members are more likely to say they do not use these tools in their jobs. Over one-third of staff members said that they do not use graphic design software, HTML, page design or layout software, project management tools, or programming languages.



Data Source: Question: How comfortable are you employing each of the following technologies or digital practices for your job? Showing percent of respondents who indicated they did not use this tool. Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579. Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Despite consternation that managers resist innovation, these findings suggest that managers are generally more comfortable with new digital tools and practices.

Our survey also asked journalists about 23 different skills that they might believe was important for someone entering their field. The list of skills ranged from writing and reporting skills to numeracy and entrepreneurship to knowing the history of the web.

It is important to note that this question did not ask people what skills are important for someone in their *position*. The differences between managers and staff members then suggest contrasting views on what skills people working in journalism should possess.

To elaborate, the largest gap in what skills managers and staff members saw as important for someone in their field was leadership, with 58 percent of managers saying it was very important compared to 42 percent of staff members. The other skills that managers valued more fell into two broad groups:

Skills related to media economics – Managers were more likely to believe that marketing in new ways (48% vs 38%), entrepreneurial skills (35% vs 32%), and the business of media (33% vs 29%), is important for someone in their field.

Skills related to data and audience metrics – Managers were more likely to emphasize fluency with data (39% vs 31%), understanding audience data (32% vs 22%), and conducting audience research (31% vs 26%) is important for someone in their field.



Data Source: Question: How important do you think each of the following skills is for someone in the field you work in today?
Showing percent saying "very important."
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Staff members, on the other hand, are slightly more likely to believe skills related to creating content are very important for someone in their field.

Specifically, staff members were slightly more likely to emphasize audio recording and storytelling skills (46% vs 42%), production skills for video (38% vs 36%), and production skills for photography (27% vs 25%). Perhaps reflecting the volatility of the job market, nearly half of staff members (49%) said career development and job seeking skills were important (compared to 45 percent of managers).



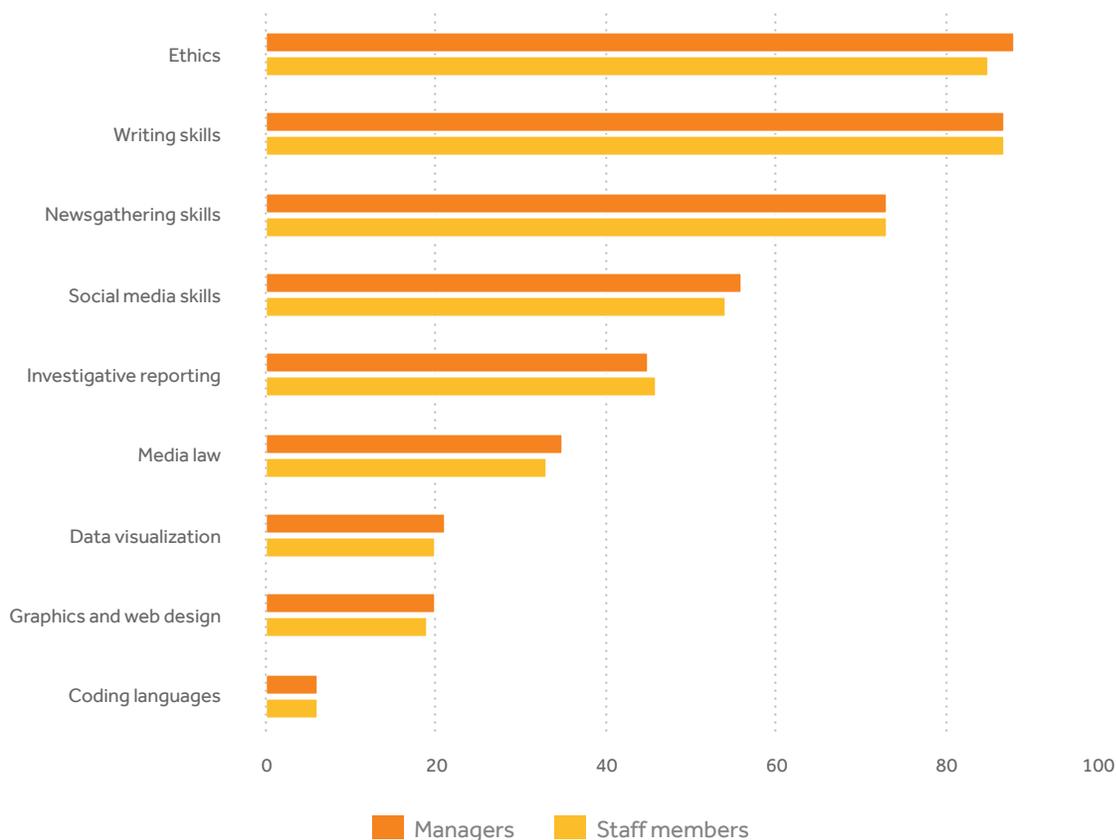
Data Source: Question: How important do you think each of the following skills is for someone in the field you work in today?
 Showing percent saying "very important."
 Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
 Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Still, both managers and staff members place similar importance on a variety of other skills. In particular, over 70 percent of both managers and staff members rated ethics, writing skills, and newsgathering skills as very important. At the other end of the spectrum, despite much aplomb, media workers were unlikely to say that data visualization, graphic design, and coding languages are very important for someone in their field.

What skills managers and staff members equally believe are important

Percent who say skill is "very important"



Data Source: Question: How important do you think each of the following skills is for someone in the field you work in today?
Showing percent saying "very important."
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Journalists varied widely on which of these areas in which they would like to pursue additional training. Despite being able to select all relevant answers, no area was chosen by more than 35 percent of workers. This likely reflects the need for media workers to learn a variety of skills, which prevents any one area from dominating.

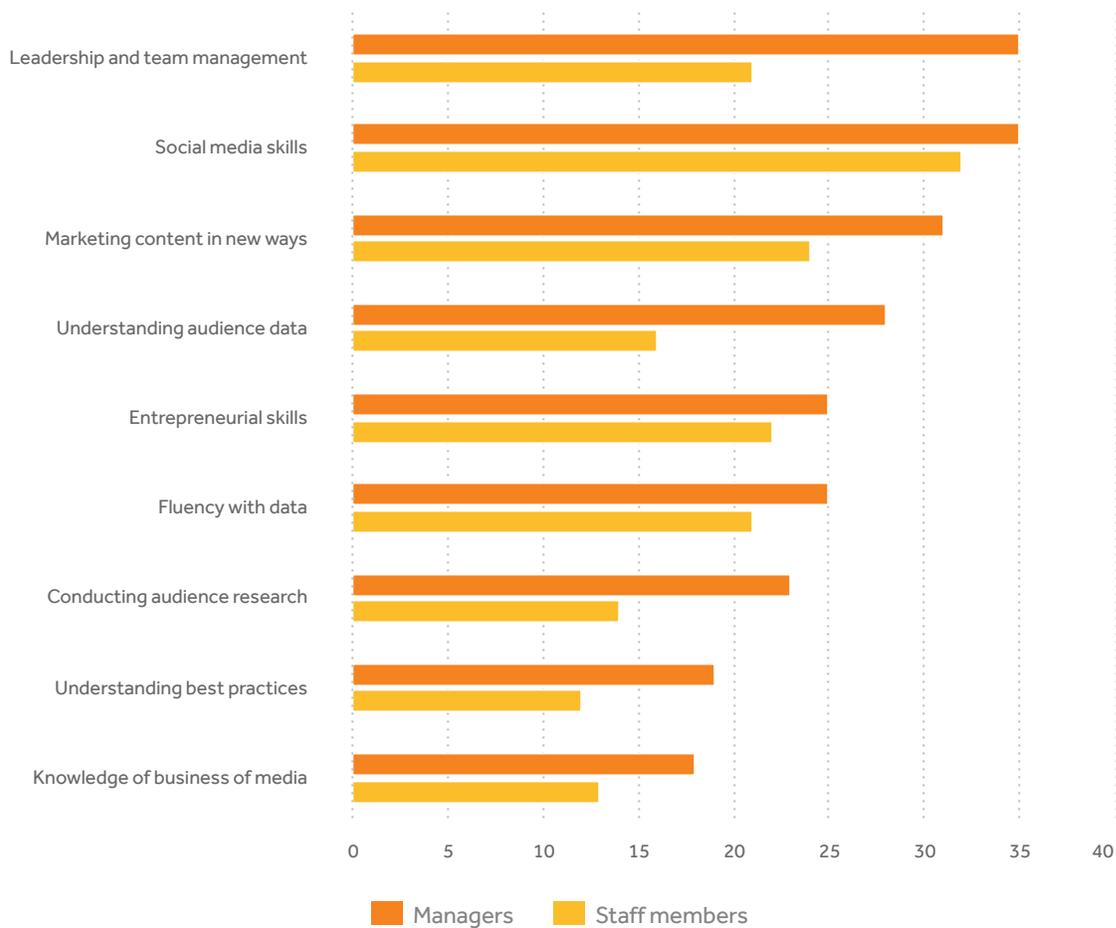
Managers differed from staff here in some important respects:

Skills related to media economics – Managers were more likely to seek training in marketing content in new ways (31% vs 24%), entrepreneurial skills (25% vs 22%), and knowledge of the business of media (19% vs 14%).

Skills related to data and audience metrics – Managers expressed greater interest in training related to understanding audience data (28% vs 16%), fluency with data (25% vs 21%), and conducting audience research (23% vs 14%).

