

THE MEANING AND INFLUENCE OF CONVERGENCE

A qualitative case study of newsroom work at the Tampa News Center

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In March 2000, Media General attracted considerable industry attention in the United States when it opened the Tampa News Center and placed the operations of The Tampa Tribune, WFLA-TV, and the Tampa Bay Online service under the same roof. To understand the meaning of this media convergence experiment, the changes in the newsroom culture, and the type of job skills necessary in a convergent newsroom, we analyzed relevant trade press accounts and conducted in-depth interviews with 12 staff members of the News Center. Respondents viewed media convergence and its impact in the newsroom primarily as a tool to produce either combined or additional newsgathering resources. The interviewed journalists felt that they now concentrate more on multimedia storytelling and have increased their level of knowledge of the other two platforms. In terms of training, respondents stressed the importance of strong fundamentals, such as writing, reporting, and communication skills, but also emphasized the importance of cross-media adaptability for individuals preparing for careers in convergent newsrooms.

KEYWORDS case study; convergence; digitalization; digitization; multimedia; newsgathering; newsroom

Introduction

When Media General's Tampa News Center opened its doors with fanfare in March 2000, it stimulated considerable interest and trepidation among media professionals, but also a sense of uncertainty. On the one hand, some in management felt that this type of cross-platform consolidation was inevitable in the highly competitive news business and could herald a new model for newsrooms across the country (e.g., Steinberg and Sorkin, 2003; Thelen, 2002). Others in the profession, however, were more skeptical and expressed concern about the impact of this convergence experiment on the culture of the newsroom and employment opportunities (e.g., Sanders, 2003; Strupp, 2000). Three years after the launch of this unique initiative, it is time to revisit how some employees at the Tampa News Center construct the meaning of media convergence and how they perceive it has affected their work environment and skills development. The examination of these issues is not only important for the evolution of the news industry, but also for the future of academic programs that increasingly believe in the merits of media convergence education (e.g., Duhé and Tanner, 2003).

There are, of course, other convergent newsrooms in the country (see Killebrew, 2005; Singer, 2003), but we chose to study the News Center in Tampa, Florida, for several reasons. Not only is the News Center one of 21 newspaper–television combinations

grandfathered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC, 2003), but it has upped the convergence ante by moving its three news units under the same roof. In March 2000, *The Tampa Tribune*, the NBC-affiliated WFLA-TV, and the Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) service began operation in a brand new \$40 million, 120,000 square foot building (Strupp, 2000). Furthermore, the News Center’s owner, Media General, announced that it intends to replicate the News Center’s convergence strategies with other current and future properties. A week before the FCC (2003) lifted the ban on newspaper–television cross-ownership,¹ Media General’s chairman J. Stewart Bryan spelled out his plans: “Any of the places where we have a newspaper, we’d like to have a TV station . . . Any of the places we have a TV station, we’d like to have a newspaper” (Steinberg and Sorkin, 2003, p. C6). Thus, the News Center was an ideal setting to investigate qualitatively the meaning of media convergence, changes in newsroom practices and culture, and optimal job functions in a convergent newsroom that could impact on the journalism curriculum.

This descriptive case study will examine three research questions that are particularly relevant to journalism researchers and educators: First, how do employees at the News Center define media convergence? Second, what changes have journalists experienced on their jobs and in the newsroom since the creation of the News Center? Third, what skills do news staff members need to function optimally in the convergent environment of the News Center?

We begin by placing the study within a broad convergence framework. Next, we will review the historical, organizational, and strategic aspects of the Tampa News Center. We will then supplement this document analysis with a series of in-depth interviews with news directors, editors, producers, reporters, and technical personnel from the News Center.

A Model of Media Convergence

In proposing this general model of media convergence (see Figure 1), we seek to situate our research questions within a larger frame of reference and provide an integrated look at different conceptions of media convergence. Although our study focuses specifically on the newsroom environment, it is important to realize that media convergence represents more than a common technical platform, a business strategy,

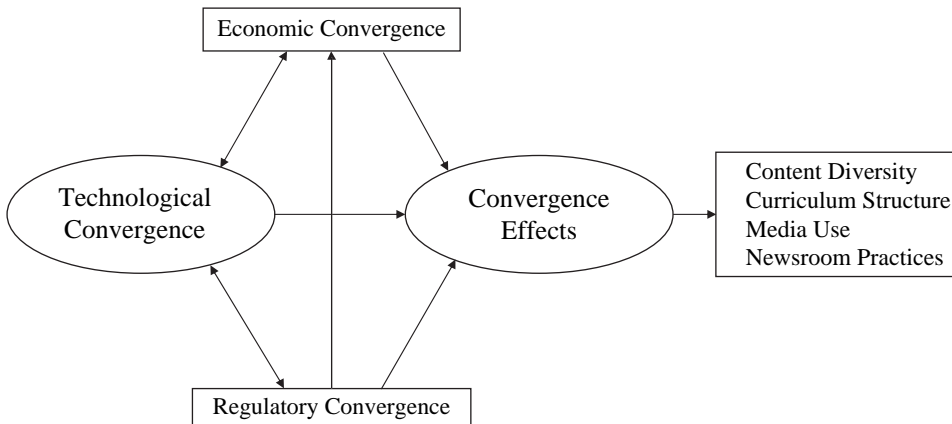


FIGURE 1
A model of media convergence

or a regulatory action (see Dennis, 2003). There is no single definition for convergence. Instead, this construct is multidimensional and has different conceptions and contexts. Below we define and discuss three main types of media convergence: technical, economic, and regulatory.

