Values, value, and impact

'Good journalism, better societies' in practice

A handbook for journalists and media developers
May 2025

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IMS (International Media Support) is a non-profit organisation supporting local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition. We push for quality journalism, challenge repressive laws, and keep media workers of all genders safe so they can do their jobs. Peaceful, stable societies based on democratic values rely on ethical and critical journalism that aims to include, not divide.
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Summary

Journalism is no longer the exclusive domain of professionals working for specific institutions. Public interest journalism is increasingly defined by the ways in which it is practiced, the qualities of stories produced, and the impact they have rather than by the institutions and individuals telling these stories.

Ethical standards and editorial values continue to distinguish journalism from other forms of information and storytelling, while the aim of having a beneficial impact on society sets public interest journalism apart from other forms of content creation. This is what IMS means by its mantra 'good journalism, better societies'. In the parts of the world where IMS works, public interest journalism has always been a tough and a largely unviable venture, but there is a tradition, dating back more than a century, of entrepreneurial journalism committed to social justice.

If it is to survive and thrive, public interest journalism should also benefit – create value for – people with the money, attention, data, time, commitment, ideas, solidarity, and other resources needed to sustain it: audiences, media outlets – their owners, journalists, advertisers investors and donors – as well as the societies they belong to and serve.

To balance the continuous, competing, and often conflicting interests of these various stakeholders, journalists need a clear sense of where they are heading and how they want to get there. This handbook presents a methodology for editorial teams – editors and journalists working together with their managerial, marketing, technological, and operational colleagues – to design and implement bespoke editorial strategies for producing and disseminating public interest journalism that:

- Embodies a media outlet's ethical principles and editorial values.
- Has the impact the team strives for.
- Creates value for those with the resources to sustain their public interest journalism.

This approach endeavours to harmonise journalism and business models by treating public interest journalism as a mission-driven media outlet's main asset.

Foreword

A publisher's view

I have experienced the value that quality journalism brings to society and its positive impact on individuals and communities.

This core tenet drove the mission, editorial strategy, and business model of the popular independent digital magazine I founded and published in autocratic Belarus. It was shared by our editorial team and communicated to our audience through the content we published.

Our editorial values – printed on a poster and proudly displayed in our newsroom – guided our content choices and commercial partnerships. These values were not only the foundation for every action we took as a media outlet; they were also our main asset and the key to our success in gaining readers and business partners. And they proved essential in helping the magazine to survive political and economic repression and exile.

Even though a value-based approach was at the core of our work, implementing it was not always easy. We spent considerable time turning our values into guidelines and processes that every team member – from editors and journalists to project managers and designers – could follow day-to-day.

Measuring and capturing the value our journalism created posed another major challenge. We were steadfast in remaining true to the magazine's mission, values, and editorial independence while entering commercial partnerships. This sometimes led to tough negotiations, so it was important to have our principles in writing. We had to act intuitively, be inventive, and scramble to find relevant examples and best practices across the media sector.

We would have benefited significantly from IMS' *Values, value, and impact* handbook, which offers a holistic methodology and ready-to-use tools designed to assist any mission-driven media outlet. It demonstrates how any media outlet can integrate its value proposition into the editorial and business sides of its operations, effectively bridging them.

Whether you are part of an established media organisation seeking to further articulate and assess its values and impact, or a media start-up team at the beginning of your journey, this handbook will not only save your outlet time and resources but also strengthen its mission, audience, and market stance. Perhaps most importantly, it will spotlight the impact your media is generating in its communities, boosting the spirit of your team and inspiring it to continue promoting the public interest.

Iryna Vidanava,
Co-founder of CityDog magazine, Belarus,
and Business Viability Advisor at IMS.

A media development worker's view

Media development actors advocate for public interest journalism because we believe it helps citizens to claim their rights. However, the independent news organisations and digital media start-ups we work with are always stretched thin, either because they are small and emerging media or they face constant external challenges to their integrity and sustainability.

In the parts of the world where IMS works, journalists and media outlets that strive for ethical, value-driven journalism operate in harsh conditions. They are shunned and attacked by the authorities, adding to the financial pressures created by weak economies and a lack of available resources. Unsurprisingly, they seldom have a chance to plan their journalism strategically.

Values, value, and impact is a tool for media outlets to chart their journey from story idea to the impactful use of news that can improve public participation. Media development agencies can integrate the approach presented in this handbook into our programming, so that media partners with the requisite passion have the funds, time, space, and peace of mind to design and test their strategies while still paying the bills.

Values, value, and impact goes hand in glove with IMS' Impact Framework for Media Projects toolkit. I think of them as the body and the soul of public interest journalism: the Impact Framework's product development approach provides the material to keep the body of the media sector healthy, while *Values, value, and impact* channels the more abstract but principled soul of journalism.

Let us keep this body and soul together to realise our vision of impactful public interest content!

Waqas Naeem,
journalist and media development consultant,
Pakistan

The author's view

Values, value, and impact builds on a tough lesson that five colleagues and I learned after we pooled our savings to launch a current affairs magazine in Namibia in 2004.

For several years, we won awards for our journalism and made a small profit without loans or grants. We knew intuitively why our readers and advertisers valued our brand of public interest journalism. Or so we thought.

When the time came to take our venture to the next level, differences emerged in our understandings of our values and strategic direction, things that we had taken for granted as a disruptive start-up brimming with energy and ideas. Our sweat capital had run dry but we struggled to step off the production treadmill and find the time or headspace to chart a clear way forward. We just kept going, until, eventually, the magazine folded. Lesson learned!

This handbook aims to help other media avoid a similar fate. Few teams working for small media operations will have the time and space to follow the handbook's step-by-step guide from start to finish. If you are a member of such a team, try to use the handbook intuitively: adapt the steps that speak to your specific needs at a particular time and integrate them into existing workflows as much as possible.

Good luck and enjoy the journey.

David Lush,
journalist, publisher and media development consultant,
United Kingdom.

Using the handbook

Values, value, and impact provides practical guidance on how to design and implement bespoke editorial strategies for producing and disseminating public interest journalism that:

- Embodies a media outlet's ethical principles and editorial values.
- Has the impact an outlet strives for.
- Creates value for those with the resources to sustain an outlet's public interest journalism.

Chapter 1 explains the reasons for the handbook and its approach.

Chapter 2 explains the key ingredients of this approach and how these come together in IMS' values, value, and impact framework.

Chapter 3 summarises key shifts in the ethics, values, and practice of journalism due to the seismic changes over recent decades in how journalism is produced and consumed.

Chapter 4 provides a step-by-step guide for media outlets to design and implement a bespoke editorial strategy for producing their own brand of impactful and valuable public interest journalism.

Chapter 5 presents the evidence that informs this approach and how the handbook was collated.

Why editorial strategies?

An editorial strategy focusses on journalism and the role of journalists in achieving a media outlet's goals. This is different to a content strategy, which tends to cover all forms of content, including advertising, with a focus on marketing and an emphasis on data analysis and sales. While an editorial strategy must embrace many aspects of a content strategy, particularly when it comes to journalism's relationship with its audience, this handbook's distinction between the two emphasises the contribution public interest journalism can make to a media outlet's drive for viability. It treats public interest journalism as a media outlet's main asset.

In the past, few newsrooms needed an editorial strategy. Journalists produced stories day-in, day-out, with little consideration for their impact and how they benefitted the people who ultimately paid for these stories to be produced: the audience, advertisers, media outlet's owners, investors, and funders.

Yes, journalists wanted their stories to have an impact and, invariably, this related to vague notions of journalism's role in a democracy: informing and educating the public and being a 'watchdog' over those with power and authority. But this impact was seldom articulated as goals or outcomes that a newsroom's team of journalists would then strive for. Nor did they have much idea of what benefit, if any, their journalism had for the people who ultimately paid the bills.

But as audiences and advertisers have migrated en masse to other platforms, journalists can no longer be so blasé about the impact their stories have and the value they create. The media's panicked response to the apparent collapse of its traditional business model has been to see impact and value in terms of clicks and attention, as this is how Internet search engines and social media algorithms reward content producers, usually at the expense of ethical journalistic standards and editorial values.

This challenges media committed to public interest journalism to play to their strengths; to identify the beneficial value that journalism has for their audiences, advertisers, investors, society, and to practice journalism that creates this value.

Research and a growing body of experience indicates that the benefits these stakeholders expect – in return for their money, attention, data, time, participation, and solidarity – are often determined by the impact they would like media to have; the kind of impact public interest journalism also strives for.

The framework in Chapter 3 pulls together the different ingredients needed to produce public interest journalism that has a beneficial impact and creates value for those key stakeholders who ultimately determine whether journalists can keep producing it. To balance these competing and often conflicting interests, journalists need a clear sense of where they are heading and how they want to get there. They need a strategy that guides and shapes their day-to-day journalism and an outlet's efforts to capture the value this journalism creates.

We need a strategy for the FUTURE

Using the handbook

Pick and choose

We understand that few media can afford the time and space to follow this handbook's strategy design-and-implementation process from start to finish, our suggestion would be to pick and choose sections and steps that speak to specific needs at a particular time. Some of the steps work best when journalists and their marketing colleagues, data analysts and technologists collaborate; this will encourage the teamwork between roles needed to harmonise an outlet's public interest journalism output with its business model. But some of the steps also lend themselves to smaller groups. In places, decision makers may want to take the lead. The steps can be followed by a whole team in a workshop setting, by a few people sitting around a table, or by a single person at their desk.