What skills managers want more training in

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



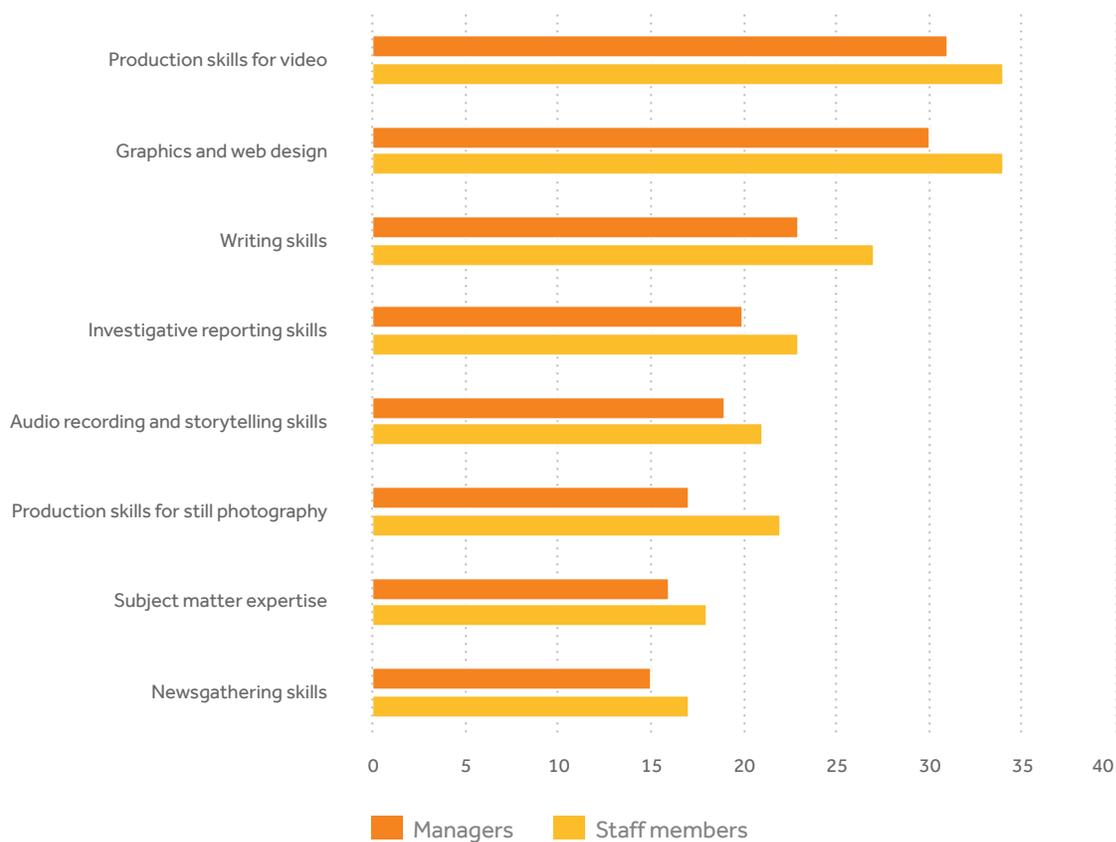
Data Source: Question: For which of these skills would you pursue further training? Check all that apply.
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Staff members were more likely to seek training in areas related to creating content, but only slightly. For instance, they were more likely to express interest in training related to video production (34% vs 31%), graphic design (34% vs 30%), writing skills (27% vs 23%), investigative reporting skills (23% vs 20%), and production skills for photography (22% vs 17%).

What skills staff members want more training in

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: For which of these skills would you pursue further training? Check all that apply.
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

In effect, the findings indicate that, at least as of 2015, many staff members had not yet embraced learning new digital approaches to the same degree as their managers.

These silos may be a source of tension for media organizations implementing changes. Writers may resist audience metrics if they see the data as something only managers should care about. Organizations with workers who are less knowledgeable about the business of media may miss opportunities to learn new ideas from employees who are not managers. And staff members who are not comfortable with digital practices are less able to utilize them to strengthen their reporting.

One major tension in the digital age is whether traditional silos need to be abolished. That certainly has been an issue in the past. In 2014, the New York Times innovation report argued that "The people who have spent the most time thinking about the challenges of our digital future...can be found upstairs, most often in Product, Design and Strategy. They are also spending countless hours studying and interviewing our competitors and our readers, and capturing and sharing their insights in detailed reports. But their initiative means the newsroom is often reacting to, rather than driving, the work on big questions that are critical to our future."

One major question is the degree to which those issues still exist. They may have eased in some operations. But to the extent that news organizations may have been able to hire new staff in the last two years, they may remain.

As we detail in the following section, the contrasts between managers and staff extend to their views on industry trends—with managers being more concerned with new business models and staff members focusing more on preserving news quality.

Views on news quality and industry trends

The fact that the news industry faces challenges is no surprise. Which of those challenges people in newsrooms think most critical helps reveal where change may be most rapid.

Our findings suggest that managers place greater emphasis on the economic model of journalism being broken and the need to experiment with new types of revenue. Staff members, on the other hand, are more likely to question whether the news system is able to support quality journalism and the importance of respecting ethical boundaries.

The survey asked respondents to choose from a list of problems facing news, asking which were biggest or most important and allowing people to choose up to three.

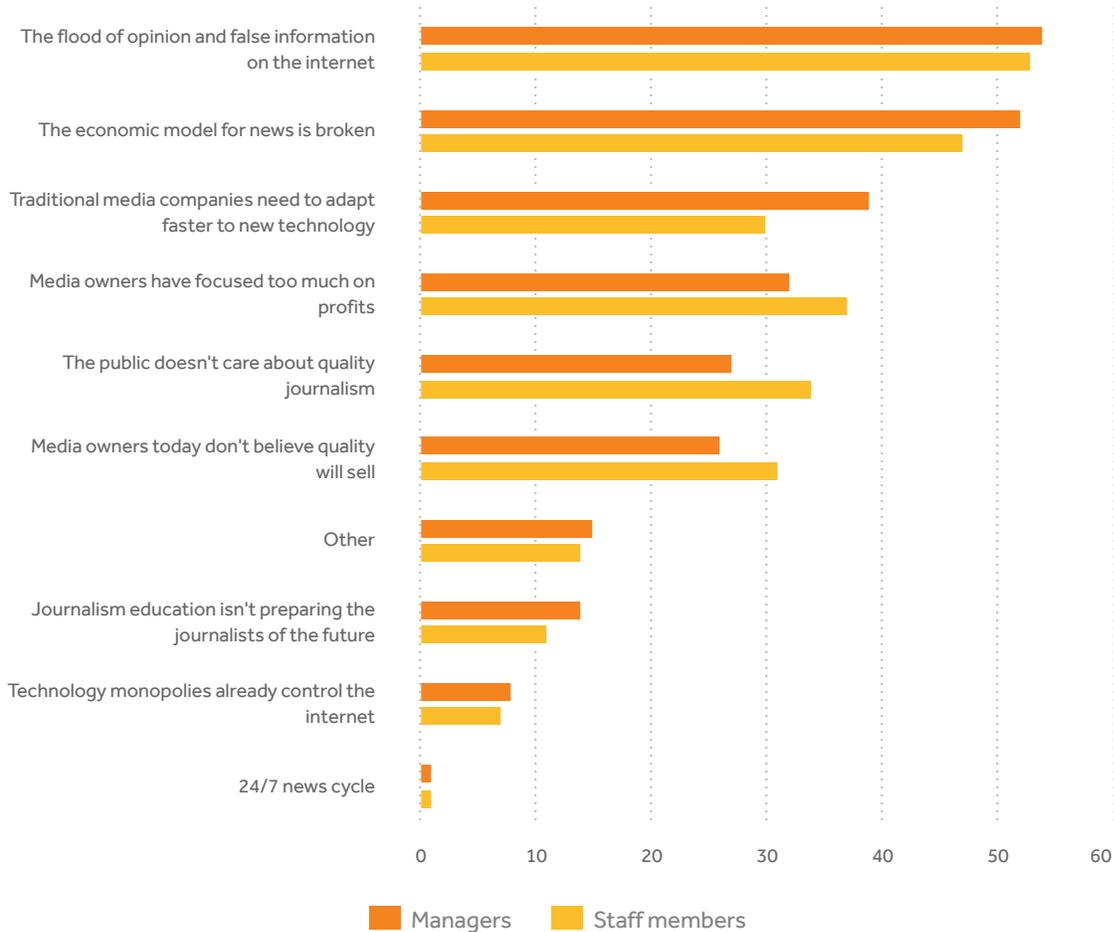
Both managers and staff members believe that the biggest challenge is the flood of false information on the internet (54 percent of managers and 53 percent of staff members). They differed, however, in their opinions of other significant challenges.

Managers were somewhat more likely than staff members to say the economic model for news is broken, (52% vs 47%). Managers were also more likely to say that traditional media companies need to adapt faster to new technology (39% vs 30%).

Staff members, on the other hand, seem more critical of news quality. The third-most common answer for staff members was that media owners have focused too much on profits (38%). The fourth-most common answer was that the public doesn't care about quality journalism (34%), while the fifth-most common answer was that media owners don't believe quality will sell (31%). In each of these three cases, staff members were more likely to believe it was a greater problem than managers.

What managers and staff members think are the biggest challenges facing journalism today

Up to three answers



Data Source: Question: What do you think are the biggest challenges facing journalism in general today? Choose no more than three.
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

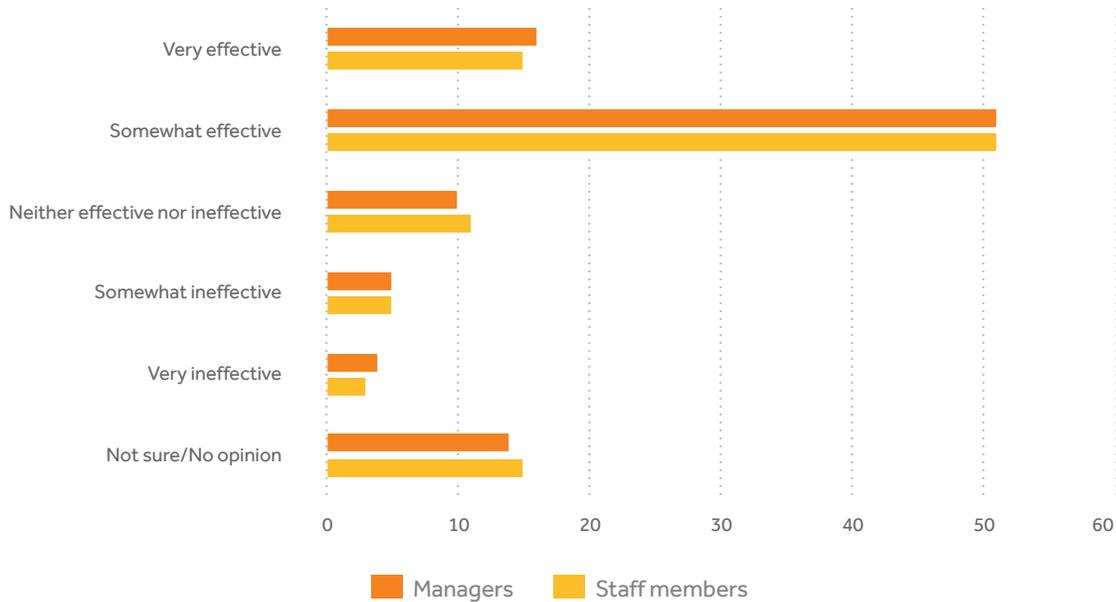
AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

When we collected the data for this survey in the summer of 2015, fact checking journalism was gaining prominence. Since then, it became a central story in the 2016 election.

