

Research report

Lifelong learning needs of media professionals in Latvia (April 2020)

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I. Introduction

The study was initiated by the Latvian Association of Journalists and the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME). The aim of the research is to find out the lifelong learning needs of the media professionals within Latvian media organizations. The results of the study will be used to provide accurate information regarding the needs of Latvian media to donors and other supporters of BCME projects.

The study was conducted at a time when media organizations were trying to adapt to the declining income caused by the increasingly active involvement of global platforms in the Latvian media market. According to the data of the Latvian Advertising Association, the preliminary results of 2019 show that the amount of advertising revenue will be 125 million euros. In turn, the data received from the State Revenue Service show that in the first ten months of 2019, the share of global platforms in the Latvian advertising market amounted to 104.5 million euros, in 2018 this share was 81.7 million euros. In 2017, the Media Support Fund was established in Latvia and has been operating ever since, annually allocating an average of 1.2 million euros to commercial media for the creation of high-quality, important journalistic content.

At the end of 2016, Latvia's first media policy document, which offered the plan for the modernization of media regulatory enactments, was implemented. It was adapted to the requirements of a modern media environment, ensuring the development of diverse and high-quality media. At the same time, decisions of politics-making provide that PSM would gradually leave the advertising market in 2020. However, in general, the foundations of the existence of Latvian media are uncertain, the labour market of media professionals is not active. The situation is worst for regional/local media companies and national newspapers.

Continuing education for media professionals in Latvia is fragmented, unsystematic, provided without common strategy and offered by various national and international institutions.

II. Data and method

The study was conducted between October 2019 and March 2020. During the study, 20 representatives from 10 media were interviewed, advocating to all media segments and types: public service media, Latvian and Russian speaking media companies, commercial broadcasters, online newspapers, magazines, news portals, local and regional media. Journalists and managers from approximately 10 media organizations were interviewed. The study employed a qualitative semi-structured interview as the research data collection method. The interviews conducted for the research addressed media executives and editors, as well as journalists and producers of audio-visual content.

The study includes the following structure of questions: the main issues related to lifelong learning; previous training experience; the necessary media management skills; the necessary journalism skills; the necessary multimedia content creation skills and knowledge of multimedia technologies.

III. Results

The study results show that Latvian media organizations lack resources (finances, time, managerial practices) to organize the lifelong learning for employees. Although media managers generally value continuous professional development, most decisions about knowledge and skills improvement activities are made at the individual level (editors, journalists, producers).

The professional development of media organizations and their employees takes place mostly in response to external actor offers: journalists and editors use various EU level seminars and programs, offers by foreign media educational institutions (e.g. Deutsche Welle, BBC, YLE) and journalism support funds, courses and seminars created by Latvian organizations. Evaluating the lifelong learning opportunities of Latvian media professionals, it can be concluded that journalists and editors are highly dependent on the capabilities and content priorities of the organizers and financiers of lifelong learning activities. Journalists and editors are actively partaking in these opportunities. At the same time, the interviewees suggest that the main staff training needs of all media organizations are related to two aspects: improvement of management skills and the skills needed to effectively operate in a digital environment.

Evaluating the research data, it can be concluded that Latvia's media companies lack a permanent, planned lifelong learning strategy and tactics. There is a relatively small media market and a limited number of media professionals who regularly update their professional knowledge. There are certainly quite a few media companies whose employees do not have the opportunity to improve their professional skills. These differences also make it difficult to create an educational offer for lifelong learning: if one part of the target audience needs, for example, the basics of digital storytelling, other media professionals have mastered them long ago and could conduct classes for colleagues themselves.

IV. Existing experience in lifelong learning of media staff members

Employees of all media organizations interviewed for this study have used further education opportunities. Their intensity and content vary. In several commercial media, the management does not consider it necessary to invest in the further education of employees, but those media managers do not prevent employees from devoting time to the courses and seminars offered. If a media organization values the professional growth of its employees, it organizes the necessary trainings and actively participates in training programs for media professionals offered by other organizations.