The guide is intended to fit into existing workflows as easily as possible. Teams might want to work with an experienced facilitator, who can help guide them through the process. IMS and other media development initiatives might be able to assist teams with this.
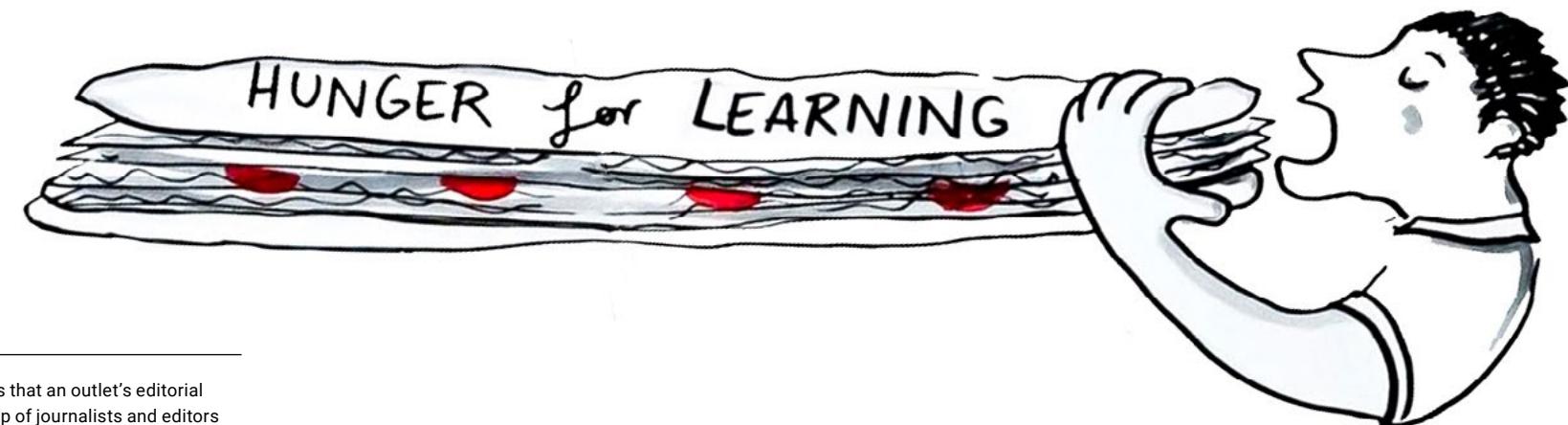
Who the handbook is for

The handbook is aimed at two main audiences:
- The practical guidance (chapters 3 and 4) is primarily for journalists and media leaders as well as their marketing and operational colleagues who form a strategic editorial team.[2]
- The sections that contextualise and explain this guidance are aimed at a wider audience: media development practitioners, policy makers, donors, educators, and researchers as well as journalists and media leaders.
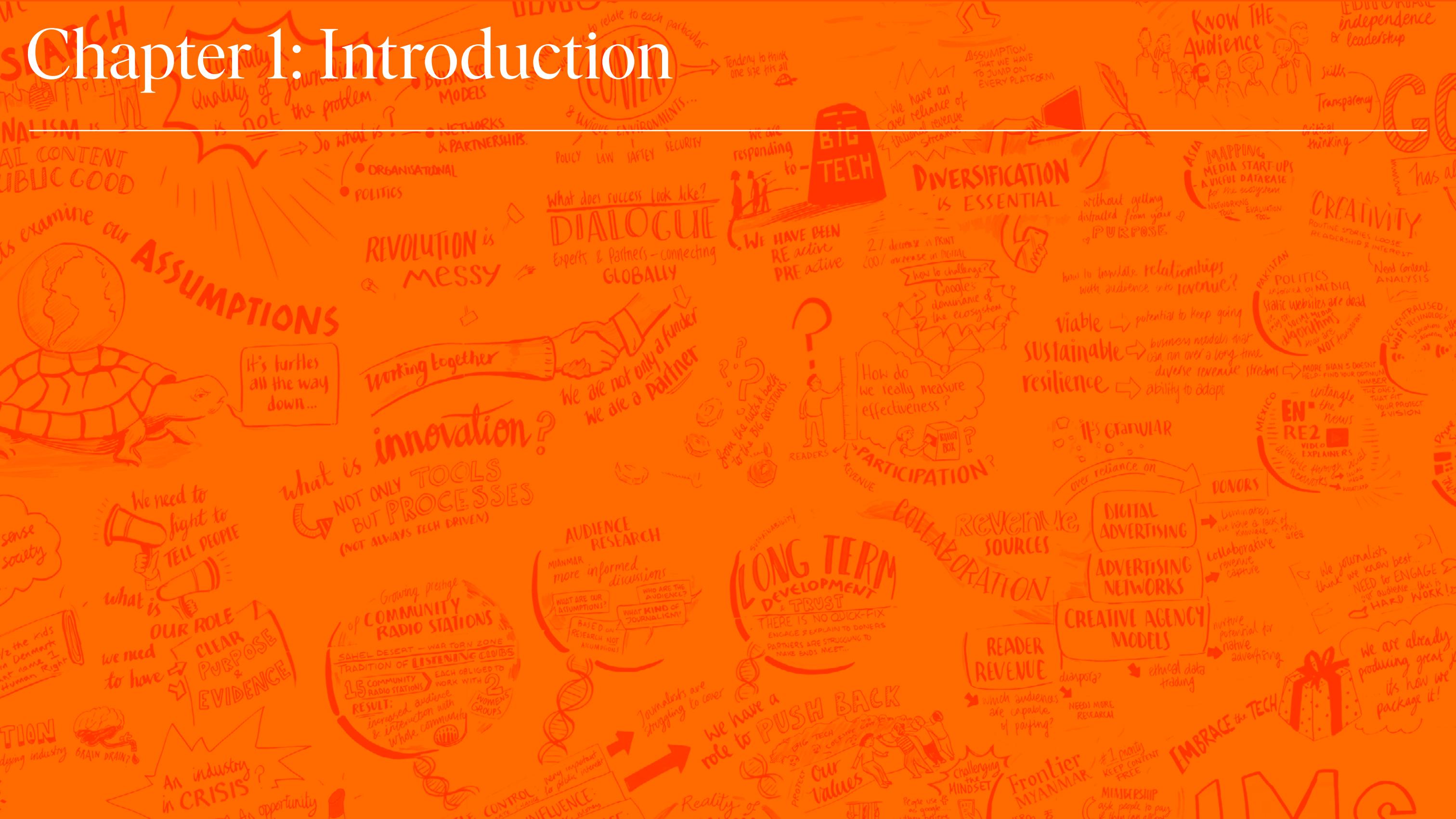
The handbook adopts two distinct styles to distinguish between the following two types of content:
- The sections that contextualise and explain the approach look like this and refer to journalists and other members of editorial teams as 'they', because these sections are written for the wider audience.
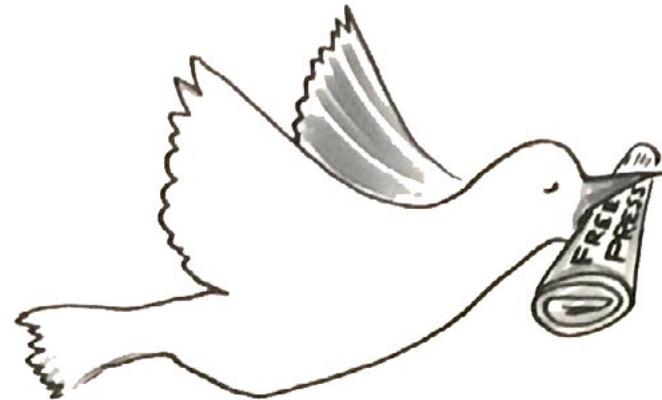
- **THE PRACTICAL SECTIONS** look like this and are written in the second-person plural ('you') to denote that these sections speak directly to members of the editorial teams. These sections include step-by-step guidance on how to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate an editorial strategy, with worksheets and illustrative examples.

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[2] The handbook starts from the premise that public interest journalism can and should contribute to a media outlet's viability, which means that an outlet's editorial and business strategies should reinforce each other. Ideally, an editorial strategy should be designed and implemented by teams made up of journalists and editors working together with managerial, marketing, technological, and operational colleagues.

Chapter 1: Introduction

'Good journalism, better societies' is IMS' mantra. Since its formation in 2001, the organisation has sought to provide journalists and other media content creators with the means to produce journalism that holds those with power to account and allows their audiences – in particular communities who wield less power – to participate in public life and claim their rights.[3] This is in the belief that societies in which citizens have the freedom to express themselves and access reliable, information are ultimately more peaceful, just, equitable and inclusive.

For journalism to play this role, media must also generate the income and operate in ways that allow them to keep producing good journalism that benefits society. That is why IMS' support for story production goes hand-in-hand with its development of media operations, along with its efforts to create safe and enabling environments for media.

But what does 'good journalism, better societies' mean in practice?

Public interest journalism

'Good journalism' is shorthand for public interest journalism. IMS defines this as ethical, fact-based journalism that informs members of the public about issues that shape their lives in ways that:

- serve the public's rather than any political, commercial or factional interest,
- encourage and informs public debate,
- hold those in power to account,
- challenge discriminatory societal norms.[4]

Public interest journalism not only strives to meet certain ethical standards. It also aims to have a beneficial impact for members of society.

How this plays out in day-to-day journalism varies from country to country, and from media outlet to media outlet, depending on the ethical principles journalists and media outlets recognise, the editorial values they believe in and the impact they want their journalism to have.

While ethical standards for journalism are similar the world over, their application is influenced by the norms and beliefs of the society in which journalists and their media outlets operate.

Each media outlet's version of public interest journalism is shaped by its ethical principles, its editorial values and the beneficial impact each outlet wants its journalism to have on the society it serves.

Changing norms

The traditional understanding of journalism's role in relatively stable and prosperous liberal democracies with well-established media is not necessarily applicable in less liberal, less stable and less prosperous and less democratic parts of the world. Furthermore, technological changes over the past 20 to 30 years have transformed the ways in which journalism is produced and consumed.

Journalism today is more focussed on audiences than perhaps ever before. Journalism is no longer the exclusive domain of professionals working for specific institutions. This has resulted in a recalibration of the ethical principles and editorial values that traditionally underpinned public interest journalism.

Journalists are exploring innovative ways of producing public interest journalism that both appeals to audiences and helps pay the bills, while remaining true to their ethical principles and editorial values.