The survey asked news people their opinion about the effectiveness of fact checking journalism.¹ Here, managers and staff members held similar views, with about 50 percent saying fact checking was only "somewhat effective," 10 percent said that it was "neither effective nor ineffective" and about 13 percent said they were not sure or had no opinion. This suggests cautious optimism from both managers and staff towards this increasingly common practice.

How effective do managers and staff members think fact-checking journalism is?

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: Overall, for whatever reason, how effective or ineffective do you believe "fact-checking journalism" is?
Asked among a half sample
Managers N = 755. Staff members = 1,625.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

(A more detailed breakdown of this topic can be found in our previous report, "Fact-checking and accountability journalism: Popular, effective — but sometimes misunderstood.")

Of course, a common concern about the news industry is that the quality of journalism may be declining. In August 2016, this fear was even satirized in a popular John Oliver clip. Do those working in the media share this concern?

To answer this question, we first asked journalists to compare the quality of journalism produced today to journalism produced five years ago. We found that managers and staff members hold similar views, with about two-fifths believing that journalism has declined somewhat in quality and another one-fifth believing journalism has declined greatly in quality. Overall then, journalists expressed ample concerns over the quality of journalism declining.

Is journalism getting better?

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: Thinking of media in general, do you think on balance that the journalism produced today has improved in quality, declined in quality or is about the same as it was 5 years ago?

Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.

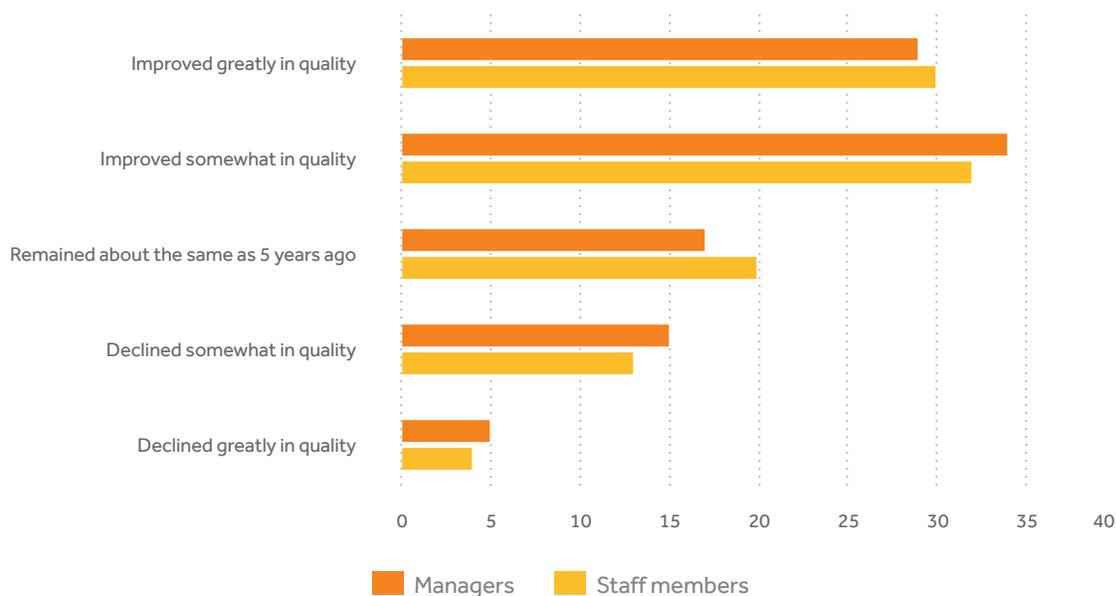
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

But that did not extend to their own work. When asked how the quality of the work that they produce compares to five years ago, both managers and staff members are much more optimistic. About 33 percent said it had improved somewhat in quality while another 30 percent said their work had improved greatly in quality.

Is "your own" journalism getting better?

Managers and staff members who described their work as journalism



Data Source: Question: Thinking about the changes in journalism and your own work, do you think the quality of what you are able to produce is better, worse or about the same as what you produced five years ago? (If you have been working in journalism for less than five years, then for as long as you have been working.)

Managers N = 1,211. Staff members = 2,592.

Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

What might explain the paradox that most journalists believe the quality of journalism is declining while the quality of their work is improving?

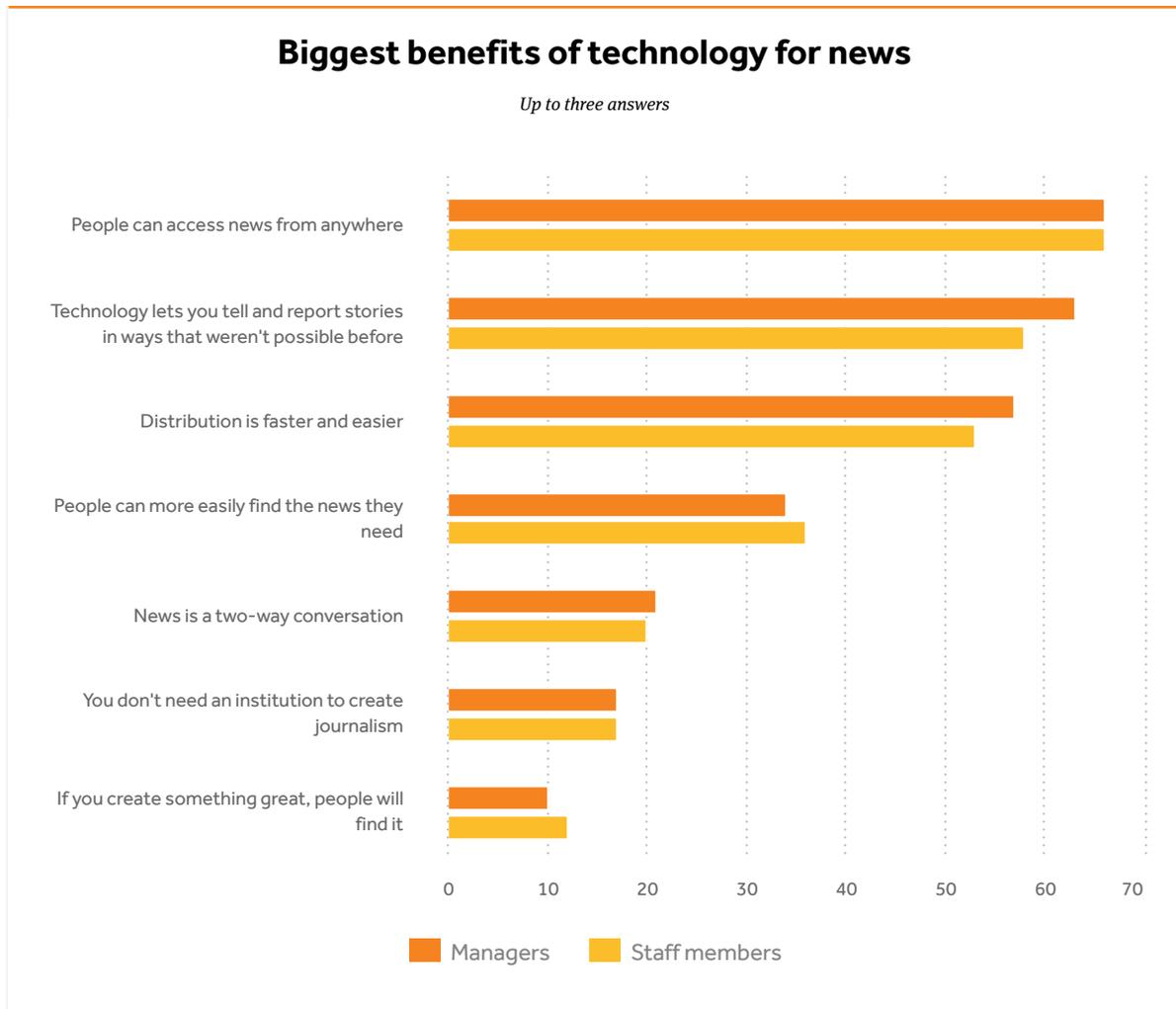
One explanation, of course, is that people would never see their own work as getting weaker. But there are more nuanced possibilities. A journalist could believe that the quality of their own work has improved but think journalism in general is declining because fewer journalists are employed in the news industry overall compared to five years ago. Alternatively, journalists may feel that the work produced by their news organization is strong while quality elsewhere has declined.

Of course, in the past five years, technology has changed journalism in important ways. People are able to consume the news on their phones and organizations are able to disseminate information through digital interactives, podcasts, and video. The relationship between news organizations and the audience has changed, as some readers regularly write comments and post on the social media feeds of organizations.

Given these changes, we asked journalists what the biggest benefits of technology have been. About 65 percent of managers and staff members said that people can access news from anywhere, the most common response. Managers were slightly more likely to say that technology lets you report stories in new ways (63% vs 58%) and that distribution is faster and easier (57% vs 53%).

Notably, only one-fifth said that “news is a two-way conversation.” This may reflect a lack of enthusiasm towards comments on news sites, or other forms of audience interaction, such as through social media. Or perhaps it simply ranks as a lesser benefit in the eyes of media workers, even as news organizations and philanthropic foundations emphasize its importance.

Likewise, news workers may also believe that there is a limit on how involved audiences should be in the production of news. In an in-depth case study of one mid-western news organization, for example, only 14 percent of employees believed that members of the community should be part of the news team. As one reporter summarized, “I think the whole focus on bringing people from the community and assuming they can do journalism is not well regarded among the reporting ranks.”