Informant 9. Who organizes lifelong learning for employees in my media company? I do not know. [the answer is basically - not organized]. Why should an employer do this? Does it take time for direct job responsibilities so that someone can then buy back those employees?

The content of lifelong learning is determined by the management only in those cases when the media company itself organizes the training. The content of the training organized in such a manner varies greatly, as it depends on the peculiarities of the media. For example, several respondents point out that management skills trainings have taken place, and Latvian radio

workers appreciate the training on the basics of photography, which is necessary in order to adapt the audio content to publications on the web news portal. Latvian television employees are constantly being trained in digital journalism. Local and regional media staff has been trained in multimedia journalism and social network content management.

Certain media organizations (mainly PSM and large commercial media) pay for the lifelong learning of their employees. Some respondents also pay for their own education, such as the next level of higher education or knowledge of increased interest (psychology, economics). Journalists and editors use the continuing education opportunities offered free of charge; therefore, it can be said that at the individual level, respondents, with few exceptions, have not paid for the improvement of journalism professional skills regarding lifelong education.

The content of lifelong learning acquired by the media can be divided into three groups as follows:

1. Knowledge and skills related to content creation and management.
2. Management skills.
3. General knowledge.

The first group includes both editorial skills and digital storytelling, mobile journalism and other skills related to adapting media content to the digital environment.

The second group includes a variety of skills, from planning and personnel management to coaching and team-building skills. The training, which falls into the first two groups, is mostly organized by foreign and Latvian media education institutions.

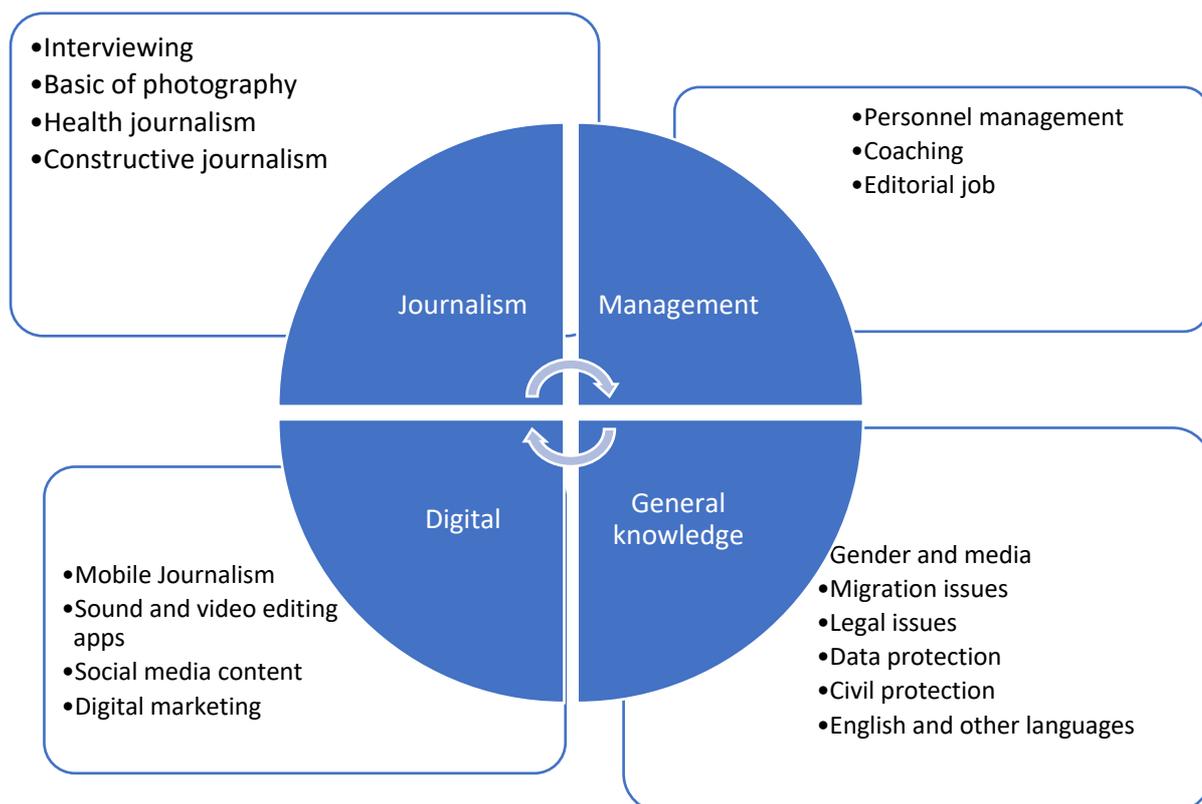
The third group mostly includes the so-called "up-to-date" knowledge of general topics necessary for media professionals: public administration, politics, economics and business, legislation, foreign languages etc.