Technical Convergence

More than 20 years ago, Pool (1983, p. 24) coined the term “convergence of modes” and offered an early conceptualization of media convergence as a process “blurring the lines between media.” In his view, the traditional divisions between media industries, such as the press, broadcasting, and telephone networks, were slowly collapsing due to the growing use and influence of digital electronics (see also Mueller, 1999). Therefore, the term “technical convergence” has come to signify the “coming together of all forms of mediated communications in an electronic, digital form, driven by computers” (Pavlik, 1996, p. 132; see also Blackman, 1998; Vallath, 2000). Technological convergence is not without its critics, though. For instance, Noll (2003) argued that because television sets increasingly incorporate digital components this does not automatically mean that television and computers are merging into a single home appliance.

Economic Convergence

As the European Commission’s (1997, p. ii) *Green Paper* plainly stated, convergence goes beyond technology: “It is about services and new ways of doing business of interacting with society.” Economic convergence, also known as market or industrial convergence, can take place at the user or institutional level. User-oriented economic convergence may or may not involve significant vertical integration activity because it targets products and services, not acquisitions. For instance, some cable operators can offer cable and broadcast programming, video on demand, voice over Internet Protocol, and Internet access in a bundled fashion on the same wired platform.

At the institutional level, economic convergence emphasizes *multiple* but integrated platforms. John Haile, a former *Orlando Sentinel* editor and a media consultant, dubbed this form of convergence “complete convergence” and defined it as “a single business operating with multiple platforms: common management, ads sold across multiple media, and a shared news operation” (Aaron et al., 2002, p. 18). As Killebrew (2005) points out, the cross-promotional value of sharing and presenting information across platforms could bring about greater advertising revenues. But even such convergence advocates as Robert Decherd, chairman and chief executive of Belo Corporation (a leading media group that owns a newspaper–television combination in Dallas), questioned the economic expectations of this type of integration. “There is a belief on the part of some people in the financial community that there are tremendous efficiencies and revenue opportunities associated with any cross-ownership . . . That is just not correct” (Steinberg and Sorkin, 2003, p. C6).

Thus far, institutional economic convergence, which is supposed to produce cross-media mergers, has not fared well in the marketplace, often because of philosophical and management differences. The failures of the AOL Time Warner and AT&T Broadband mergers are two frequently mentioned examples. Mueller (1999) contends that most of the mergers and acquisitions after the Telecommunications Act of 1996 have fallen within

the horizontal integration category—which involves the acquisition of companies or units that operate at the *same* level of production as the acquiring company (see also Dennis, 2003). Chan-Olmsted (1998) reported that despite a 200 percent increase in the number of transactions in the radio, television, cable, and telephone business between 1991 and 1996, the primary merger and acquisition strategy remained intra-industry.

Regulatory Convergence

There is an important distinction between full and partial regulatory convergence. Full regulatory convergence “refers to the confluence of previously separate industry-based laws and regulations into a single legal and regulatory framework” (Garcia-Murillo and MacInnes, 2003, p. 58). On the other hand, partial regulatory convergence is more limited in scope and involves deregulatory actions that allow media organizations to engage into economic or technological convergence. For instance, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the FCC’s revised ownership rules have the potential to generate cross-media services for consumers and create inter-industry alliances among media companies (Labaton, 2003; Steinberg and Sorokin, 2003).

Pool (1983) was primarily concerned with the question of full regulatory convergence and its First Amendment implications: which of the three main regulatory models—print, broadcast, and common carrier—would govern these media once they have converged (see also Blackman, 1998)? Contrary to Pool’s expectations, full regulatory convergence has never materialized in the United States. None of the regulatory models has prevailed over others in the public policy sphere. Instead, these industries continue to be regulated differently without a unifying structure even when they offer similar services. For instance, McGregor (1994, p. 139) noted that “three competing wireline distribution industries are regulated under much different regimes: local exchange carriers as common carriers, cable systems under a complicated three-way jurisdictional scheme, and SMATV systems as largely unregulated.”

Convergence Effects

Some studies have investigated whether media convergence yields direct effects on media use, content diversity, newsroom practices, and curriculum structure (see Figure 1). In recent years, a growing number of convergence-type products and services, such as TV/PC combos, home media centers, voice over Internet Protocol, multi-function cell phones, and streaming technology, have been introduced on the market. But the evidence of convergence effects on individuals’ media use has been mixed: a single device or Web-based application offering multi-media attributes does not necessarily replace or displace traditional media usage. For instance, while 22 percent of Americans reported using Internet radio or video in December 2004, the same survey also indicated that 82 percent of the respondents plan to continue to listen to over-the-air radio in the future as much as they do now (Rose and Lenski, 2005). In the Lin (2004) study, respondents who expressed greater interest in streaming were also more likely to consider newspaper and radio content substitution (but not television content substitution), to watch less television, and to spend less time on magazines (but not on newspapers). Kayany and Yelsma (2000, p. 224) concluded that “time displacement effects are not uniform but different by medium and by communication activity.”