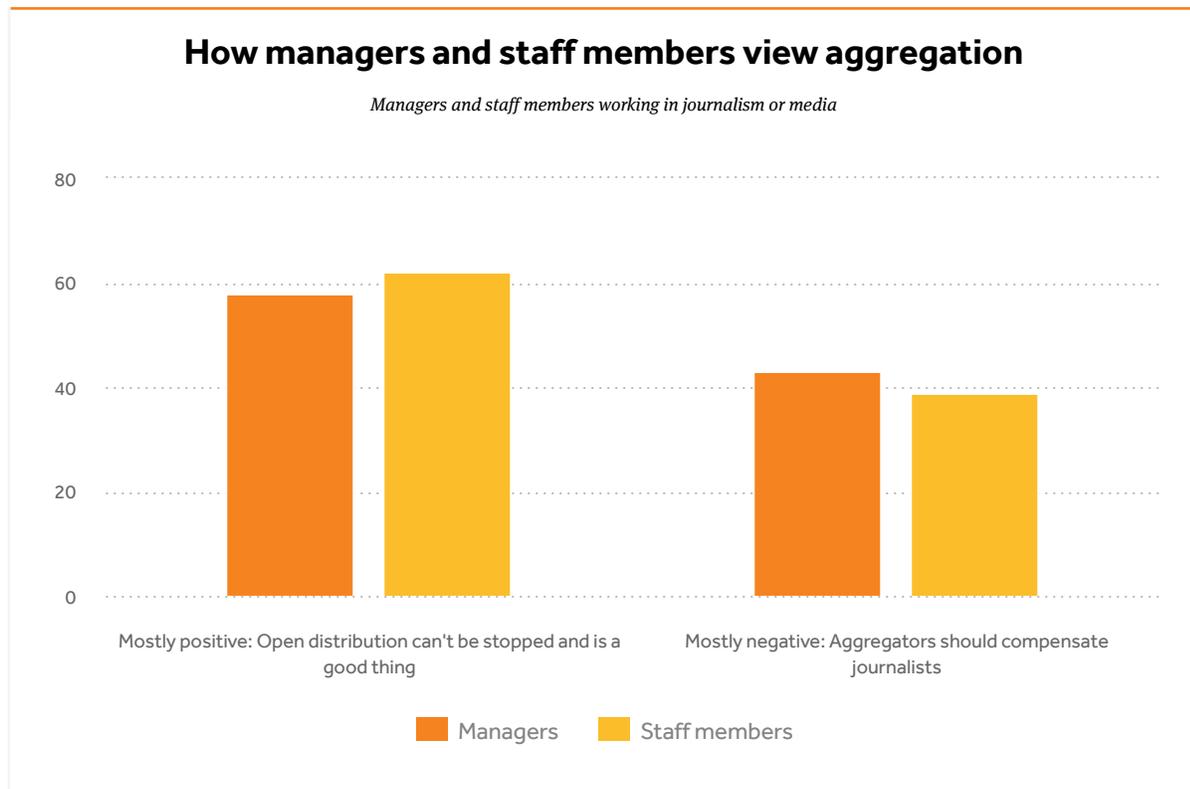


Data Source: Question: What do you think is the biggest benefit that new technologies bring to journalism today? Please pick up to three.
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: “Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media.” 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

While technology has brought many benefits to journalism, it has also reshaped how people find news content. Previously, a newspaper could be confident that readers in their circulation area would mainly read their reporting if they bought their newspaper. However, readers may now bypass a newspaper by using a news aggregator or reading an article from another site that summarizes the paper’s article.

Consequently, a common concern with the news ecosystem is that the internet has made it easier to redistribute content from other publishers. When asked how they view this practice, staff members were more likely to adopt a critical view that good journalism costs money to produce and aggregators should pay licensing fees to those who produce original news content (62% vs 58%).¹



Data Source: Question: The Internet makes redistributing content from other publishers easier than ever. Which of the following comes closer to your view of this practice? Asked among a half sample. Managers N = 755. Staff members = 1,625. Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

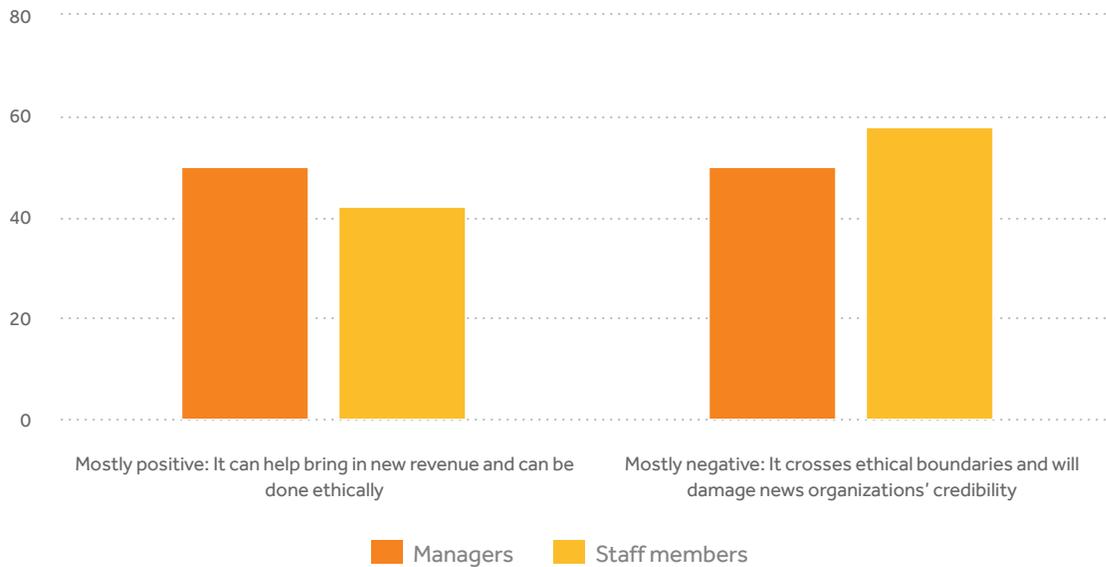
AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Another new trend in digital content is sponsored content or native advertising. While this practice has nuance, with organizations labeling sponsored content differently, it has been controversial with supporters arguing it provides needed revenue and critics arguing that it lowers the credibility of the organization.

When asked to choose between these two views, managers are evenly split – with half saying that it helps bring in new revenue and can be done ethically and half saying it crosses ethical boundaries and damages the organization’s credibility. Staff members are more skeptical – with 58 percent agreeing with the negative view.

How managers and staff members view the practice of sponsored content or native advertising

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: In general, which of the following statements comes closer to your view of the practice of sponsored content or native advertising?

Asked among a half sample.

Managers N = 755. Staff members = 1,625.

Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Overall, these findings suggest that staff members are more concerned with possible declines in news quality and ethical boundaries. Managers, perhaps demonstrating a different focus, seem more concerned with finding new economic models and adapting faster to technology.

A central question that arises from this data is whether managers and staff members evaluate what "success" at their news organization looks like similarly. Managers seem to be more focused on finding new business models even if they push the boundaries of traditional journalism norms. In response, staff members may be more concerned with producing quality journalism and respecting ethical boundaries.

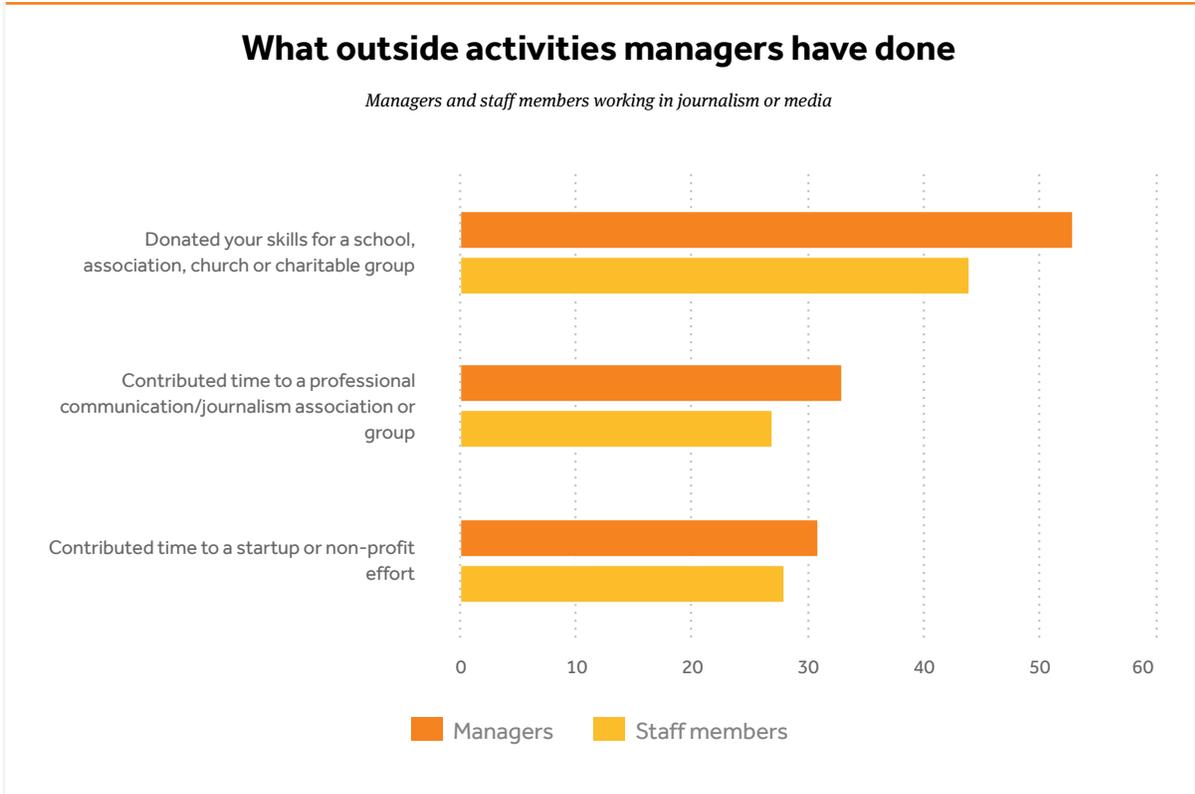
Sponsored content then, becomes emblematic of the debate. According to a 2016 report, native advertising accounts for 11 percent of ad revenues at news media companies and will rise to 25 percent by 2018. Given this growing source of revenue, it is important that managers and staff members agree on how to best approach this practice.