The respondents of the study are generally satisfied with the quality of the offered knowledge and skills. Most people appreciate the opportunity to attend courses and seminars together with colleagues from other media, as well as the opportunity to perform practical tasks during further education courses. Due to the lack of time, some journalists would like the tutorials to be held remotely and to be able to learn independently.

Informant no 15. "In my previous job, we had lectures that were sometimes organized to acquire additional skills, but they were not useful to me at all - for example, "time management" - the program did not correspond to the specifics of the work of an editor and journalist (office staff). The second program, How to Work with the Millennials and the Z-Generation, seemed to me rather annoying, as I don't think that employers should treat someone in a special manner just because of their age. I also remember once there were courses on security in the Internet environment, data protection - this is the only one in my working years that I remember as being useful."

In general, media organizations have a liberal attitude towards further education of employees. If the media company itself organizes courses or seminars, they are mostly held in response to a current need - creating a new format, wanting to change, for example, the design of a magazine, reacting to the lack of skills in the existing team, such as interviewing skills or headline creation skills for Internet content (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Structure of the acquired lifelong education skills and knowledge.



Analysing the experience of continuing education in media organizations by segment, it can be concluded that regional and local media professionals use continuing education opportunities more often, their motivation and interest is generally higher. Local media are more likely to use the training opportunities offered by EU institutions. National media workers, on the other hand, are more likely to invest time and resources in obtaining a master's degree or another type of higher education.

When asked about their self-assessment of skills and knowledge, most respondents offer a varied list. They know how to work with information, managing information for different genres of journalism, some respondents have mastered visual storytelling. A few interviewees admit that they lack the skills to work in analytical journalism, to compare a large amount of diverse information. Most of the respondents are interested in learning, especially considering different digital skills. Many journalists have paid for their lifelong learning, especially for courses on digital journalism and language classes.

V. Problems of lifelong education in Latvia's media

Discussing lifelong education needs, respondents characterized the present situation by problems as follows:

- Most media professionals in audio-visual media and print media, who have been working in the field for more than 20 years, have high level professional skills. But due to the high level of job specialization in media companies, those journalists and editors represent narrow (old) specialization (mostly in regional/local media, PSM) of media professions.
- There is a constant lack of resources for regular life-long learning;
- Some staff members mention lack of basic knowledge in politics, governance, economics, culture, language usage and grammar (within all media, mostly younger employees)
- Many editors and media managers have achieved managerial positions from other posts e.g. journalist, producer, lawyer etc.; therefore, many of them can be regarded as amateurs or beginners in managerial positions without media management knowledge or experience. This is the reason why many mid- and higher managers need training for of managerial skills and knowledge;
- Lifelong learning process shall be harmonised with the high level of workload, as most journalists and editors are simultaneously preparing content for conventional and new media platforms. Moreover, the speed of information flow leads to burnout, which is why some respondents admit to having low motivation for partaking in lifelong learning activities.

VI. Needs of future lifelong education programs for media professionals

Regarding the skills that should be acquired in further education courses and seminars, their structure is rather similar to the skills already in place (Figure 2). The list of needs is closely related to the media segment. For example, writing for the Internet is essential to the audio-visual media staff members as they have not been trained to write journalistic content for web environment.