At the corporate level, a few studies have assessed the impact of newspaper–television cross-ownership on local news coverage bias, quality, and output. For instance, Pritchard (2002) analyzed whether 10 cross-owned newspaper–television combinations displayed a consistent slant in their news coverage in favor of a particular presidential candidate during the 2000 election. In five combinations, including Tampa, the overall slant of newspaper coverage was significantly different from that of television coverage. While most of the coverage of Media General’s WFLA-TV was coded neutral, coverage of *The Tampa Tribune* was deemed pro-Bush. Another FCC report found that affiliated television stations that own daily newspapers aired more local news and public affairs programs and received more awards than those without such newspaper ownership (Spavins et al., 2002; see also Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2003).

Little research has examined how convergent news operations, such as those at the News Center in Tampa, have affected newsroom practices, roles, and culture. Zavoina and Reichert (2000) reported that photo editors working for the printed version of a daily newspaper handled photographic content differently from their Web director counterparts working for the online version of the same newspaper. Killebrew (2003, p. 43) contends that “Reporters, editors and the supervisors charged with making convergence or ‘new media’ journalism a reality are finding a great deal of dissonance in the workplace today.” Although he does not present specific empirical evidence, he hypothesizes that convergence will disrupt news operations due to differences in cultures and decision-making procedures. This present qualitative study will focus on media convergence at that corporate level.

At the educational level, a growing number of journalism schools have modified their curricula to adapt to trends in media convergence (see South and Nicholson, 2002). These schools believe that students must be able to present news across different platforms—newspaper, television, and the Web. Duhé and Tanner (2003, p. 8) found that 72 percent of their surveyed school administrators “believe convergence is the future of mass communications.” Another recent study of journalism and mass communication school administrators revealed that nearly 85 percent reported that their curriculum emphasizes either cross-media learning or both cross-media and specialization learning (Lowrey et al., 2005). But if a convergence curriculum is to be successful, it is important to determine what new practices, if any, are being implemented in convergent newsrooms. Lowrey et al. (2005) found that perception of industry hiring was the most important predictor of faculty interest in pursuing a convergence curriculum.

The Tampa News Center

As part of the case study, this section briefly reviews the historical, organizational, and strategic accounts published in the trade press about the News Center (e.g., Colón, 2000; Downie and Kaiser, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2001; Gabettas, 2000; Garrison, 2000; Sanders, 2003; Strupp, 2000). Much has been written about the News Center in 2000, but we will make a special effort in this section to synthesize these industry insights according to logical themes. Not only do such documents provide a necessary context to describe the unit of analysis, but they also play a vital role in corroborating data sources from the subsequent in-depth interviews (see Yin, 2003).

Historically, Media General’s News Center has lent itself to becoming a convergent newsroom. In 1975, the FCC (1975) banned common ownership of a broadcast station and

a daily newspaper in the same market, but grandfathered Media General's *Tampa Tribune*/*Tampa Times*/WFLA-TV combination in Tampa (Media General, 2003b). In 1982, the operations of *The Tampa Times* were consolidated into those of *The Tampa Tribune*. In 1994, *The Tampa Tribune* launched Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) as its newspaper's website. At that time, the *Tribune*/TBO.com and WFLA-TV were located in separate downtown buildings. In March 2000, Media General inaugurated the \$40 million News Center to house its three Tampa news properties under the same roof (Strupp, 2000).

Organizationally, the 120,000 square foot, four-story News Center was designed to foster interaction and coordination between the staff members of TBO.com, WFLA-TV, and *The Tampa Tribune* (Garrison, 2000). The first floor (and, by extension, part of the second floor) houses two large WFLA production studios. The second floor provides space to both the WFLA and TBO.com newsrooms. The third floor is home to the *Tribune* newsroom and TBO.com executive offices. The fourth floor houses the WFLA executive offices. A central piece of the building is an atrium, which rises through the second and third floors. Lying in the middle of the atrium on the second floor is the so-called "superdesk"—a circular multimedia assignment desk where editors of the three news organizations work side-by-side (Downie and Kaiser, 2002; Gabettas, 2000; Garrison, 2000). The atrium is often an area bubbling with activity where employees interact and even pass on videotapes.

Strategically, Media General believes "that the best way to ensure the production and delivery of strong local news is to allow companies like ours to practice good journalism across various media platforms" (Media General, 2003c, p. 3; see also Colón, 2000). For this corporation, "Convergence brings together the depth of newspaper coverage, the immediacy of television and the interactivity of the Web" (Media General, 2003c, p. 4; see also Gabettas, 2000). For instance, WFLA can rely on the *Tribune*'s archives and in-depth knowledge of beat reporters, while TBO.com can borrow content from both the newspaper and the television station. Thus, the primary mission of the News Center is to cultivate cooperation and resource sharing in its news-gathering operations (Thelen, 2002), thereby creating a form of "editorial gestalt" in which the convergent newsroom is greater than the sum of its individual parts. By February 2002, about three-fourths of the *Tribune* and WFLA photographers were equipped with both still and video cameras (Stevens, 2002).