Public interest journalism is now determined by the ways in which it is practiced, the qualities of the stories produced and the impact they have rather than by the institutions and individuals telling those stories.

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[3] IMS (2023). Global Strategy 2024-2028, p.11.
[4] bid, p.29.

Balancing values with value

A media outlet's ability to produce public interest journalism will depend on its journalists having the necessary money, skills and other resources at their disposal. Public interest journalism invariably takes more time and effort than some other forms of journalism, which can make it difficult for media to continue producing such journalism over a long period. Therefore, public interest journalism must also create **value** for those who provide the resources needed to sustain it, notably:

- The outlet's audience.
- Those with a stake in the media outlet: owners, advertisers and journalists.
- The society the outlet ultimately serves.

Each of these stakeholder groups may value journalism differently and their motives for sustaining it with their money, data, attention, time, effort, support and solidarity may vary.

Sustaining public interest journalism is a balancing act between various, sometimes conflicting interests that come together around shared values.

Editorial strategies

This handbook outlines how editorial teams[5] can design and implement strategies for striking this delicate balance in their day-to-day journalism. It is based on a framework for 'good journalism, better societies' that combines the various elements touched on above. This framework provides a basis for producing sustainable public interest journalism.

By monitoring and regularly assessing how well their strategy is progressing, editorial teams can:
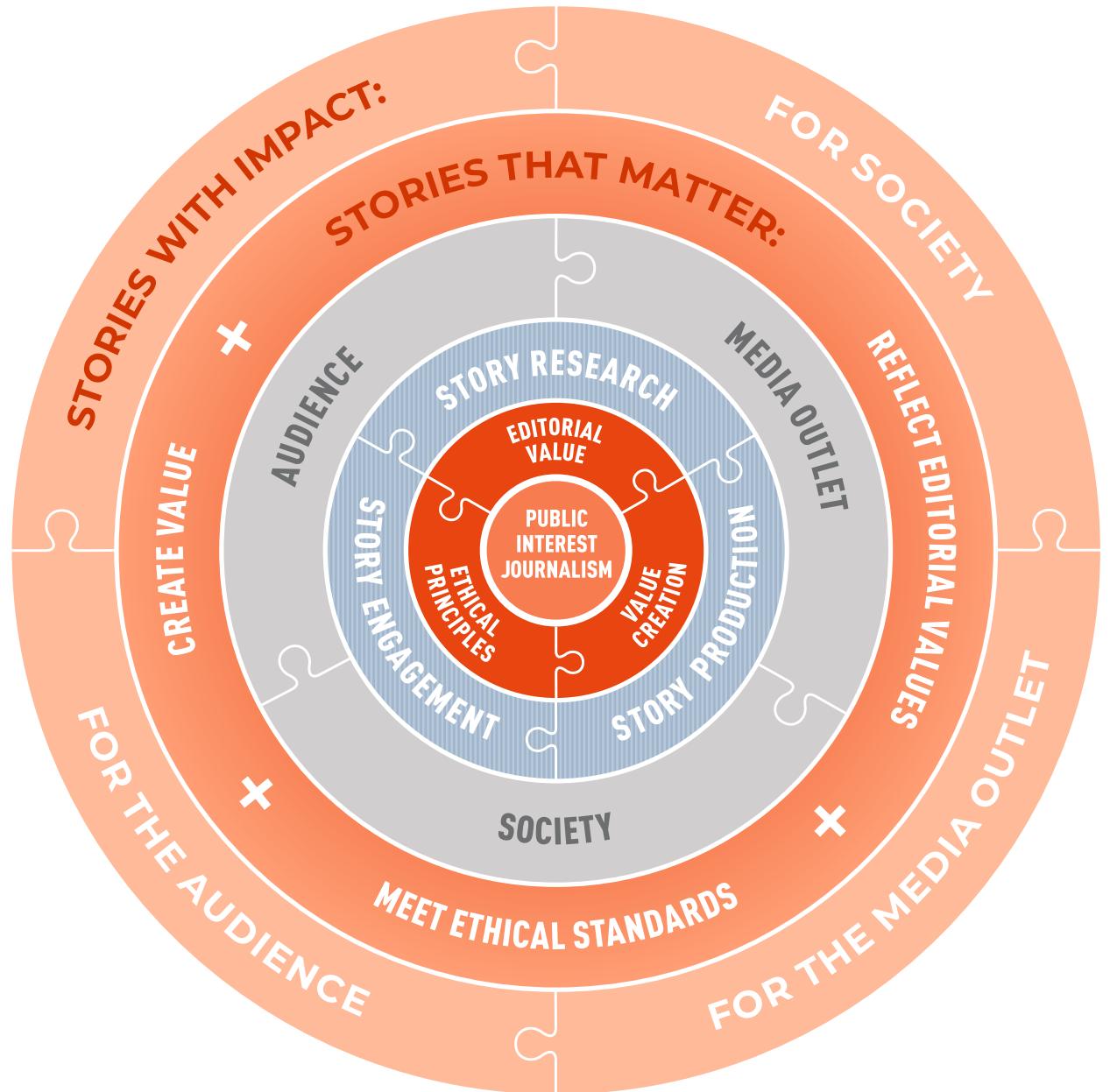
- *Refine the way they practice their public interest journalism*
- *Hold each other accountable in a mutually supportive way*
- *Work towards their desired impact and creating value.*

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[3] Ideally, journalists and editors work with managers, marketing, technological and operational colleagues so that a media outlet's business and revenue models support the implementation of its editorial strategy and vice-versa.

Chapter 2: A framework for 'good journalism, better societies'

Why a framework?

Seismic changes in how journalism is produced, consumed and financed have prompted a lot of introspection and research that re-evaluates both the role and practice of journalism.

Much of this has focussed on Europe and North America, where journalism's once prosperous business model has been turned upside down. In other parts of the world, public interest journalism has always been a tough and a largely unviable venture, but there is also a long tradition dating back more than a century of entrepreneurial journalism committed to social justice. Journalists in Africa, Asia, Eastern and Central Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa have been in the forefront of the digital media start-up revolution, exploring innovative ways to produce journalism that both appeals to audiences and helps pay the bills while remaining true to their ethical principles and editorial values. These pioneers inspired IMS mantra of 'good journalism, better societies'.

The 'good journalism, better societies' framework distils learning from these experiences and wider research. This framework provides a structure for the handbook's step-by-step guide to designing and implementing editorial strategies that help editorial teams make sense of their situation, what they want to achieve with their public interest journalism and how they want to achieve it.

The framework envisages journalists embedding ethical principles and editorial values throughout the editorial process – from research to production, distribution and audience engagement with their stories - in a way that creates value for those best placed to sustain public interest journalism: the audience, the media outlet and the society it serves. This involves producing 'stories that matter'[6]; stories that meet ethical standards, reflect editorial values, have impact and create value for these stakeholders. Because of the value they derive from this journalism and the impact it has, stakeholders are more likely to give their money, time, attention, data, support, goodwill, solidarity and other in-kind contributions that journalists and media outlets can use to sustain their public interest journalism.

It would be difficult to achieve this with every story. Rather, the framework represents an approach that shapes an editorial team's journalism over time, or in a specific project such as an investigation, a new product or a series of stories on a particular theme. This is done by implementing an editorial strategy that editorial teams review and adjust as they go, steering their coverage towards the desired impact and value they want their journalism to have. This gives direction to individual products and projects that can then utilise IMS' Impact Framework for Media Projects.[7]

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[6] Our use of this term is inspired by the journalism described in Deuze, M. and Witschge, T. (2020). Beyond Journalism. p.108-128. Cambridge, Polity.
[7] IMS (2024). Impact Framework for Media Projects Toolkit

Definitions

Ethical principles: What we consider to be right and how we ought to behave. Ethical principles of journalism are usually captured in professional codes that determine how journalism ought to be practiced.

Editorial values: Beliefs that shape how we actually behave. Editorial values shape journalists' day-to-day decisions about which stories are covered and how they are covered. These decisions are often instinctive and may vary from outlet to outlet and journalist to journalist.

Impact: The lasting change that journalism contributes towards, directly and / or indirectly. E.g. coverage of an authority's plans to close a clinic prompts opposition from the public that makes the authority keep the clinic open.

Value: A measure of the worth and importance we place on a journalistic product or service, usually based on the benefit we derive from it. Value is often in our minds, based on how we think we can benefit. E.g. We listen to a podcast because it covers a topic that helps us do our work or because it gives us a sense of belonging to a particular community of people.

Chapter 2: A framework for 'good journalism, better societies'