However, all responses are dominated by the need to improve the digital skills needed for journalists. This does not mean that journalists do not have the skills to operate in a digital environment. This need is driven by the rapid change in the digital environment which forces media professionals to constantly learn new skills and their applications for digital media. From the digital skills group, the most popular are social media management and marketing, less common are knowledge of algorithms and data journalism.

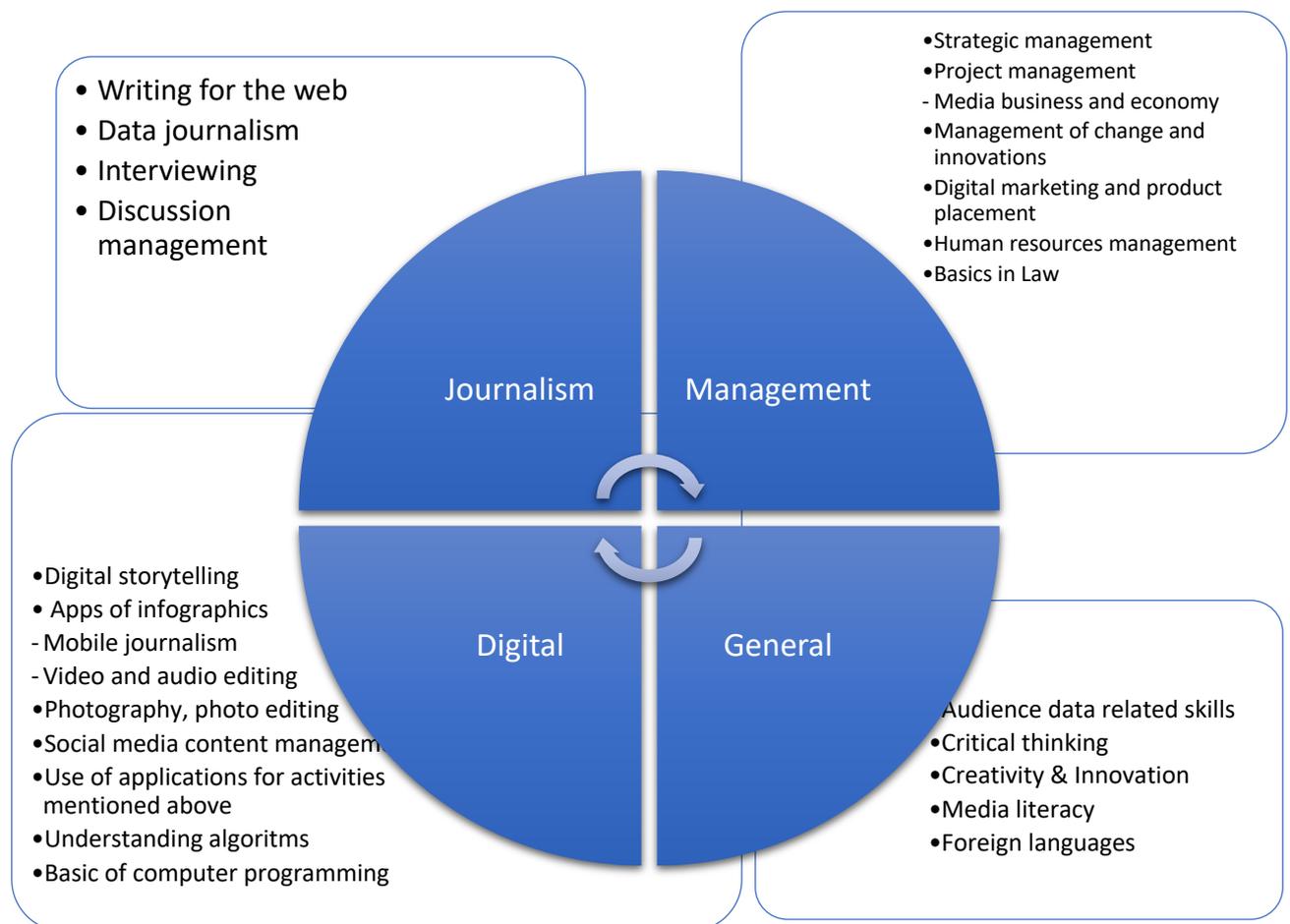
Informant no 4. I should know and understand more about the fact that everything about technology is changing at a rapid pace, come new platforms. I want to be up-to-date all the time - how to disseminate information, how to be on the same wavelength with the audience, because technology is always in front of us, ahead of us, moving along and wanting to keep up with the newest.