While the News Center management team rarely mentions, or even downplays, the financial benefits that could result from this convergence experiment (see Beard, 2003), the potential economic windfall is not ignored. In May 2003, Bryan commented that "When quality improves, circulation and audience share increase, all of which create revenue growth" (Fitzgerald and Moses, 2003, p. 11). The *Media General 2002 Annual Report* (Media General, 2003c) painted a relatively rosy picture of the News Center's financial results in 2002: the daily circulation of *The Tampa Tribune* increased by 5.8 percent from December 2001 to December 2002 and NBC-affiliated WFLA solidified its No. 1 position in the Tampa TV market (13th Designated Market Area (DMA)) with an audience share of 12 percent in November 2002. In 2004, despite losses attributed to heavy hurricane activities in Central Florida, the circulation of *The Tampa Tribune* grew by 0.9 percent for daily editions compared to 2003 and by 1.5 percent for Sunday editions (Media General, 2005). WFLA remained the top-rated television station in the market that year. In a press release, Media General (2003a) also reported that the number of TBO.com page views rose by 11 percent from 2001 to 2002. In 2004, the number of page views increased 10 times during peak storm and hurricane periods, and TBO.com became profitable for the

first time in its short history (Media General, 2005). But it is not entirely clear whether the convergence itself is responsible for these positive results and whether it has led to significant revenue growth. According to Media General, the Tampa integration only produced an additional \$6.4 million in revenue in 2001, and cross-media sales rose by a mere 2 percent during the same year (Beard, 2003). Gil Thelen, publisher and president of *The Tampa Tribune*, admitted that “commission-sensitive sales teams have had trouble finding ways to co-operate” (Beard, 2003, p. 28). Still, he believed that “the editorial benefits of convergence will translate into greater financial ones over time” (2003, p. 28).

Not surprisingly, the Tampa venture has its share of critics who have voiced concerns that a convergent newsroom would damage the editorial independence of news operations, reduce the amount of original content, and augment employee workloads without proper compensation. Despite common ownership of the three news outlets, the News Center has repeatedly pledged to retain its journalistic independence (see Gabettas, 2000; Thelen, 2002). In practice, however, it is not always immune from subtle or not-so-subtle editorial interference. For instance, *Tribune* television reporter Walt Belcher acknowledged being asked not to cover several WFLA-related stories (see Strupp, 2000). Critics also fear that the unification of the three news operations will limit the amount and type of local news stories (Gabettas, 2000; Strupp, 2000). *The Washington Post* executive editor Leonard Downie and associate editor Robert Kaiser (2002) have argued that much of the News Center’s news sharing is cross-promotional in nature and consists of repurposed stories with little original content. Rival *St. Petersburg Times*’ managing editor Neil Brown has contended that a convergent newsroom could dilute content and adversely affect how the news is being covered. Thelen has acknowledged that “the Tampa News Center still housed three different and often conflicting news cultures” (Downie and Kaiser, 2002, p. 55). He wryly added: “Convergence is a contact sport that is shaped one staff collision at a time” (Gabettas, 2000, p. 28). Along with issues of journalistic integrity and quality, there has been concern about fair compensation and working conditions (Sanders, 2003; Strupp, 2000). Economies of scale in a convergent newsroom could easily invite management to demand more from fewer employees. Thus far, some of these fears have not materialized. In fact, total employment has remained stable between March 2000 and June 2005. In June 2005, staffing authorizations were 15 journalists at TBO.com, 100 at WFLA, and 300 at the *Tribune* (G. Thelen, personal communication, June 21, 2005).

Methodology

Case study research refers to “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). As such, it is best used to understand complex social and organizational issues. In this study, we focused on a single news-producing organization as an *intrinsic* case study—also our unit of analysis—to explore and to gain insight into news media convergence. Methodologically, case study research is inherently qualitative because it is bounded to understanding a specific case rather than seeking generalization beyond that case (see Stake, 2000). In addition, it often relies on multiple qualitative data sources, such as documentation, archival records, interviews, and direct observations, to provide corroborating evidence on a phenomenon (Yin, 2003).

In this study, we used a combination of documents and in-depth interviews to address our three research questions. In-depth or intensive interviews have been called "one of the most powerful methods" in qualitative research because they allow investigators to "step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). Participants are able to tell their stories and discuss their involvement in detail. In-depth interviews will enable us to better understand the meaning of media convergence, the changes in the newsroom culture, and the necessary job skills at the News Center.

Selection of Respondents and Data Collection

Prior to conducting the in-depth interviews, we completed a pilot field study, also known as briefing interviews, to discover the organization's goals, identify the types of personnel who would be potential respondents, construct the open-ended questionnaire, and determine the interview schedule (see Lindlof and Taylor, 2002; Wengraf, 2001; Yin, 2003). This preliminary field visit took place on 6 June 2003. It included observation of facilities and attendance at several daily staff meetings of the three different News Center units. The authors also participated in a lengthy overview panel discussion held with six news, circulation, and advertising staff members who were presently involved in day-to-day convergence activities. The panel discussion was audiotaped for later review in preparation of the in-depth interviews.