Practicing ethical principles and editorial values

Ethical principles determine what we consider to be right and how we ought to behave, while our values shape what we think is important and how we actually behave. In journalism, ethical principles and editorial values combine to shape how journalism is practiced.
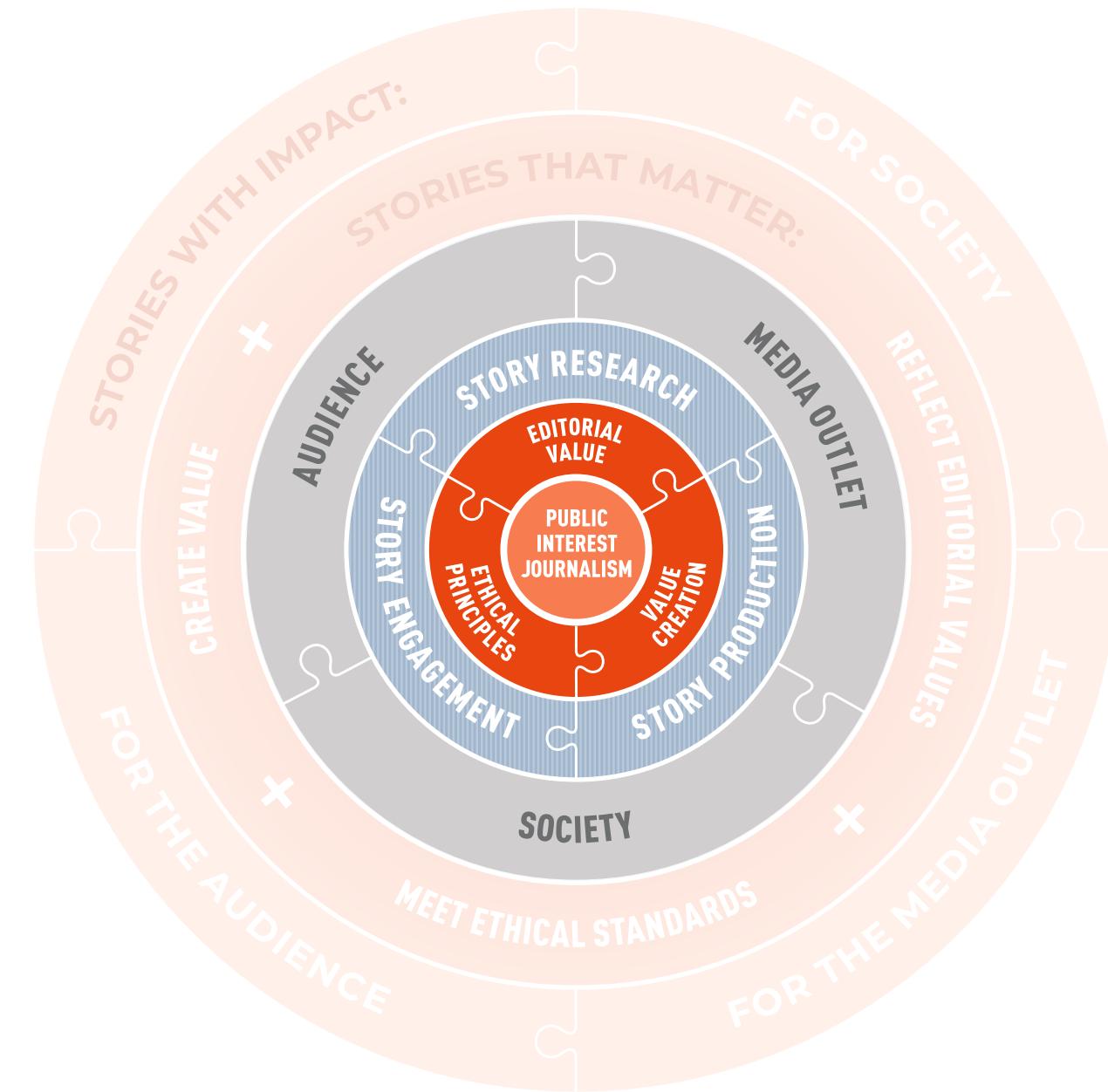
Journalists' ethical principles are usually enshrined in a code of ethics or guidelines overseen by a 'self-regulatory mechanism'; a body or individual with some independence who can receive complaints from the public, assess these in terms of the relevant ethical standards and take some form of corrective action if necessary. These arbiters might be recognised by all or part of a media sector, such as a media council or by an individual media outlet, such as a readers' editor or in-house ombudsperson. But they are usually a backstop with little direct influence over how journalism is practiced day-to-day.

Routine journalism practice – how stories are selected and edited, who journalists chose to interview, the angles we take in our stories, how stories are filmed, photographed, illustrated, recorded, and so on – tends to be shaped more by a media outlet's editorial values, which are usually a pragmatic mixture of professional ethics and the values held by the outlet's owners, its journalists and the communities in which they live and work.

Ideally ethical standards and editorial values reinforce each other. But political, commercial or social pressures – as well as the personal beliefs and interests of shareholders, editors, and journalists – can override ethical standards. This often-subtle undermining of editorial values and ethical standards can cause audiences and the wider public to grow disillusioned with a media outlet's coverage and seek alternatives. Media outlets can avoid this by having a strategy for systematically applying their ethical principles and editorial values in their research, production and distribution of stories and through engagement with their audience. Journalists can then refine their practice and hold each other accountable in a mutually supportive way by monitoring and assessing the progress they make with implementing their strategy.

Creating value

The application of ethical principles and editorial values determines the quality of journalism. But that does not necessarily make journalism valuable to those best placed to sustain it: the audience that consumes the journalism; the media outlet's owners, investors, journalists, marketers, administrators and advertisers who provide the skills and resources to produce and distribute the journalism; and the wider society that the journalists and media serve. For public interest journalism to be sustainable, it should also create value for these various stakeholders.

Chapter 2: A framework for 'good journalism, better societies'

Value is a measure of the worth and importance someone places on a product or service and how it benefits them. Value is often in our minds. We perceive value both in terms of how practical and useful something is (its 'instrumental value') as well as its longer-lasting benefits to our wellbeing (its 'intrinsic value'). Instrumental value usually contributes towards intrinsic value. For example, having a meal with friends or family, which has instrumental value, may contribute to our happiness, which has intrinsic value. Our perception of something's value determines what we are willing to give in return, not just in terms of money but also our time, attention and personal information, as well as in-kind contributions such as effort, participation, commitment and support.

Different people may value public interest journalism in different ways and for different reasons. For example, audience members might value being informed about what is going on in a way that helps them make decisions about their day-to-day lives (instrumental value), which may ultimately help them feel part of their community and contribute towards their wellbeing (intrinsic value). Advertisers send messages and sell products on the back of this relationship between a media outlet and its audience (instrumental value), which enables the company to create wealth (intrinsic value).

The value journalism creates for the audience and advertisers generates the money media owners need to produce the journalism and run their media operations

(instrumental value). But media owners and investors may also value the prestige and influence journalism gives them (intrinsic value). Journalists, on the other hand, may earn an income from their journalism (intrinsic value), but their role of finding things out and keeping people informed may also give journalists prestige and job satisfaction (intrinsic value).

These stakeholders and other members of society may also value how journalism explains what public officials are doing on their behalf and holds those with power to account (instrumental value). This can provide different groups in society with a sense of common purpose and identity, which in turn may contribute towards social cohesion and development (intrinsic value). This can also create value for donors, philanthropists and, ideally, governments who need journalists to keep the public informed (instrumental value) if they are to deliver on their political or developmental goals (intrinsic value).

Therefore, the value public interest journalism creates goes beyond just reach (the number of people who read, watch or listen to a story) and attention (the time they spend reading, watching or listening to a story). Stakeholders may equate value with how they use and experience journalism as well as the way it reflects their own values and beliefs and the beneficial impact it has on their lives and their society. This can result in an exchange of benefits – 'reciprocity value' –

when a stakeholder creates value for another in return for the value they derive. Therefore, value can flow from one stakeholder to another. The absence of such a value flow may deprive certain stakeholders of the benefits they derive from journalism.

For example, audiences pay for journalism with their money, time and data – to the benefit media owners, investors, advertisers and investors – in return for the value they (audience members) derive from the journalism they consume, which may have more to do with non-financial benefits such as a sense of identity or the ability to express themselves. If audience members think they are not benefitting enough from journalism, they will likely stop paying for it with their money, time and personal data, depriving other stakeholders of the benefits they are looking for.

Increasingly, audiences get information from many places and it must be clear why one media outlet's journalism has more benefits than that of another and what the first outlet does better. This is a media outlet's 'value proposition'. This depends on how a media outlet's journalism is perceived as being different to that of others. The qualities derived from ethical principles – factual, non-partisan journalism that informs members of the public about issues that shape their lives and challenge social norms – differentiate public interest journalism from other forms of media content, not least misinformation and disinformation. But other

media outlets might also espouse these principles and values, in which case the ways stories are produced and designed, how easy they are to access and use, and how audiences and other stakeholders experience them, are also part of this value proposition.

A media outlet combines these various factors as stories are researched, produced and distributed, and through its engagement with audience members and other stakeholders along the way. Journalists play a key role in gathering, making sense of/editing information and presenting stories in a way that appeals to their audience. But other stakeholders can also contribute to this value creation process. For example, audience members may contribute story ideas and information. They also help to distribute stories and encourage dialogue by sharing them and providing feedback. Meanwhile, media owners provide journalists with the resources they need to produce and distribute their stories; resources that are usually paid for through sales, advertising and other revenue. Society provides the context and meaning to stories as well as some of the infrastructure used to distribute them.

Therefore, value creation is a fluid process with potential tensions that may require trade-offs between the interests of different stakeholders. For example, media owners may value the prestige and influence they derive from their outlet more than the needs of their audience. Journalists' ethical principles may