Informant no 12. Since I really feel that the Internet is relevant for my job, I have set myself a goal – work with video. I would like to learn how to arouse the interest of the audience by creating advertising clips for your article. This means - how to record, edit, lead the story, work on the voice, gestures, how to work with the body, process the material. This is a trend I want to move along with.

Informant no 15. I would like to improve my knowledge of a foreign language, it would be very useful for me, because then I would feel comfortable with scientific sources. At the moment, it hinders me.

The second largest group of knowledge refers to different levels of management skills: strategic management, personnel management, project management, editorial job. At the same time, journalists admit that they would like to improve their knowledge of politics and economics. The third group of knowledge is related to the need to attract and maintain an audience. Therefore, many editors believe that the structure of media audience research in their media companies should be expanded. Some respondents think that there is not enough general quantitative data for decision-making (ratings, time expenditure, subscription data, usage data of media web pages, etc.). The editors believe that they or their employees need skills to conduct small, target-oriented studies (for instance, study of audience before launching a new format). During this study, media editors claimed that there is a lack of staff members who are able to analyse existing audience data on a regular basis, and work with legal issues.

Figure 2. Structure of media education needs



VII. Conclusions

In general, a large fraction of commercial media organizations is not interested in improving the professional skills of employees. Only the largest commercial media organizations and PSM regularly organize lifelong learning activities for employees. PSM regularly conduct a survey on the need for professional development, and support their staff members' participation in courses and seminars.

Respondents of research project admit that they experienced several attempts of lifelong education, but there is **a lack of systematic learning**. It can be concluded that public service media are the only exception, as they provide educational activities on regular basis (e.g. training of voice and language skills) and employees are asked about their learning interests.

All interviewed representatives of media organizations have experienced lifelong learning, but none of them can confirm that media companies have established a strategy for the further education of creative staff members. However, each of the media organizations has implemented the tactical tasks of employee education - they have the experience to create employee education projects necessary for their needs and use the educational opportunities offered by Latvian and foreign organizations, including BCME.

The financial resources of each media firm still play an important role in the development of continuing lifelong education. Larger media companies (PSM Santa Publishing House and others) can afford to organize training sessions (internal courses and seminars) for their employees if they want to develop specific skills or start a new project. Small media organizations, especially regional and local media, try to actively use the opportunities offered to journalists by national and/or international institutions.

Continuing education organization and planning are hindered by the uneven knowledge and skills of employees in various media organizations.

The answers of the respondents show that the media firms and individual journalists expect individualized training process. This means that the same skills should be offered at different levels. It is therefore important that training modules on the most sought-after topics (e.g. digital journalism) are developed and that training is offered both face-to-face and remotely. In order for such training courses to be effective, it is necessary to create training modules. Furthermore, the BCME should provide a training platform to guide the learning process.

Even more, it would be important for media professionals to have regular training programs and schedule: a continuing education program developed and offered every year. This would allow media professionals to systematically update their knowledge and skills, and making clear planning of lifelong learning activities.

Regular training would help media professionals not only to update their skills, but also to learn new media-related professions.

In the content of the interviews, there are contradictions between how lifelong education is understood by media managers and how it is perceived by journalists. Media managers believe that their employees need short, hands-on courses that help them quickly improve the quality of particular media content. Journalists are more likely to want to acquire skills that will help them adapt to the changing media environment and possibly change their field of professional activity. This means that the lifelong learning offer must balance these learning needs.