Following the pilot field study, we first developed a short open-ended questionnaire for the in-depth interviews. These questions, which are available from the authors, dealt with the meaning of media convergence (e.g., "How would you define media convergence?"); changes in newsroom practices and culture (e.g., "What benefits have you experienced since the newspaper, television, and on-line operations were moved under the same roof?"); and recommended job skills in a convergent newsroom and implications for the journalism curriculum (e.g., "What do students need to succeed in such a convergence environment?"). These questions were unstructured to allow probing flexibility and encourage a thick narrative description.

We then purposefully selected one dozen individuals with different specialized roles in the newsroom (see Wengraf, 2001). There is no firm rule on a recommended sample size, but McCracken (1988) indicates that recruiting eight respondents is generally sufficient for many in-depth interview projects. Our respondents were selected based on their contributions to the news process and their involvement in news convergence. To further diversify the sample, we also sought respondents in different types of news decision-making roles as well as those in news content development and news production roles. For balance of perspective, we chose respondents from each of the three news organizations in the News Center. The final 12 respondents included: the News Archives and Research Center manager; the Tampa Bay Online news team manager; the Tampa Bay Online sports and weather team manager; the *Tampa Tribune* business and real estate reporter; the *Tampa Tribune* news photography team leader; the *Tampa Tribune* senior editor of photography and convergence technology director; the *Tampa Tribune* senior editor of multimedia; the *Tampa Tribune* senior features editor; the WFLA 5:30 newscast producer; the WFLA assignments manager; the WFLA motion graphics artist/designer/ animator; and the WFLA news director. A more detailed profile is available from the authors.

We conducted the in-depth interviews on June 19 and 20, 2003. All interviews but one took place on site in the WFLA and *Tampa Tribune* newsrooms, the News Research Center, or News Center conference rooms. Because one respondent, a key news manager, was on vacation at the time of the other interviews, that single interview was conducted by telephone, when he became available, on July 2, 2003. Each interview averaged 45 minutes and was audiotaped with the expressed permission of the respondent (see Berg, 2001).

Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by two supervised and experienced typists using a professional transcription recorder (see Berg, 2001; McCracken, 1988). Transcriptions were manually reviewed by the authors using procedures recommended by McCracken (1988) and Yin (2003). McCracken suggests five stages to analyze in-depth interview content, each representing a higher level of generality to identify news convergence themes and theses. These stages include observation of a useful utterance, development of expanded observations, examination of interconnection of observed comments, collective scrutiny of observations for patterns and themes, and review and analysis of the themes across all interviews for development of theses (McCracken, 1988).

Findings

Research Question 1: Meaning of Media Convergence

The interviewed News Center journalists viewed media convergence in terms of their experience over the past three years. The single recurring theme was resources. Regardless of whether the journalist was part of the newspaper, television station, or online staffs, the dominant perception focused on the availability of combined and additional resources in terms of people, equipment, and ideas. For instance, the multimedia desk manager talked at length about the additional resources created through convergence:

Over time, one of the things that I've seen was that the best use for convergence for us . . . has been the sharing of resources. We still have reporters writing stories for print, going on air for broadcast, writing and doing things in print and broadcast through the Web. But . . . the best way for us to converge is through resource-sharing. Making sure reporters talk to each other, how do they feel, making sure that they create these bonds that have us, as a News Center, to get the information out to our users, viewers, or readers.

The assignments manager for WFLA-TV, responsible for selecting reporters, photographers, and other television news resources used to cover stories on any given day, offered this example of shared resources:

If we run out of photographers to respond to a story, they [the *Tribune*] may have a photographer at a story that we wouldn't have covered otherwise. Now we're at a position where *The Tampa Tribune* photographers are also shooting video for us, so a lot of times we're able to shoot video of assignments that we're not able to get just because we're out of people. The same goes for them.

Discussion of resources by respondents went well beyond people. The shared new building housing the News Center was mentioned often. There is less duplication of facilities with the new model. A *Tribune* business section reporter who specializes in real estate coverage spoke about the importance of shared building and facilities:

I think that of the few things that say convergence, number one is the building, how it's set up. The facility says a lot about convergence. It's still a treat to bring people into this building for the first time and point out, "This is the only place in the country where you're going to see a TV station and a print newsroom in the same building."

Respondents also cited the shared daily news story budgets (i.e., the day's stories that are being developed for publication). With a database developed internally—BudgetBank—editors and other gatekeepers at all three platforms now know what is going to happen and what stories will be covered at any time. This information is taken to daily news meetings and discussed to maximize the use of reporters, photographers, and others in the field. Shared reporters and photographers have increased the breadth and, perhaps, depth of coverage of the three news organizations. Journalists discussed a perceived growth in sharing story ideas and story tips, a process facilitated by BudgetBank.