1. This question was asked to half the sample, which consisted of 755 managers and 1,625 staff members. ↩
2. This question was asked to half the sample, which consisted of 755 managers and 1,625 staff members. ↩

Freelancing, service, and self-promotion

Outside of their primary job, what other responsibilities do media workers take on? Our findings suggest that media workers actively contribute to professional organizations, nonprofit organizations, and engage in freelance work.¹ Possibly hinting at differences in professional priorities and needs, we find that managers are more likely to donate their time or skills. Staff members are more likely to engage in freelancing or self-promotion through social networks, creating a personal website, or blogging.

When asked what activities they have done outside their primary job in the past five years, managers were more likely to say donated skills for a charitable group (53% vs 44%), contributed time to a professional group (33% vs. 27%), or contributed time to a startup or nonprofit (31% vs 28%).

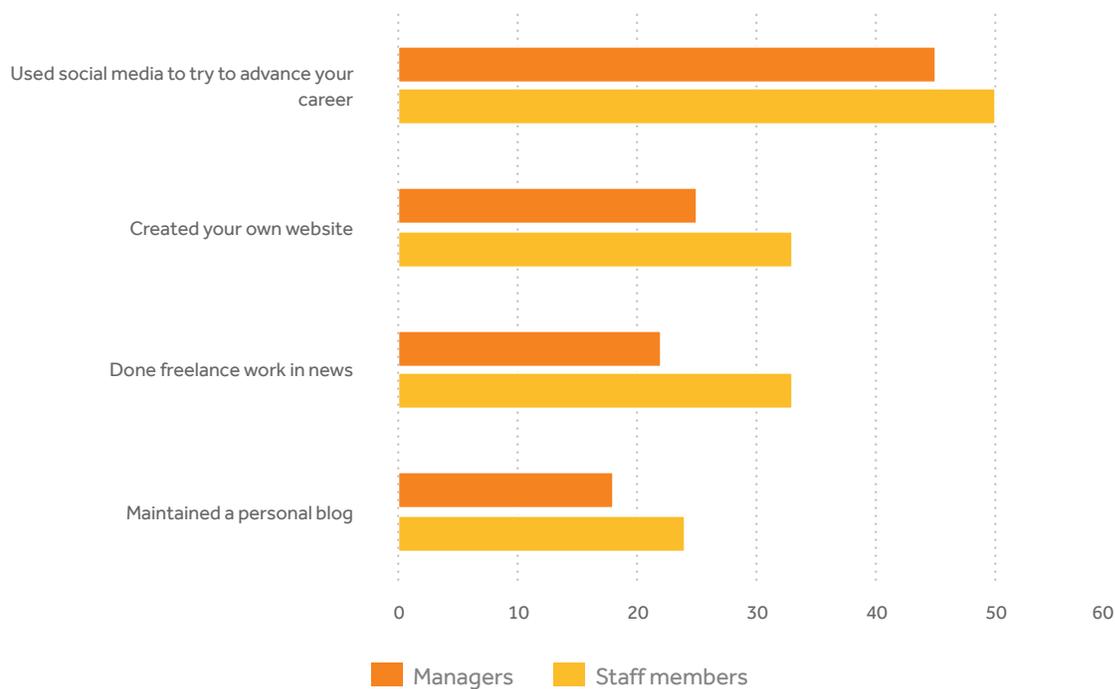


Data Source: Question: Outside of your primary job, which, if any, of the following have you done in the last five years? (Select all that apply)
 Asked among a half sample.
 Managers N = 779. Staff members = 1,760.
 Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

Staff members are more likely to pursue opportunities for promotion outside of primary work. From using social media to advance their career (50% vs 45%), creating their own website (33% vs 25%), doing freelance work in news (33% vs 22%), to maintaining a personal blog (24% vs 18%).

What outside activities staff members have engaged in

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: Outside of your primary job, which, if any, of the following have you done in the last five years? (Select all that apply)
Asked among a half sample.
Managers N = 779. Staff members = 1,760.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

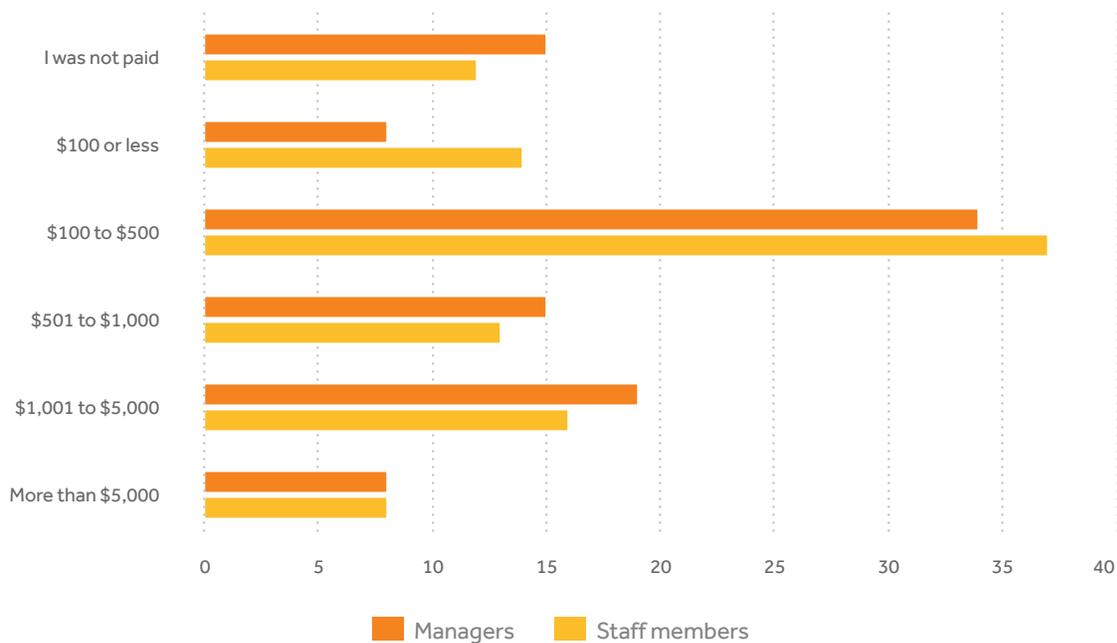
Such differences likely reflect that non-managers feel a greater need to develop and promote their portfolio (in the following section, we discuss how staff members feel less secure about their job). Managers may be better able to donate to causes they are passionate about because they are more secure in their work/finances. Given that managers tend to be older than staff members, age and life stage are other possible factors.

With 1 in 3 non-managers freelancing in the past 5 years, as well as 2 out of 10 managers, we sought to understand why they do so. When reviewing the rates they were paid for their most recent freelance job, managers were slightly more willing to accept a gig that did not pay (15% vs 11%). This likely reflects that managers generally earn more than non-managers, and are thus more willing to work for free outside of their normal job.

Compensation for their last freelance assignment most frequently fell between \$100 and \$500, with 39 percent of both managers and of staff members earning this amount. Managers were slightly more likely to be paid amounts over \$500 than non-managers. For example, 1 percent of managers earned between \$1,001 and \$5,000, compared to 15 percent of non-managers. Managers may be better able to command higher rates due to greater stature in the field or stronger experience/technical skills.

How much managers and staff members were paid for freelance

Asked of those who did freelance journalism work



Data Source: Question: If you did freelance work, how much were you paid for your most recent assignment?

Asked among those in the half sample who said they freelanced.

Managers N = 306. Staff members = 871.

Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Given the relative prevalence of freelancing, we were interested in understanding why people engage in this practice. Our survey probed this phenomenon by asking respondents what their most important reasons for freelancing were, while allowing them to select up to three answers.

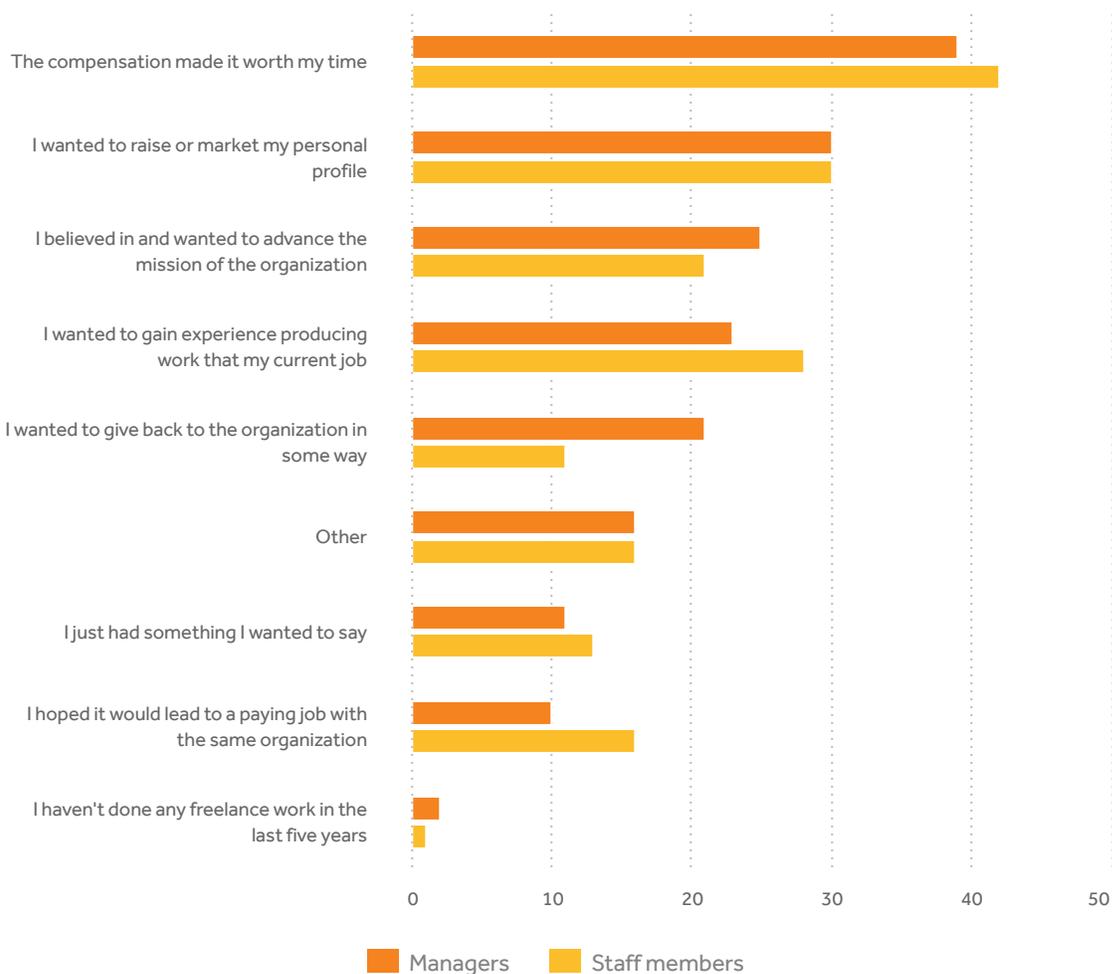
We find that about 4 out of 10 managers or non-managers who freelanced said compensation was a primary reason. The second most common answer was to raise their personal profile, with 3 out of 10 managers or non-managers giving this answer.