mitigate against the commercial interests of media owners and advertisers, while audience members may not always appreciate the way journalists challenge social taboos. While governments are supposed to represent the interests of society, many do not and may put political or factional interests above those of the broader public in their dealings with the media. To create value for those who ultimately sustain their journalism, editorial teams constantly balance these various interests and may have to prioritise some stakeholders more than others. An editorial team's guiding star is the beneficial impact they want their journalism to have, while their ethical principles and editorial values are their compass.
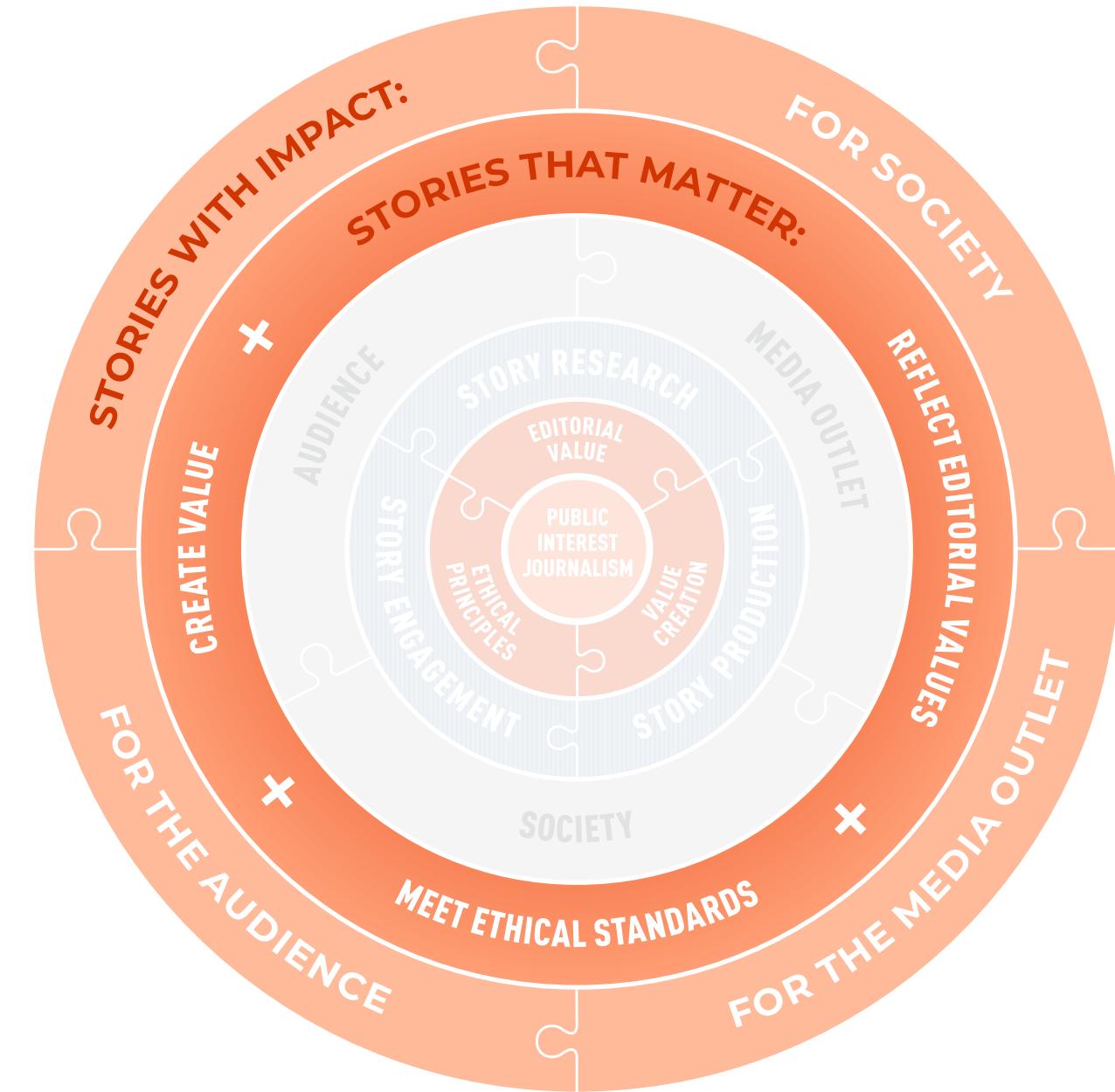
'Stories that matter'

By balancing ethical principles, editorial values, and value creation, journalists produce 'stories that matter' for their audience, their media outlet and the society it serves. These are stories that, on the one hand, embody the ethical principles and editorial values that stakeholders associate with the outlet and public interest journalism, and, on the other hand, they are stories that meet these stakeholders' needs and provide them with the benefits they are looking for. Editorial teams can maintain this balance by regularly reviewing and, if necessary, adjusting their editorial strategy.

Stories with impact

This review and adjustment of their strategy helps editorial teams steer towards the impact they want their journalism to have. This impact can vary significantly depending on the goals and priorities of different news teams and the media they work for. For example, a team might want its stories to help audience members improve their livelihoods or to give audience members pleasure. The team may want its journalism to help put the media outlet on a more viable footing by generating more revenue. At a societal level, a team may want its journalism to help encourage voter turnout or curb corruption; impact that demonstrates their journalism's importance to other members of society.

Again, this might involve balancing the interests of different stakeholders who may be looking for different types of impact. An editorial strategy provides the team with a clear sense of direction, the tools to navigate the journey and the means to demonstrate their impact.

Chapter 3: Shifts in journalism norms

Journalists have been forced to reassess their profession since audiences and advertisers deserted mainstream media for social media platforms – where public interest journalism struggles to be noticed, let alone to compete with all the other information and content available.

This has prompted changes – some subtle, others more fundamental – in how public interest journalism is normally understood and practiced. These shifts in journalistic norms try to make public interest journalism more relevant, more appealing and more impactful, and distinct from disinformation.

Some of the more noticeable shifts are summarised below, along with related questions editorial teams might consider. The list is not exhaustive but may inspire journalists and media outlets as they design their editorial strategies.

ACCURACY: reporting and verifying facts based on research, first-hand sources or being on the scene.

Things to consider:

- How do you make sure your stories are based on facts and how do you check these facts?
- How do you give depth and context to your stories so that people who are unfamiliar with them will understand the background?
- How can you make sure your stories accurately reflect the perspectives of people with first-hand experience of the issues you are covering?

FAIRNESS: providing rounded coverage that presents all relevant sides of a story from a variety of perspectives and points of view.

Things to consider:

- How do you make sure that your stories reflect the views of as many people involved in the story as possible?
- How do you recognise and address your own values and biases when covering issues that you may not agree with?
- How do you make sure that people can respond to your stories in a way that balances their side of the story with the views presented in your coverage? And how do you do this in a way that avoids simply countering one viewpoint with the opposite viewpoint, but rather explains the nuances of various viewpoints and helps audiences gain a rounded understanding of the issue?
- How do you correct factual errors in a lasting way that gives these corrections the same prominence as the original story?

EMPATHY, SOLIDARITY AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: relating to what your audiences and the people you cover are going through; addressing social injustice; being aware of how your own feelings may influence your journalism and doing something about this.

Things to consider:

- How do you acknowledge your own views and feelings about the issues you cover?
- How do you try to understand the views and feelings of your audiences and the people you are reporting on?
- How does your journalism address social injustice in a way that contributes to constructive social change?
- What do you understand by "emotional literacy" and how can this enhance your journalism?
- How do you recognise and manage your own emotions to avoid physical and emotional burn out?

Chapter 3: Shifts in journalism norms

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY: making sure your coverage reflects and serves, fairly and accurately, the different groupings in your society, particularly those currently under-represented in the media.

Things to consider:

- How do you try to involve people from a variety of backgrounds and with different life experiences in your journalism?
- How do you try to make sure that the experiences of people not usually involved in your journalism and/or of people harder to reach, are portrayed, fairly and accurately, in your coverage, as well as being part of your efforts to engage with your audience?

PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVE LISTENING: striving for accuracy, fairness, inclusion and diversity, by helping the people you cover to tell their own stories and by making sure you have clearly understood what they want to say.

Things to consider:

- To what extent should the people you are covering be involved in telling and editing these stories and in deciding which angles to cover?
- How do you want to go about this?
- How attentively are you listening to the stories people want to tell – especially those people who might otherwise not be heard in public life?
- How do you make sure people also have a right to reply if they feel you have misrepresented and / or misunderstood them?

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY: being open to the public about your commercial, political and social agenda; enabling the public to hold you to account for the journalism you produce.

Things to consider:
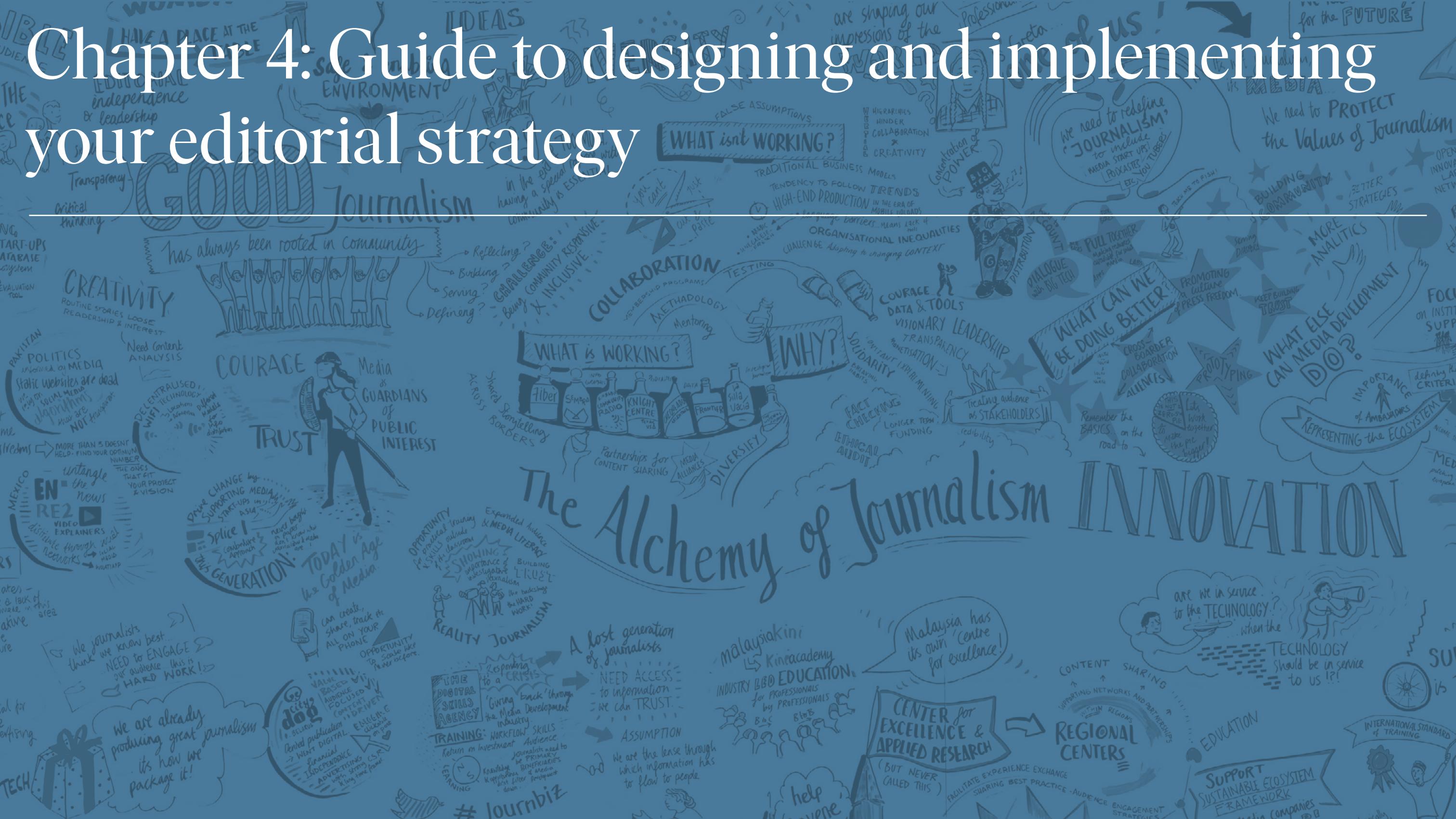
- How do you make the public aware of the commercial, political and social interests that your organisation represents?
- Who assesses how well you are practicing your editorial values and ethical standards? How independent are they? How do you let your audience know about/ respond to the findings of this assessment?
- How easily can members of the public complain about your coverage and how do you make sure these complaints are handled in a fair and transparent way?
- How do you make people aware of their right to complain and the channels for doing so?
- How do you encourage people to use these complaints channels - in particular people who do not have easy access to them and who might not be familiar with how journalism works?