The WFLA-TV news director said that tracking of convergence "acts" by the News Center was also revealing, noting hundreds of such acts each month, many involving shared resources:

We chart something like 300 different acts of convergence per month. Most of them we had some level of cooperation that probably wasn't even visible to the home viewer. Sometimes the levels of cooperation are much more explicit like in the Super Bowl; we worked with each other hand in hand. The TV reporters were frequently assisted by newspaper reporters in getting the coverage on the air. In the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in September, we aired a series of nearly two dozen stories in concert.

The news research center has become an icon of resource sharing. Previously used and funded exclusively by the *Tribune*, the research center now serves journalists working for all platforms. Respondents also often mentioned increased availability of new equipment such as desktop and portable computers, software, telephones and telephone systems, and cameras. The News Center also shares a single cellular telephone service arrangement. The single provider situation, which results in considerable savings across all three platforms, provides similar services and equipment to all journalists to work on their assignments.

Convergence was rarely discussed in terms of distribution of content involving a single delivery platform or cross-promotional activity. When it was, comments were limited to shared or loaned journalists who prepared content for another platform. For example, newspaper reporters often make themselves available for television news "talkbacks," where they discuss a story they have covered and are often interviewed by television reporters. Some newspaper journalists function even more like television reporters and prepare reports for air.

Other themes in defining convergence included enhanced communication within the newsroom, a changing understanding of news competition and the market served, and the process of covering and reporting stories, especially breaking news. These thoughts, however, were secondary in almost all cases.

Research Question 2: Changes in Newsroom Practices and Culture

Respondents often echoed themes uncovered in discussing their definitions of convergence when they were asked about how convergence has impacted on their work. The jobs and responsibilities have changed because convergence has brought additional new resources and duties. At the core, in many ways, however, their tasks are much the same as they have always been.

The multimedia desk manager saw the change involving jobs and roles as a gradual process:

What we have determined over time is that convergence sort of changed for us. Initially, the convergence was going to be making sure that we complemented all coverage with another platform. You'll see a lot of broadcast reporters writing stories for print, a lot of print reporters going on air. In fact, TBO and Web producers are doing both, going on air and writing stories for the newspaper.

In some cases, respondents noted that their positions are now more demanding because there is more to do. Television reporters, for example, are given the opportunity to write for the newspaper and vice versa. Print and broadcast photographers are asked to shoot images for both platforms. These demanding situations have left some individuals without sufficient time to do everything, some respondents noted. At least one journalist wondered aloud if managers realized the amount of time and effort required writing across platforms. The manager of the news research center was well aware of the additional workload in her department:

A lot more work . . . I would say in terms of me personally as a manager, it's juggling the balls. It's been a real culture shock for the library staff . . . When I first got here, there were people who only took care of the photo archives, people who only took care of the text archives, and those people never did research. We have a really talented group of people in here that just weren't being utilized. So there were changes that I made, in terms of if you are going to enhance text for the digital archive, why not do the photos at the same time, the same person, that way you know how to work the photo database . . . We're not going to get a lot more people, so let's diversify the job duties here and it's working so much better now.

Jobs have changed, of course, for those who work across the three platforms. One interesting observation by several respondents centered on increased collegiality and the willingness to work across platforms in covering both major news stories and routine news on a daily basis. While it might be expected by everyone in the News Center for major stories such as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' Super Bowl championship in early 2003, jobs and responsibilities have also been affected by cross-platform approaches to daily news coverage. There is now a routine, many respondents observed, to meeting with, seeing, talking to, and interacting in other ways with journalists from platforms other than the one within which an individual works. More than one individual attributed this new sense of community to the new facility, its design, and the fact that all news platforms are located in a two-floor area opened up with few walls and the common atrium. This has led to a team approach and a declining sense of internal competition and conflict over approaches and resources.

The *Tribune* senior editor of multimedia explained, using shared reporting sources as an example:

I think one of the things that initially is always difficult for reporters is to open their notebooks, open up their source list to another reporter. I think that was one of the hurdles that initially we had to get over because, as a reporter myself, we used to compete against reporters at WFLA. It was just the idea of sharing the information that I worked so hard to gather, to open it up and share it with another reporter . . . But I think that our environment—we've been doing it for three years, which is not a long time, but the strides that we've made as far as sharing resources and information—have come a long way. It's a second nature now.

Gatekeepers have certainly felt the impact of convergence. Respondents sensed an increase in the number of choices about coverage. These decisions involve the number of stories covered in a given day, the number of reporters and photographers involved, and even the basic range of stories covered. It is the view of several respondents that convergence has increased this form of work. Furthermore, at least one television news producer observed that her position has changed because there are more ideas to share and consider over the course of any news cycle.

The multimedia environment has also brought change to many newsroom jobs. Interviewed journalists said that they think more about multimedia at several levels. Multimedia approaches to coverage of a given news story may be first on this list. Multimedia, especially for the online platform, is at the heart of storytelling and the coverage a story receives. Journalists stated that they think differently about how to cover a story and how to report it and this perception is common across all platforms.

The news team leader for TBO, a veteran local government reporter for the *Tribune* prior to taking his current position three years ago, made this point:

It doesn't make me think differently about journalism. It makes me think differently about presentation and opportunity. I brought to TBO my value system and my journalism experience as a print reporter and I still adhere to that as an online journalist because I don't know any other way. What I look at is the opportunity to be more creative. I look at it as layering . . . [like] those old overhead projectors: they would take the first one and there's a map and then they do an overlay. Well, that's how you build a story online. It is one overlay after another as you fill in that puzzle.