After these two reasons, we see differences. Managers are more likely to say they freelanced because they believed in the mission of the organization (25% vs 21%) or that they wanted to give back to the organization (21% vs. 11%).

Staff members are more likely to say they freelanced because they wanted to gain experience (28% vs 23%) or hoped that it would lead to a paying job with the same organization (16% vs 10%).

Reasons managers and staff members chose to freelance

Asked of those who have done freelance journalism work, up to three answers



Data Source: Question: Which of the following were the most important reasons for your deciding to do the freelance work? (Choose up to three. Answers can tally to more than 100%)

Asked of those in the half sample who said they freelanced.

Managers N = 306. Staff members = 871.

Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Overall, the picture that emerges from these responses is that media workers differ in their emphases outside of their primary jobs. Managers are more likely to donate their time or skills, to freelance to serve an organization, and more likely to freelance for free or be paid over \$500.

Staff members, on the other hand, are more likely to use social media, a personal website, or a blog to raise their profile. They are more likely to engage in freelancing and more likely to do so in the hopes that it is valuable experience or will lead to a job.

Given our previous finding that nearly half of non-managers said job seeking skills were important for someone in their field, the survey results suggest that many staff members prioritize building a competitive portfolio. To do so, many journalists who are not managers are actively promoting their work and freelancing.

Such activities may reflect anxiety over keeping a job in journalism, a subject we explore in the following chapter.

-
1. The questions analyzed in this section were administered to half the sample, which consisted of 779 managers and 1760 staff members. ↩

Recent work experiences and future plans

With the economic model underpinning much of the media system in flux, media workers have had a tumultuous experience. Our findings suggest that while managers feel slightly more secure in their job, and are slightly more likely to say they will still be working in journalism in five years, layoffs, furloughs, and paycuts have impacted managers and staff members at similar rates.

Moreover, a majority of managers and staff members have added new responsibilities at work. Relatedly, the most commonly cited obstacle affecting their ability to do their job is organization resources and staffing. Such results hint at a workforce that may feel overworked and under supported.

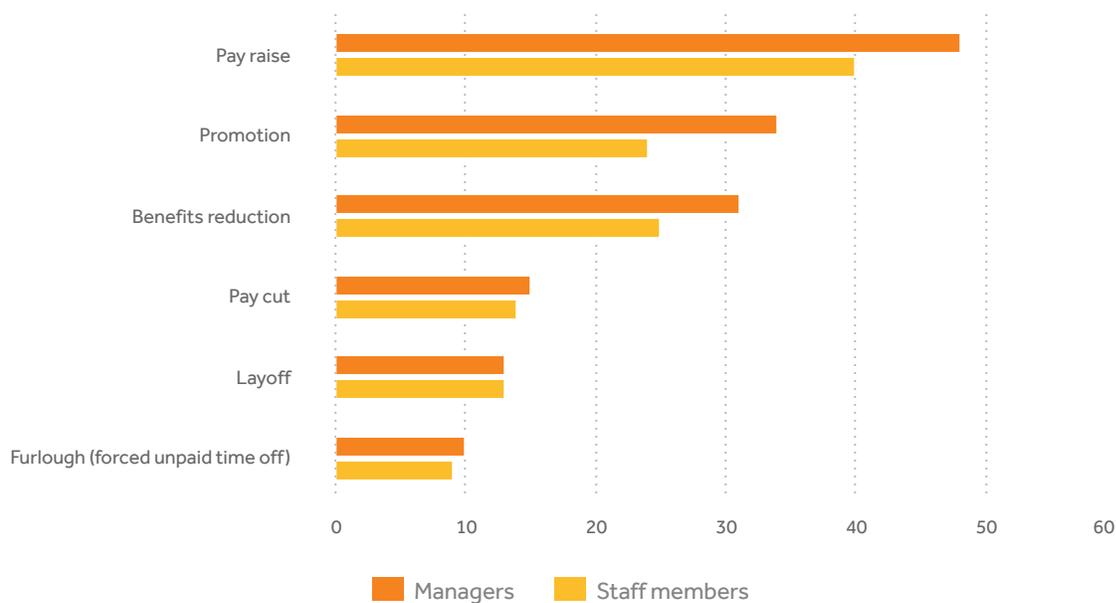
With pay cuts and layoffs an unfortunate reality for media organizations in recent years, we measured how many managers or staff members have experienced changes in compensation in the past five years.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, managers were more likely to experience a pay raise or a promotion (possibly a promotion to management). Still, managers were slightly more likely to have a benefits reduction (31% vs 25%).

In terms of other negative experiences, managers and staff members reported cutbacks at similar rates: roughly one-seventh experienced pay cuts, one-eighth experienced a layoff, and one-tenth experienced a furlough.

How managers' and staff members' pay have changed

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: Which of the following have you personally experienced in the last 5 years? (Choose up to three. Answers can tally to more than 100%)
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

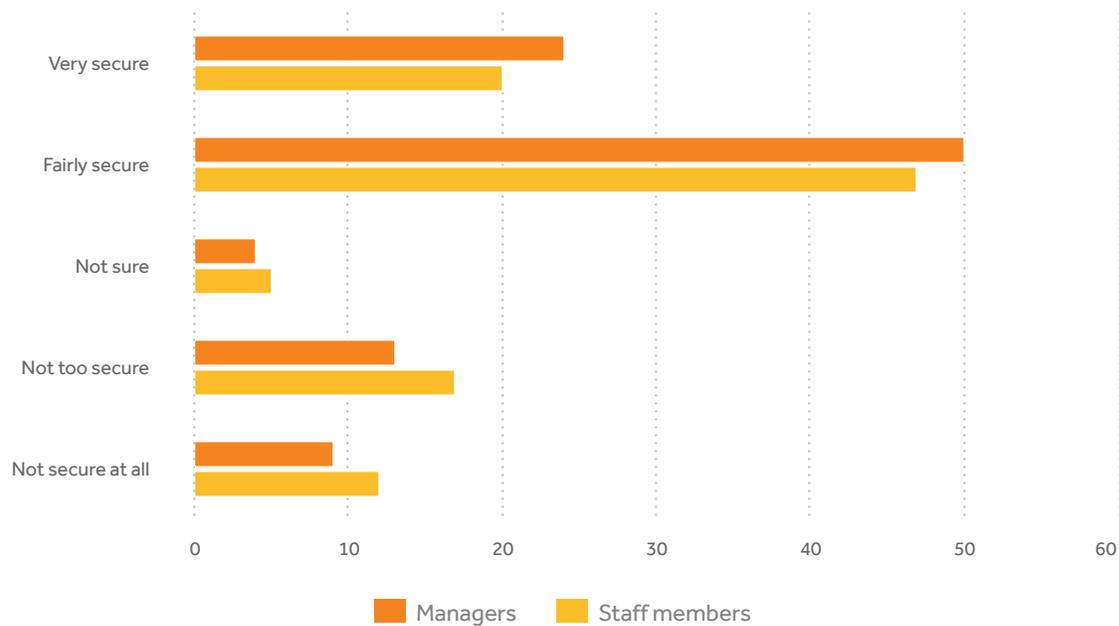
AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Given these relatively common cutbacks, how secure do managers and staff members feel about their jobs? We find that 74 percent of managers and 67 percent of staff members said they felt either "very secure" or "fairly secure." At the other end of the spectrum, 29 percent of staff members said they feel not too secure or not secure at all (compared to 22 percent of managers).

That managers feel more secure is not particularly surprising, as they may feel they have more years of experience or responsibilities that are seen as more difficult to replace. Still, it is noteworthy that more than 1 out of 4 staff members fear for their job security. This finding helps contextualize the amount of self-promotion and freelancing performed by staff members who may seek an edge in retaining their job or finding a new one.

How managers and staff members feel about their job security

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: How would you describe your feeling about your job security?
Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

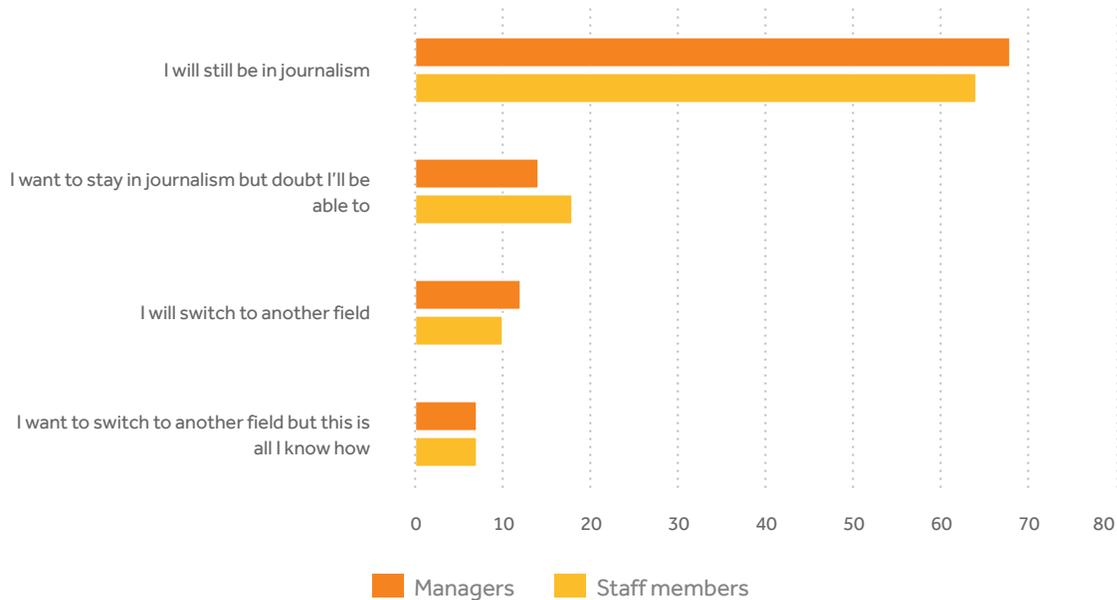
AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

Given these experiences with cutbacks and some trepidation concerning job security, a common concern is that workers may leave journalism to join a related — but more stable — field like public relations. To explore this topic, we asked those working in journalism whether they plan to continue to be working there in five years.