COLLABORATION: working together with individuals, organisations and other journalists who can contribute to your stories in a way that benefits everyone involved without compromising the integrity of your journalism and your editorial independence.

Things to consider:

- Who can add value to your journalism and help you to have the impact you want to have?
- How do you make sure you remain true to your editorial values and ethical principles when collaborating with others?
- How does the way you distribute your stories and engage with your audiences help build a community around your journalism and media outlet?

Chapter 4: Guide to designing and implementing your editorial strategy

Guided by the framework, this chapter explains how editorial teams can design, review and adjust a strategy for delivering impact while practicing your ethical principles and editorial values in a way that also creates value for your audience, media outlet and society.

This practical guide includes a set of worksheets you can fill in as you go (see Appendix) to provide a record of what you decide. Put them together and the worksheets form your editorial strategy.

The guide includes examples of filled-in worksheets for Steps 2 – 4, and the story checklist referred to in Step 6, to show you how to use the handbook's worksheets.

The examples draw on the author's experiences co-publishing a start-up magazine in Namibia that focussed on in-depth coverage of the country's politics, economics, and business sector.

These examples look back to a time when the magazine was well established, and the author and his co-owners were considering ways to serve a wider audience by launching a new product, although it was not yet clear what that would be.

The worksheets are based on a 'what if' scenario: they envisage hypothetical discussions between the author and his colleagues, had they been able to access this handbook's method to design and implement an editorial strategy.

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

An editorial strategy reflects your vision and values – beliefs your organisation stands for and that shape everything the organisation does. If you are not clear about your vision and values, it would be helpful to think these through before designing your editorial strategy.

Some media outlets have an organisational strategy and/or business plan that explains the organisation's vision and core values. Others may not. IMS has separate tools for helping media partners to develop them.

Most – but not necessarily all – journalists and media outlets recognise a code of ethics and some form of non-judicial mechanism (e.g. a media council or in-house role), that ensures the code is followed, and to which members of the public can complain if they feel the outlet's coverage is in breach of this code. If you do not have a code of ethics, organisations representing the media in your country may be able to advise you. The Ethical Journalism Network[8] might also provide you with inspiration and examples of best practice.

One way or another, these are the questions you should try to answer as a team before you move on to Step 2:

VISION AND VALUES
Think ahead. Try to imagine how you would like your media outlet to be in five years' time:

- Who will it serve?
- What will it cover?
- What values will it espouse?
- How will it look/sound/feel?

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[8] https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES
What are the ethical principles that guide your journalism?

- Where are these principles written down, (e.g. in a code of ethics or practice?) If they are not written down, try to use this opportunity to identify your ethical principles so you can refer to them later.
- Who makes sure you apply these principles, and to whom can members of the public complain if they think you have gone against these principles?

STEP 2: AIMING FOR IMPACT

Keeping your institutional vision and values in mind, discuss and agree what impact, i.e. beneficial change, you want your journalism to have for your audience, your media outlet and the society you serve.
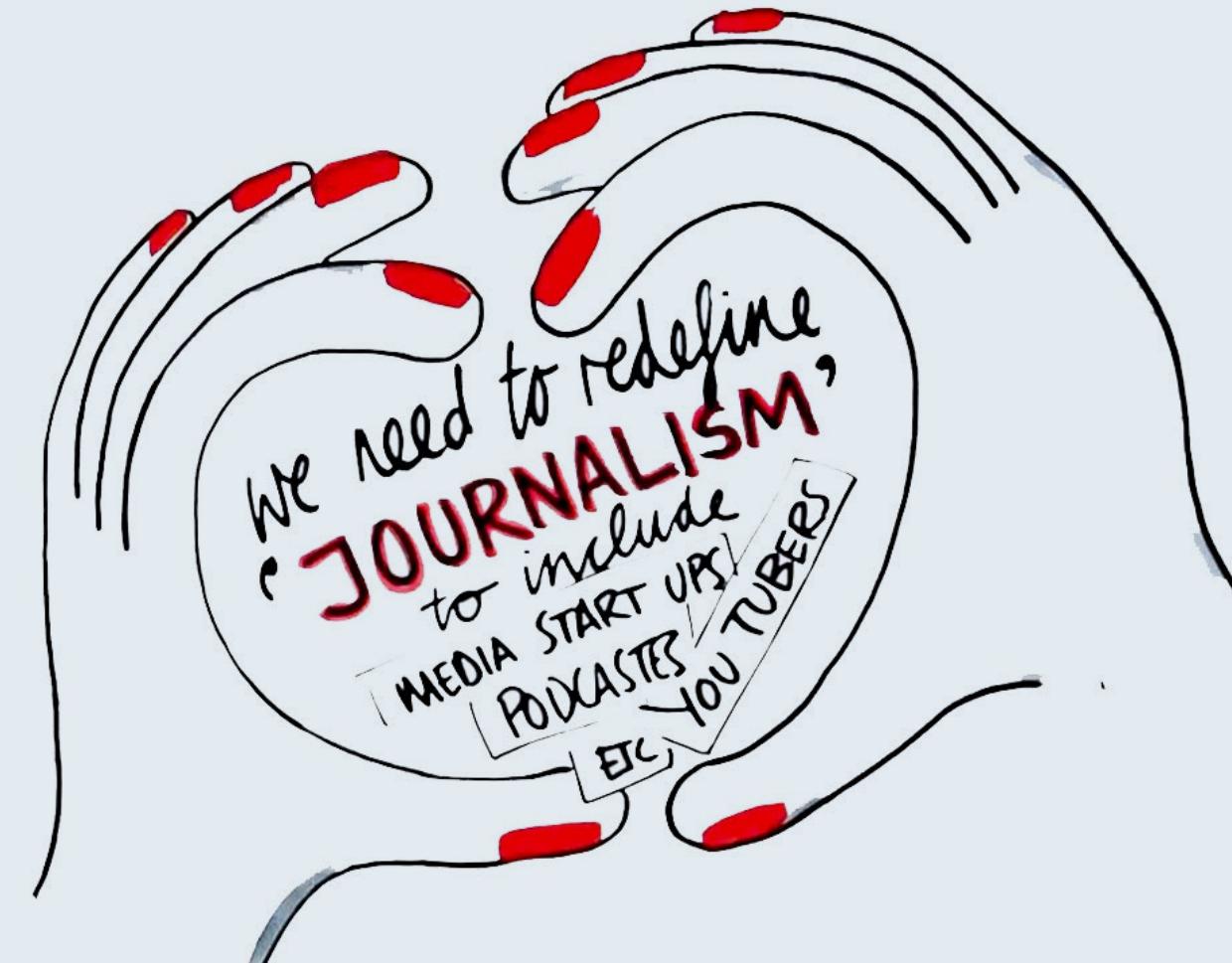
Try to answer the following questions:

1. What beneficial change(s) would you like your journalism to help bring about
   • in the lives of your audiences?
   • for your media outlet?
   • for your society?

2. How can your journalism contribute towards these changes, realistically speaking?

3. How would you know if your journalism is contributing to these changes in the way you would like? What would each of these changes look like in practice?

4. How can you identify and measure such changes? Who is responsible for doing this?

Use the **worksheet for Step 2** to record what you decide (see example, and template in the Appendix section). You can then refer to this as you continue with the next steps.

> **Tip:** If your team is big enough, you could divide into three groups – on for audiences, one for the media outlet and one for your society - and each group discusses and answers the questions in relation to their assigned stakeholder.
>
> Each group can then present their ideas to the whole team for further discussion and agreement on the impact you want to have. Otherwise, if the team is small, you can brainstorm together.