In addition to the multimedia thinking about news coverage, some journalists felt that jobs have changed because they have been required to learn about the other platforms with which they work on a regular basis. One print journalist remarked about the need to learn television jargon just to be able to communicate with his WFLA colleagues:

[L]earning more about the other platforms. Learning what they are looking for, what their wants and desires are, essentially just understanding how they talk their language. You know, the language they use . . . So this is not just an understanding across . . . but also understanding their language.

Respondents also noted that convergence has required some jobs in some departments to be realigned. This is especially true in central departments serving all platforms such as the news research center. New positions and departments that did not

exist prior to the creation of the News Center are an obvious example of significant job changes. The multimedia desk, which serves all platforms, has been staffed with individuals brought from previous positions at one of the three platforms, clearly creating a substantially different work situation. This has led to a sense of evolution for new departments or jobs impacted by convergence. Respondents noted that positions have matured as needs have forced refinement or modification of original job descriptions. They also observed that job changes were most intense during the first year of the convergence of newsrooms and were less significant in the past two years. There was little, if any, discussion by respondents concerning gain or loss of jobs during the past three years.

Research Question 3: Skills Needed in a Convergent Newsroom

Interviews pointed to five themes of interest to journalism and mass communication educators. First, respondents felt that students must be very good at one task or skill, but able to do others as well. Second, they emphasized writing and reporting as fundamental elements for any platform. Third, they identified the need for adaptability and collegiality across platforms. Fourth, News Center journalists highlighted a need for students to be good communicators regardless of platform. Finally, they stated that students must obtain experience working in a converged newsroom.

The news team manager for TBO elaborated on the need for new journalists working in a converged newsroom to be strong in at least one skill and able to handle others as well:

I think that whatever concentration they want, become really good at it. And focus your attention there and become a valuable employee to the market, but at the same time understand your partners and what their wants and needs are and how they go about collecting information and presenting information. I know people that are very good online that are able to do video and broadcast, but they can't write worth a lick. And I've seen writers who are tremendous and either don't feel comfortable in front of TV or don't know anything about the Web.

While having a specialization is important, other respondents noted concern for basics, such as reporting and information gathering. Fundamentals, respondents agreed, remain important. For them, journalism is a business of information gathering and distribution. The weather/sports team leader at TBO was typical of individuals who emphasized the need to gather news:

I think they should still be reporters, first and foremost. Newsgathering should be the most important thing; still be a reporter. It is fine to know all the bells and whistles in video and audio and Flash and all that. Those skills are useful in what you're doing, but I think being able to write a tight lead [is important].

Receptivity to new technologies and convergence is important for graduates, a *Tribune* business reporter stated:

The biggest skill is you need to be open to it . . . People need to be receptive to the environment. I don't think people who come and say, "I'm going to be a print reporter and that's all I'm going to do" are going to get very far . . . That works two ways. On the first hand, a student starting out in journalism needs to realize that the image of what a

journalist does has changed, but at the same time it's incumbent on the media organizations to let them know.

Beyond specialization in a skill and information gathering, respondents noted that these skills and tools will not go far without the ability to communicate at several different levels. Communication within the newsroom is necessary, but general ability to communicate a message to a print, broadcast, and online audience is essential as well. Good communication basics and abilities should remain key attributes for new graduates, the director of *Tribune* news photography argued:

[Graduating students] need to be good communicators as well. They need to be able to communicate with a lot of different types of people. And if you are a journalist of any sort, you should have those skills as well coming in—being able to communicate with a lot of different types of people.

Respondents also emphasized the need for graduates to be adaptable across platforms and offer significant collegiality with newsroom co-workers across platforms. This includes understanding the work of others and willingness to contribute when possible. While this is partly personality driven and cannot easily be taught in a classroom, it remains important. Perhaps another important theme, experience working in a converged newsroom, can offer development in the area of collegiality and reduction of platform-related loyalties. Respondents repeatedly mentioned the value of internships and summer work in converged newsrooms before graduation.

Discussion and Conclusions

Summary

Meaning of media convergence. Shared resources benefit all interviewed journalists in the Media General News Center in Tampa, but the real winner seems to be the television news operation. It benefits from the depth of resources of the newspaper that did not exist when the operations were housed in separate locations and did not work together. The business or financial sides of the platforms have yet to completely merge under convergence, although there is more effort to share costs across platforms. There are still, for example, *Tribune* employees, not News Center employees, paid by the *Tribune* budget, not by a News Center budget. This problem of financial integration will likely be corrected as employee and other expenses for operating and maintaining the news research center, for example, are increasingly shared by all three units. There is also a desire to continue growth of sharing through a single, common content writing, editing, and production computer system, which is the primary function of BudgetBank. Movement in this direction is apparent and will continue during the next several years. In fact, as of June 2005, the News Center was beta testing CCI NewsGate, an integrated editorial management solution that would support the entire news process (G. Thelen, personal communication, June 21, 2005).