Here, we find that managers and staff members have slightly different views. For both, the most common answer is they will still be in journalism, with 68 percent of managers and 64 percent of staff members saying this. But slightly more staff members say they want to remain in journalism but doubt they will be able to (18% vs 14%). And slightly more managers say they will switch to another field (12% vs 10%).

Where do managers and staff members think they will be working in 5 years?

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: If you work in journalism, describe where you see yourself in five years. Managers N = 1,009. Staff members = 2,275. Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

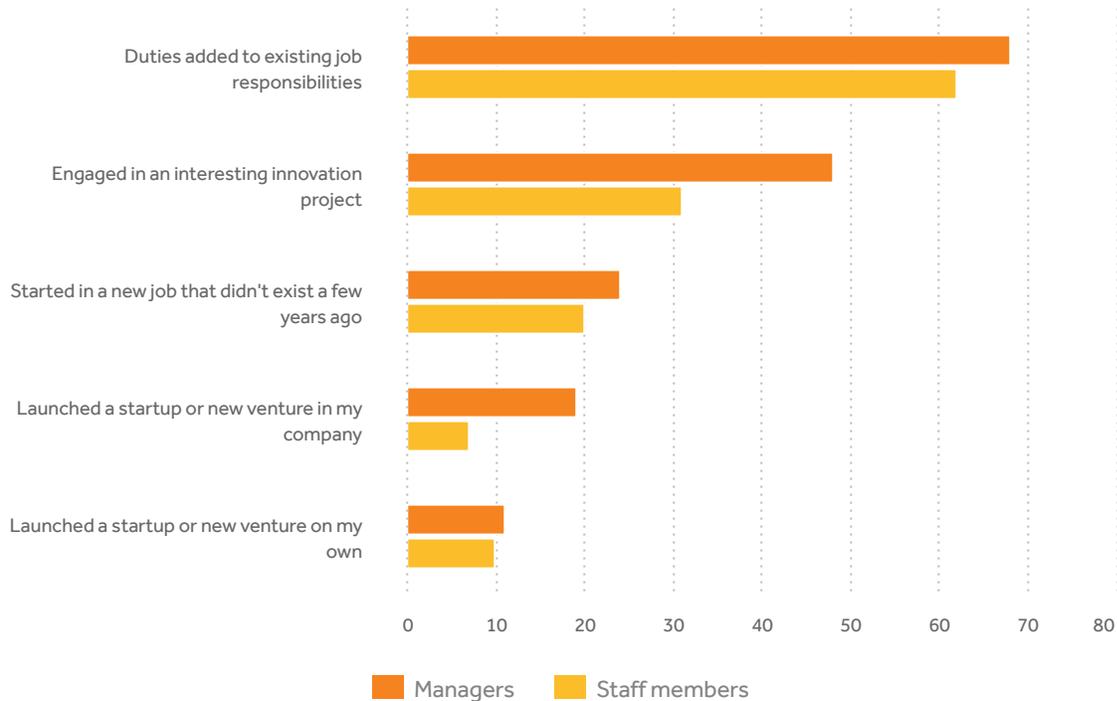
These differences may be partially attributable to staff members having less confidence in their ability to retain a job in journalism while managers are more likely to believe their skills are easily transferable to other fields.

The changes undergone at media organizations did not just impact pay or job security—it also impacted the responsibilities employees hold. Indeed, in the past five years, we find that 68% managers and 62% of staff members say they have had duties added to existing responsibilities.

Managers were more likely to engage in an interesting innovation project (48% vs 31%), start in a new job that didn't exist a few years ago (24% vs 20%), or launch a startup or new venture at their company (19% vs 7%). Roughly 1 out of 10 managers or staff members launched a startup or venture on their own.

Have managers and staff members gained new responsibilities in the last 5 years?

Managers and staff members working in journalism or media



Data Source: Question: Which of the following have you personally experienced in the last 5 years?
 Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
 Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

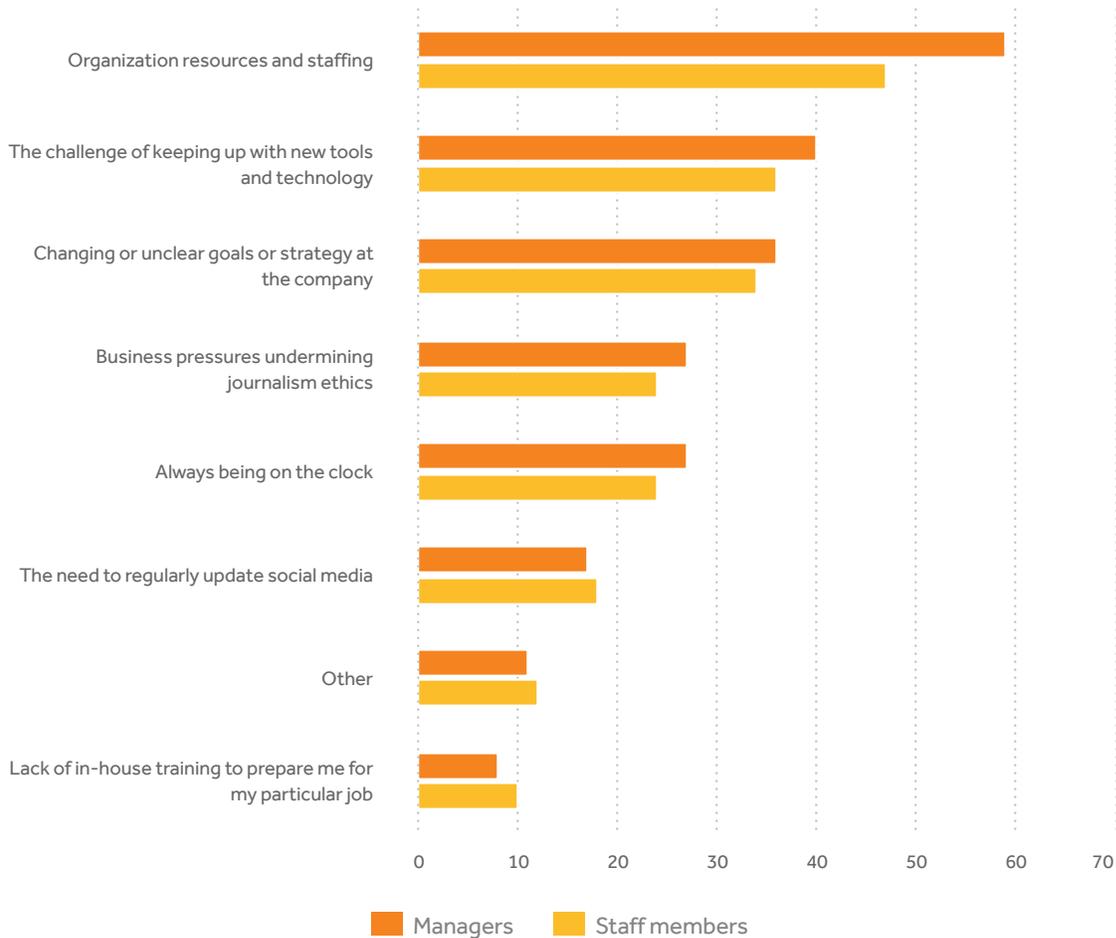
On one hand, these changes hint at innovation within media companies. At the same time, they suggest that staff members are less involved in these new projects. Coupled with our previous findings that managers are more likely to be comfortable with technology and desire more training in metrics and business practices while staff members focus more on content creation, it reinforces the notion that managers are focusing on the more innovative aspects at media companies. It is unclear whether this arrangement is the most productive approach, as staff members will eventually need to “buy in” to the new developments as much as management has.

With the responsibilities, job security, and content produced in journalism fluctuating over the years, it is understandable that workers may be frustrated with certain aspects of their jobs. Consequently, we asked workers what they see as the biggest obstacles affecting their ability to do their job, while allowing them to select up to three answers.

For both managers and staff members, three responses stand above the rest. The most common answer is organizational resources and staffing (59% of managers and 47% of staff members), followed by the challenge of keeping up with new technology (40% vs 36%) and unclear strategy at the company (36% vs 34%).

What obstacles are affecting managers and staff members' ability to do their job?

Up to three answers



Data Source: Question: Thinking about your own work, whether in journalism or not, what obstacles do you think most affect your ability to do your job? (Select up to three.)
 Managers N = 1,604. Staff members = 3,579.
 Original report: "Facing Change: The needs, attitudes and experiences of people in media." 2015.

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

A striking finding is that nearly 6 out of 10 managers say organizational resources and staffing is a major obstacle. With figures from the American Society of News Editors suggesting that the number of newsroom staff has declined by 21 percent between 2010 and 2015, managers are likely working with less staff than they were a few years ago. Given our other findings, managers may be frustrated with staff members being laid off, their company not adapting faster to technology, and the strategy to adapt to this new environment being unclear.