Chapter 4: Guide to designing and implementing your editorial strategy

	IMPACT			
	What beneficial change(s) would you like your journalism to help bring for each stakeholder?	**How will your journalism contribute towards such change(s)?**	**How will you know if your journalism is contributing to this change – what information can you collect to measure this?**	**According to the information available, what is the current situation of the change(s) you want to see? What is your 'baseline'?**
Your audience(s)	Impact for existing magazine: Business, political, and civil society leaders draw on the magazine's coverage in their work. Impact for new product: New audience segment finds the new format of our in-depth, analytical journalism appealing (First i we must find out which segment we are aiming for and what format they would find appealing). Then we need to design and pilot the product. Then we need to raise the investment to refine, launch and market the product).	Our journalism provides in-depth and analytical coverage of topics relevant to these leaders and their work. We replicate our in-depth and analytical style of journalism in a way that appeals to new audience.	Audience survey (Company directors will be responsible for leading the survey). Analysis of subscriber and social media data (Company directors). Audience feedback on pilot of new format (Company directors).	Anecdotal evidence – from our talks with readers – suggests we are having the desired impact, and that our current audience is predominantly male, middle-aged and well educated, but we lack hard data. We need to conduct a proper analysis of our subscriber data. Then the first audience survey will provide further baseline data.
Your media outlet(s) The owners, staff, advertisers, funders, and investors.	*Owners/investors:* We generate more revenue and raise the investment we need to launch a new format. *Staff:* We can hire a staffer and more freelancers for the new format. In time, they will win awards and other recognition for their stories. *Advertisers:* New audience segment responds positively to advertising in new format.	*Owners /investors:* Magazine attracts more subscribers, advertisers, and co-sponsorship of events. New audience's response to innovative form reveals demand for in-depth, analytical journalism. This attracts new investor(s). *Staff:* Our success with new format of in-depth, analytical reporting attracts journalists who are keen and able to produce it. We hire some as staff or freelancers, within set recruitment/retention targets. *Advertisers:* Magazine continues to attract current levels of advertising. Critical mass of advertisers willing to advertise in new format (we will set a target for how much advertising we will aim for).	*Owners/investors:* Regular financial reports (Managing Editor responsible). *Staff:* Recruitment and retention figures for staff and freelancers. Discussions with staff and freelancers (Managing Editor responsible). *Advertisers:* Marketing Manager will provide advertising sales data, on a regular basis, which will reveal any changes.	*Owners/investors:* Current financial position. Financial projections for new format. *Staff:* Current staffing levels. *Advertisers:* Current advertising sales, projected advertising sales for new format.

EXAMPLE WORKSHEET FOR STEP 2: AIMING FOR IMPACT (2 OF 2)

	IMPACT			
	What beneficial change(s) would you like your journalism to help bring for each stakeholder?	**How will your journalism contribute towards such change(s)?**	**How will you know if your journalism is contributing to this change – what information can you collect to measure this?**	**According to the information available, what is the current situation of the change(s) you want to see? What is your 'baseline'?**
Your society	Our coverage helps political, business, and civil society leaders to make informed decisions. More people understand politics, business, economics, and take an interest in decisions that leaders are making.	Decision makers feel better informed because of our coverage. Audience members question and discuss leaders' decisions on policy, issues, and events. This becomes clear through audience response to our stories, especially at key moments. We see these responses in public/private discussions and/or online forums, e.g. our website. Our coverage of these topics appeals to a wider demographic.	Audience survey (Directors responsible). Analysis of subscriber data and discussions on outlet's platforms – events, social media, website comments (Managing Editor responsible).	We don't have a baseline. The first audience survey we carry out will provide the baseline for magazine. First audience survey after launch of new format provides baseline. Analysis of current subscriber and social media data. Analysis of audience data for new format.

Comments (use this space for additional thoughts or ideas, e.g. you might identify and wish to pursue a long-term goal based on the combined impact of the changes that your journalism brings to your audience, outlet, and/or society?)

We should review and update this worksheet once we have carried out:
• Analysis of existing subscriber data.
• First audience survey.
• Piloted new format.

STEP 3: CREATING VALUE

Now, with your vision, values and impact in mind, try to answer the following questions:

1   What value can your journalism create?
   • What *practical benefits* – e.g. money, data, entertainment, guidance, understanding, inspiration, an outlet for self-expression, a connection with other people – can your journalism have for:
      ◦ your audiences?
      ◦ your media outlet?
      ◦ your society?
   • What *lasting benefits essential for their wellbeing,* – e.g. health, happiness, wealth, influence, credibility, a sense of belonging, peace – can your journalism have for:
      ◦ your audiences?
      ◦ your media outlet?
      ◦ your society?
   • On a scale of 1to 4 (where 1 is low and 4 is high), how important are these benefits to:
      ◦ your audiences?
      ◦ your media outlet?
      ◦ your society?

2.   How will you know if your journalism is creating this value - what information can you collect to measure this?

3.   What value, if any, does your journalism currently create for each stakeholder, according to the information you have available?

Use the **worksheet for Step 3** to record what you decide (see example, and template in the Appendix section). You can then refer to this as you continue with the next steps.

> **Tips:**
> 1.   Keep in mind that practical benefits often lead to longer-term, essential benefits, e.g. self-expression and a connection with other people can lead to a sense of belonging.
>
> 2.   Each category of stakeholder is likely to be made up of different groups of people. Each group may perceive differently the benefits of journalism. In which case, you could start by identifying which groups within each stakeholder category have the most influence over the sustainability of your journalism and focus on these groups when you try to answer the questions.
>
> 3.   The best way to find out how journalism benefits your key stakeholders is to ask them. You could convene panels of people from each group to discuss the questions. You could include a mix of people from the most influential groups in each stakeholder panel. Your stakeholder panels can also help you to evaluate how well you are implementing your strategy during Step 7.
>
> 4.   Once you have a sense of the benefits your key stakeholders derive from journalism, you can gather the editorial team to discuss these findings during the prioritisation exercise. Again, you could divide into three groups – 1) audience, 2) media outlet and 3) society. Each group discusses and answers the questions in relation to their assigned stakeholder and then presents their ideas to the whole team for further discussion and agreement on the desired impact. If the team is small, you can brainstorm together.

We have a role to PUSH BACK — BIG TECH, COERSIVE GOVT — PROTECT Our Values

EXAMPLE WORKSHEET FOR STEP 3: CREATING VALUE (1 OF 2)
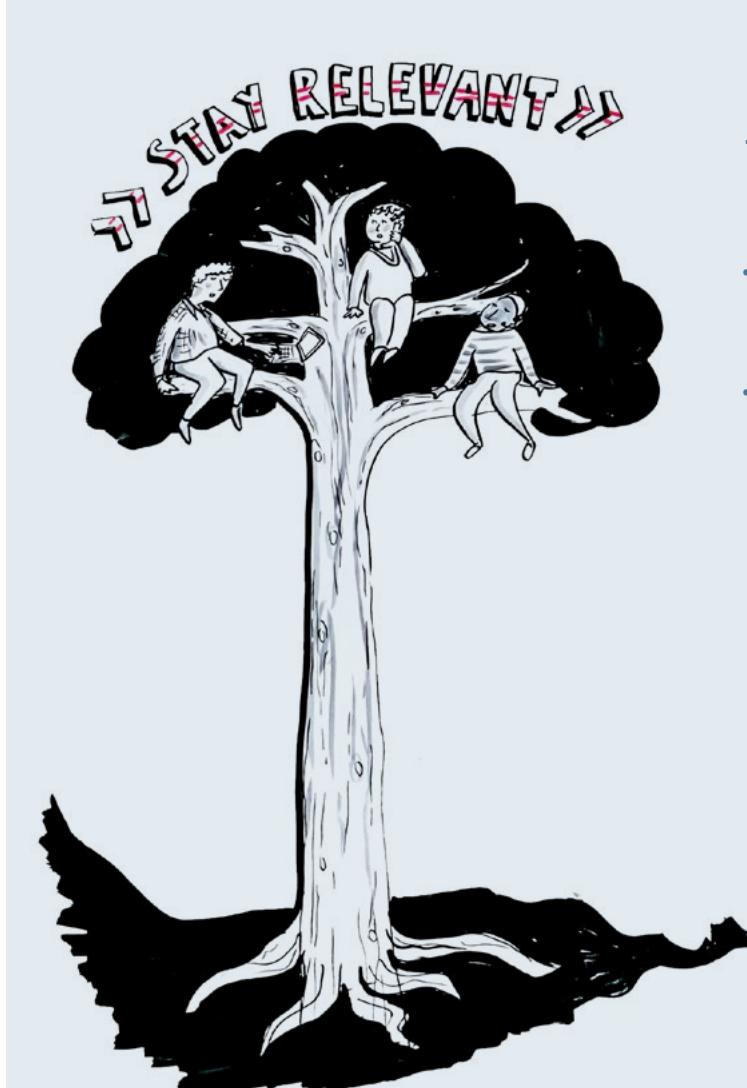
	VALUE				
	What *practical benefits* **can your journalism have for each stakeholder,** e.g. money, data, entertainment, guidance, understanding, inspiration, self-expression, a way to connect with people?	What *lasting and essential benefits* **can your journalism have for each stakeholder,** e.g. health, happiness, wealth, influence, credibility, a sense of belonging, peace of mind?	**On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 is low, and 4 is high) how important are these benefits to each stakeholder?**	**How will you know if your journalism is creating this value – what information can you collect to measure this?**	**What value, if any, does your journalism currently create for each stakeholder, according to the information available?**
Your audience(s)	Our journalism provides audiences with new information. Our events provide audience members with opportunities to connect with other people in leadership roles. The magazine, the new format, and our events facilitate communication between audience members and decision makers. Audience members access information that they cannot get from other media.	Decision makers have job satisfaction from feeling 'on top' of what's going on. Audience members have influence by having views and concerns reflected in our coverage and having leaders respond. Respect and sense of being taken seriously because we cover topics audience members think are important, in a way that reflects their views and concerns.	Practical benefits: 3 Lasting benefits: 4	Audience survey and audience reference group. Attendance and evaluation data gathered during our events.	Not sure! Anecdotal evidence suggests the magazine has practical benefits, but we need to find out what these are and whether our journalism also has lasting benefits.
Your media outlet(s) The owners, staff, advertisers, funders, and investors.	*Owners/* investors: Additional income and a chance to develop skills and experience. *Staff:* Income, an opportunity to practice in-depth, analytical journalism. *Advertisers:* Ways to reach decision makers (magazine), and our new audience segment (via our new format), which helps advertisers sell products and create awareness of their brands.	*Owners /* investors: Recognition, prestige, influence, and a return on investment. *Staff:* Prestige, career development. *Advertisers:* Prestige (their brand is associated with quality journalism that decision makers read). Also influence (their adverts reach decision makers) and a competitive edge (their adverts reach our new audience segment, which might not be similarly served by other media).	*Owners / Investors:* Practical benefits: 4 Lasting benefits: 3 *Staff:* Practical benefits: 3 Lasting benefits: 3 *Advertisers:* Practical benefits: 4 Lasting benefits: 4	*Owners / investors:* Financial reports. Regularly evaluate these benefits at board meetings. *Staff:* Managing Editor discusses these benefits with staff and freelancers during annual appraisal. *Advertisers:* Feedback from advertisers (we need to conduct a survey of /interviews with advertisers).	We don't know, we need to find out.