Changes in newsroom practices and culture. Job and role changes were expected given the scope and depth of the News Center operation. Most changes related to additional duties or responsibilities beyond those originally stipulated in a single-platform environment. The fact that journalists saw their core work as generally unchanged is

somewhat surprising, however. This outcome may be explained by the fact that convergence has brought additional efficiency through shared resources that allow the same number of people to get more done in a given time period such as a news day. Not only has media convergence at the News Center fostered a greater sense of community among the different units, but it has also brought to the forefront the importance of versatility in news-gathering operations. Respondents are now thinking about their job duties at different levels. Most of them view these changes as an evolutionary trend rather than a complete overhaul of the existing newsroom culture.

Recommended job skills. Convergence, as anyone in education knows, has implications for the next generation of journalists. The impact of convergence will cut at the heart of organizational charts, budgets, and even personnel. The challenge for faculty and school administrators will be to decide how to adapt their curricula to the new convergence expectations while taking into account the fluctuating economics of higher education. Given the continuous importance of the journalism education fundamentals, which was confirmed in this study (see also Brill, 1997; Zoch and Collins, 2003), adjusting existing curricula rather than designing new ones could be the preferred route of many administrators. Our respondents indicated that while future journalism graduates must become increasingly versatile and knowledgeable about multimedia, good communication, reporting, and writing skills remain the bedrock of the news profession. Based on these interviews, those students who plan to work in a convergent newsroom would be well inspired to take courses in cognate television and visual communication fields.

Theoretical implications. On a more theoretical level, how do these findings relate to the model of media convergence presented in Figure 1? The News Center could be described as the confluent product of regulatory, economic, and technical convergence. First, partial regulatory convergence in the form of FCC grandfathering allowed the existence of *The Tampa Tribune*–WFLA combination. Then, the creation of the News Center in 2000 led Media General to anticipate economic convergence derivatives, such as cross-media advertising sales. However, our examination of trade press articles and our in-depth interviews suggest that these expected economic advantages have not yet reached their full potential. Instead, the results reveal a gradual emphasis on organizational and technical convergence, whereby employees of the three units cooperate more frequently, share resources and equipment, and use uniform database systems.

Future Research

The findings of this qualitative inquiry prove to be heuristic and suggest multiple avenues for subsequent quantitative research. Obviously, we cannot generalize the responses of 12 individuals to an entire news operation or other convergent newsrooms; nor is generalization an actual goal of in-depth interview methodology. But it is also clear that these qualitative insights lend themselves to a follow-up quantitative phase that would benefit from a larger sample. One must recognize, however, that a self-administered survey inside a large newsroom has its own methodological hurdles. Among other things, distribution of questionnaires generally requires permission from management to secure the highest possible response return. Prospective employee respondents,

on the other hand, may view the survey instrument with some suspicion if the company endorses it and may not answer questions as truthfully as expected.

These challenges notwithstanding, it would be valuable to administer a survey to employees in one or more convergent newsrooms to determine the perceived importance of traditional and convergence job skills. Zoch and Collins (2003) recently found that respondents from media organizations involved in cross-platform initiatives favored traditional journalistic values (e.g., understanding of ethical issues, writing skills) over visual communication knowledge (e.g., graphic and Web design) for new reporters. Brill's (1997) survey of online journalists reported similar results. More research is needed to determine whether these findings represent an actual pattern among news managers and whether they hold true in converged newspaper–television operations.

Future research could also focus on the relationship between changing job responsibilities in convergent newsroom and job satisfaction. This present study has pointed out that some News Center journalists have voiced concern about the increasing workload that a convergent newsroom created. To what extent these additional duties could affect and further reduce the satisfaction level of journalists is an open question that warrants further study. In their latest survey, Weaver et al. (2003) found that only 33 percent of US daily newspaper journalists reported to be “very satisfied” with their jobs in 2002, up by 22 percent from 1992, but still 32 percent down from 1971. The literature on job satisfaction in mass communication industries is vast, but no study has examined the impact of convergent news operations on job satisfaction. Daniels and Hollifield (2002) analyzed how organizational changes at CNN Headline News affected newsroom personnel and found that the staff responded negatively to these changes. They concluded that “[t]he degree to which change affects morale and drives talented professionals from news organizations and the industry should be a question of serious concern to media scholars and professionals” (Daniels and Hollifield, 2002, p. 676). These are some of the questions and challenges that await convergence researchers in the years ahead.

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NOTE

1. In June 2004, the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit affirmed in part and remanded in part the FCC's revised ownership rules (*Prometheus Radio Project v. F.C.C.*, 2004). It ruled that the new cross-ownership rules, including the newspaper–broadcast combination rule, were not unconstitutional *per se*, but also held that cross-media limits were insufficiently justified. Therefore, the court instructed the Commission to rewrite the rules. In January 2005, the US Department of Justice declined to seek review of the case before the US Supreme Court. But broadcast groups, such as Fox, NBC Universal, and Viacom, petitioned the High Court for review of the appellate decision. In June 2005, the US Supreme Court denied these petitions. The old cross-ownership rules remain in effect while the FCC reevaluates and rewrites the rules based on the Third Circuit's ruling.

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