Managers also expressed more concerns over the challenge of keeping up with new tools and technology (40% vs 36%), which was the second most common answer. At first glance this seems to suggest that managers struggle more to keep up with technology. However, when it is contextualized with our previous results showing that managers are more comfortable with digital tools and use them more regularly, this challenge likely reflects that managers feel more pressure to stay up-to-date. It may also suggest that managers are concerned with how to keep their staff up to date on technology.

It is noteworthy that one-third of managers and staff members also identified changing or unclear goals or strategy at their company as a major obstacle. This is particularly problematic because clear goals helps establish a structure and culture that fosters innovation. Such strategies are especially important as news organizations adapt to smaller newsrooms and new technologies.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that while managers and staff members have experienced cutbacks at similar rates, staff members feel less secure in their jobs and are slightly less likely to believe that they will still be working in journalism in five years.

Possibly suggesting an overworked workforce, resources and staffing is the most commonly cited challenge affecting journalists' ability to do their jobs. Indeed, most media workers have added responsibilities in the past five years, with managers being more likely to work on innovative projects.

Summary and implications

When a media company's performance is analyzed, managers are often criticized for the innovations that they have not implemented. When discussing a new approach in journalism, the views of staff members are rarely cited. And while reports tally how many people have been laid off, it is often difficult to measure anxiety over job security.

We hope that these findings lend more context to these types of stories.

Our findings suggest that managers are often more comfortable with technology and more frustrated with the rate of adoption of technology than staff members. Managers are also more likely to value data journalism and audience metrics.

Managers may be more likely to embrace these innovations because they are more likely to see the economics of the news industry as a major challenge. In contrast, we find that staff members are more likely to be concerned with supporting quality journalism and are more critical of sponsored content.

Outside of work, we find that managers are more likely to donate their time and skills while staff members are more likely to freelance or engage in self-promotion. Relatedly, we find that staff members report lower levels of job security and are less confident that they will still be working in journalism in five years.

To be sure, some of these observed differences are to be expected and some of the differences are modest. But taken together they suggest that managers and staff members have different perspectives and experiences in regards to the state of journalism. In many respects, managers seem to align themselves with the traditional "business side" by embracing audience metrics and new streams of revenue while staff are more representative of the "editorial side" that focuses on producing content and preserving news quality.

Given that many news organizations are focusing on how to best implement innovations, we believe that these differences are important and noteworthy. If staff members are anxious about their jobs and more focused on creating content at work and freelancing outside of it, they will have less time and energy to learn and contribute to new innovations. Moreover, if they believe that these innovations are hurting the quality of journalism, they may actively resist them.

And in the digital age, is increasing engagement the responsibility of the business side or editorial side? Because of these types of mutual responsibilities, many experts have argued that these silos unintentionally stymie innovation.

To facilitate innovation, it may not be enough for managers to learn new skills and approaches. It may require workers throughout the organization to share the same goals and views, which would require managers and staff members to bridge some of these differences. To do so, leaders of media organizations may need to spend more time communicating with staff how new strategies fit within existing norms and goals. Or conversely, they may need to listen to staff to iterate new approaches towards audience metrics, sponsored content, and other digital practices and innovations.

About the methodology and sample

The survey was conducted online through the lists of alumni of the 22 participating schools and was distributed through partner alumni email lists between April 14 and June 29, 2015, with the dates varying within that time frame among different schools.

The survey was executed using the SurveyMonkey survey tool, with consultation from senior SurveyMonkey research staff. The results were moved to and analyzed using SPSS. The following institutions participated in the project:

- Arizona State University, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication
- Arizona State University, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication
- Boston University, College of Communication
- City University of New York, Graduate School of Journalism
- Columbia University, Graduate School of Journalism
- George Washington University, School of Media & Public Affairs
- Louisiana State University, Manship School of Mass Communication
- Michigan State University, School of Journalism
- Northwestern University, Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications
- Pennsylvania State University, College of Communications
- Stony Brook University, School of Journalism
- Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
- Temple University, School of Media and Communication
- University of California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Journalism
- University of Florida, College of Journalism and Communications
- University of Iowa, School of Journalism & Mass Communication
- University of Maryland, College Park, Philip Merrill College of Journalism
- University of Nebraska, Lincoln, College of Journalism and Mass Communications
- University of Nevada, Reno, Reynolds School of Journalism
- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, School of Media and Journalism

- University of Southern California, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism
- University of Texas, Austin, Moody College of Communication
- Washington State University, Edward R. Murrow College of Communication

Potential partner institutions were identified by several factors including size, location and history of their journalism and communication schools. Twenty-five schools were approached and 22 participated in full. Representatives from all schools consulted on the design and wording of the questionnaire. Schools were also given slots for four proprietary questions. The data from any one school will remain anonymous except for that school. Each school was given its own dataset of its alumni, which it can compare to the aggregate dataset. Schools can compare graduates in detail (i.e., those with only journalism programs will be able to compare their graduates just to other journalism graduates). The identity of any one graduate will remain confidential, and all schools agreed that they cannot use the individual responses to contact that alumni for fundraising or other purposes.

For most schools, all communication with the alumni came directly from the individual educational institution. Two institutions requested that API send the invitation to participate. At no time did API or its consultants have any identifying information on the graduates invited to participate. Schools used similar language in their emails and follow-up reminders to encourage participation to ensure uniformity in the how the study was presented (to minimize bias across the schools in terms of who might respond). The invitations and reminders were sent through email. The link to SurveyMonkey was included in each of these emails.

The survey was not generic; instead it was tailored to each school with school name and other identifying features to ensure comfort on the part of the respondent. After the data collection, the surveys for each of the schools was consolidated into a single dataset. A total of more than 105,000 invitations were sent, and 11,931 accessed the survey. Some respondents did not complete the entire survey. To be considered a “completed survey” respondents had to answer to a certain point and had to be a qualified alumni. Of these, 89 percent reached the required completion point. Fully 69 percent of those finished the survey in its entirety; 10,482 met the criteria to be included in the dataset.

In addition to the 22 schools, the survey was also sent to the membership of the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) and the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) to supplement the managers dataset. A total of 254 members of these associations accessed the survey and are included in the dataset used in this report. The questionnaire for these respondents was essentially the same in order to allow for some comparison between industry leaders and the alumni.

Due to a variation in programming, the wording for one school’s questionnaire was slightly different than the rest. While the data for this school are valid, those are not included in the dataset for this report or in the totals of completes.

The survey included a combination of closed- and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were coded into meaningful categories.

This analysis is limited to workers who indicated that the work they do is journalism or those who worked in the following industries: digital-only news organization, freelancing, magazines, newspaper media, radio media, technology or social media company, TV media, film media, news agency/wire service, multimedia, book + journal publishing/writing.

Managers (n = 1,604) were categorized as media workers in journalism who indicated that they did one of the following: assignment/section editing, product management, or senior management. Staff members (n = 3,579) were workers who did not perform one of these functions.

Including those who may have more than one degree, the managers and staff members included in this sample reported a similar mix of college degrees, with about ¾ of each group majoring in journalism. Communication was the second most common major, with about 11 percent of managers or staff members studying this field in college.

Major	Managers	Staff members
Journalism	73.0%	75.2%
Communication	11.5%	11.3%
Advertising/PR/marketing	6.6%	6.3%
Other subject	7.0%	6.5%
None/no degree/incomplete	1.9%	0.6%

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

The managers and staff members in this sample span generations. Unsurprisingly, managers tend to be older, with 30 percent graduating in 1980 or before compared to 21 percent of staff members. At the other end of the spectrum, 24 percent of managers graduated between 2006 – 2015 compared to 37 percent of staff members.

	Managers	Staff members
1980 and before	29.9%	20.7%
1981 - 1995	28.3%	21.9%
1996 - 2005	18.2%	20.0%
2006 - 2015	23.6%	37.4%

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

In terms of employment status, managers in the sample are more likely to be employed full-time (69% compared to 60%). Staff members are more likely to be freelancing full-time/consulting (17% vs 8%).

	Managers	Staff members
Full-time	69.4%	59.8%
Part-time	3.0%	6.7%
Freelancing full-time/consulting	7.5%	16.5%
Currently not employed/seeking employment	3.1%	4.0%
Currently employed full time but seeking new employment	0.6%	1.3%
Retired/ not in workforce	16.0%	10.7%
Internship/fellowship	0.5%	1.0%

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

The sample includes workers in a variety of subfields, from newspapers and TV media to companies specializing in science or sports. When comparing where managers and staff members work, the percentages are generally similar, except staff members are more likely to be freelancing (21% vs 10%).

Field	Managers	Staff members
Newspaper media	26.5%	21.6%
TV media	18.2%	23.0%
Magazines	15.3%	9.6%
Advertising/marketing/public relations/communication/media	12.7%	11.0%
Technology or social media company	11.6%	8.5%
Digital-only news organization	10.4%	8.2%
Freelancing	10.1%	21.1%
Self-employed, entrepreneur	9.0%	9.1%
Educational institution	8.6%	12.3%
Advocacy/public interest/think-tank group (nonprofit)	6.7%	4.3%
Radio media	6.6%	5.5%
Commercial product or services company (for-profit, non medi	5.7%	3.5%
Government	3.8%	2.7%
Book + journal publishing/writing	2.3%	1.8%
No answer	1.2%	2.7%
News agency/wire service	0.7%	1.1%
Commercial/financial services	0.6%	0.7%
Film media	0.4%	1.3%
Multimedia	0.4%	0.1%
Health/well-being	0.4%	0.4%
Arts/Entertainment	0.3%	0.3%
Science/engineering	0.3%	0.1%
Sales/retail/rental/wholesale	0.2%	0.4%
Other	0.2%	0.1%
Law	0.1%	0.3%
Sports (not broadcasting)	0.1%	0.3%
Housing/construction	0.1%	0.1%
Food/beverage	0.1%	0.1%
Research/development	0.1%	0.1%
Retired/disabled	0.1%	0.1%
Transportation	0.0%	0.1%
Stay-at-home	0.0%	0.1%
Seeking employment/unemployed	0.0%	0.0%
Continuing education	0.0%	0.1%

AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

This analysis was completed by Alex Williams, a PhD Candidate at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School, under the guidance of the American Press Institute and in cooperation with Maria Ivancin, president of the Market Research Bureau and adjunct associate professor at American University. For the full list of those who contributed to the larger research effort, please see the methodology on the original findings.