EXAMPLE WORKSHEET FOR STEP 3: CREATING VALUE (2 OF 2)

	VALUE			How will you know if your journalism is creating this value – what information can you collect to measure this?	What value, if any, does your journalism currently create for each stakeholder, according to the information available?
	What *practical benefits* **can your journalism have for each stakeholder,** e.g. money, data, entertainment, guidance, understanding, inspiration, self-expression, a way to connect with people?	What *lasting and essential benefits* **can your journalism have for each stakeholder,** e.g. health, happiness, wealth, influence, credibility, a sense of belonging, peace of mind?	**On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 is low, and 4 is high) how important are these benefits to each stakeholder?**		
Your society	Decision makers become more aware of how they impact society. The public accesses information about how leaders' decisions and issues we cover (politics, business, and economics) impact on society.	Informed and accountable decision making. Popular understanding of politics, business, and economics and how decisions impact on society.	Practical benefits: 2 (public access to information about how decisions impact society relates more specifically to our audience rather than society as a whole) Lasting benefits: 4 (in the long-run there should be a ripple effect whereby awareness created with our audience gradually extends to a wider public).	Audience survey includes our non-subscribers and those outside our target audience segments.	We don't know, we need to find out.

Comments (use this space for any additional thoughts or ideas on the value you want your journalism to create/an impact it should avoid, e.g. the benefits to one stakeholder might boost or, conversely, limit the benefits to another. In either case, how might you address this?)

- Until now, we did not really consider whether or how our journalism creates value. But we need to start doing this, immediately.
- We should investigate setting up a panel of audience members that we convene on a regular basis (yearly?) to assess the value we are creating for them.

STEP 4: PRIORITISING YOUR PRINCIPLES, VALUES, AND IMPACT TO CREATE VALUE

Now you can:

- decide which ethical principles and institutional values your journalism should focus on.
- assess whether these principles, values, and practices create enough value for you audience, your media outlet, and your society.

ETHICAL STANDARDS AND EDITORIAL VALUES

First, try to decide which ethical principles and institutional values your journalism will focus. It is unlikely you can apply all these at the same time, so try to identify those that are most important for achieving the desired impact (**see Step 2**).

Use the **worksheet for Step 4** to record what you decide (see example, and template in the Appendix section).

Tip: Try to do this exercise as a team. Each member of the team could select two or three principles and values they find the most important and take turns to explain why. Once everyone in the team has done this, discuss the selections as a group.

NEW NORMS?

Then consider the changing norms highlighted **in Chapter 3** and how these might relate to the impact you want to have. Add to the worksheet any as-yet unlisted norms that you think are important.

Tip: There are no right or wrong answers to these questions – rather they are intended to help you assess whether there is anything you might not have thought of. Any additions should be compatible with your values and the impact you want

Once you have done this, rank in order of importance the principles and values you have chosen as a team, while keeping in mind the impact you are aiming for.

Tip: If you are doing this as a group, each member of the team could vote for their top principles and values.

CREATING VALUE

Now look at your worksheet **for Step 3** and do the following:
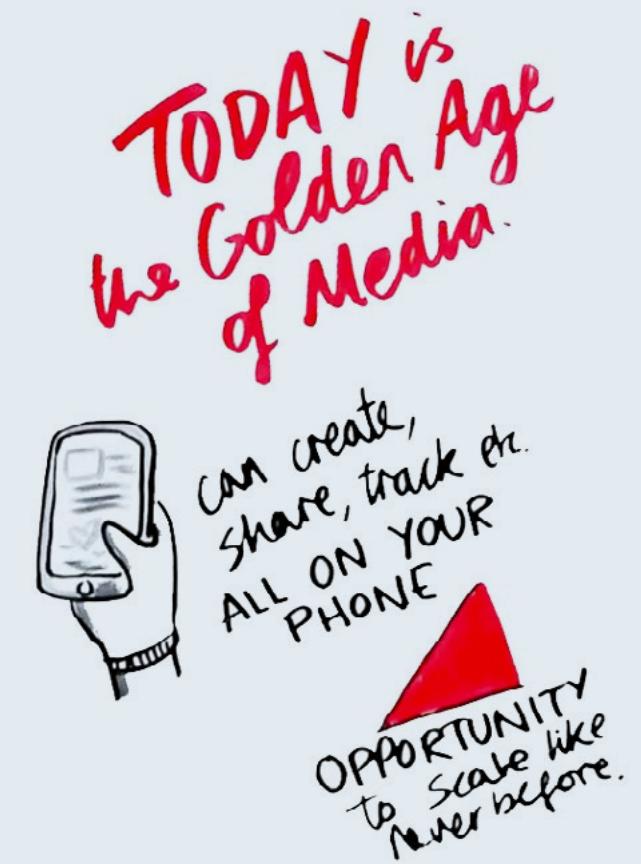
1   Try to place both the practical and lasting benefits you have listed next to the principles and values you prioritised earlier.
2.   Discuss the extent to which the benefits that are most important to your stakeholders, i.e. those that got high scores during Step 3, correspond with the principles, values, and impact you prioritised earlier.

Try answering the following:
    a.   How valuable are these priorities to your key stakeholders (audience, media outlet, and society)?
        i.   Are any of the most important benefits you identified in Step 3 missing?
        ii.   Which of the principles and values you have prioritised create the most value for your stakeholders and which ones the least?
        iii.   Are there gaps in the value creation column next to any of your priorities? If so, how might the principles, values, and impact you have prioritised benefit your key stakeholders? And how important are these benefits to these stakeholders?
    b.   How valuable are these priorities to your key stakeholders (audience, media outlet, and society)?

3.   Discuss your findings and then decide if you need to change the order of priority for your principles and values given a) the impact they will have and b) the value they create for your key stakeholders.
4.   Finalise your list of priorities.

> **Tip:** Balancing principles, values, impact, and value may involve trade-offs and compromises to which your outlet's main decision makers should ultimately agree. If these individuals have not already been involved in the exercise, you may want to explain the team's findings before the next step.

Alternatively, your main decision makers could complete the last stage of this exercise ('Creating value') together. Either way, it is important that the decision makers understand the team's thinking and that the team then understands the reasons for their final decisions.

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Chapter 4 / Step 4: Prioritising your principles, values, and impact to create value

EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET FOR STEP 4: PRIORITISING YOUR PRINCIPLES, VALUES, AND IMPACT TO CREATE VALUE (1 OF 3)

Which principles and values do you consider the most important?	How does the selected principle/value help your journalism to impact in the way you want, as identified in Step 2?	How do each of the selected principles/values create value for your key stakeholders? From the value you identified during Step 3, list: • the stakeholder group. • the type of value (practical or essential) created. • a short description of this value.	How important, to each stakeholder, is the value created? See scores in Step 3.	Order of priority. This might change as you weigh the importance of these principles/ values to you and your stakeholders.
Accuracy	This is the reason why decision makers refer to our stories and take them seriously. It gives us the credibility we seek. Our coverage needs to be accurate to appeal to our audience. Because of the appeal of our accurate coverage, our audience members have a way to communicate with others (via feedback channels and events), and offers our advertisers with a way to communicate with our audience.	*Audience* Practical – better understanding of issues that affect their lives because they can rely on the information in our stories. Lasting – accurate coverage contributes to job satisfaction of decision makes and other audience members (people can rely on information we provide), influence (through appeal and use of accurate information from stories), respect, and a sense of being taken seriously because we cover issues accurately. *Media outlet* Practical – income, return on investment resulting from appeal and usefulness of accurate coverage. Lasting – recognition/prestige, influence, and a return on investment derived from our reputation for accurate coverage. *Society* Practical – members of the public access accurate information about how issues and decisions impact on society. Lasting – accuracy contributes to informed and accountable decision making.		=3
Fairness	Fairness also gives us the credibility we need to appeal to decision makers (through our magazine) and the new audience segment (through our new format) because our journalism presents the viewpoints of people with different social outlooks and political persuasions. It will also help us attract and recruit journalists of different backgrounds and	*Audience* Practical – our coverage provides different viewpoints, and a 'bigger picture' than other media. Our events provide audience members the opportunities to connect with other people in leadership roles and to exchange different viewpoints in a safe space. Lasting – job satisfaction, influence, respect, and a sense of being taken seriously because we provide rounded coverage unavailable in other media. *Media outlet* Practical – income, a return on investment due to the appeal and credibility of our accurate and fair coverage. Lasting – recognition/prestige, influence, and a return on investment because of the appeal and credibility of our accurate and fair coverage. *Society* Practical – the public gets a rounded view of how issues and decisions impact on society. Lasting – informed and accountable decision making by political/business leaders that takes into account different viewpoints.		=3

EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET FOR STEP 4: PRIORITISING YOUR PRINCIPLES, VALUES, AND IMPACT TO CREATE VALUE (2 OF 3)

Which principles and values do you consider the most important?	How does the selected principle/value help your journalism to impact in the way you want, as identified in Step 2?	How do each of the selected principles/values create value for your key stakeholders? From the value you identified during Step 3, list: • the stakeholder group. • the type of value (practical or essential) created. • a short description of this value.	How important, to each stakeholder, is the value created? See scores in Step 3.	Order of priority. This might change as you weigh the importance of these principles/values to you and your stakeholders.
Analytical (trying to make sense of things, offering interpretations of events, policies, laws etc.).	This is what most differentiates us from other media: we take time to make sense of things, to explain issues in an easy-to-understand way that is presented in attractive and user-friendly formats. This should appeal to a new audience segment and make more people aware of, and appreciate, the topics we cover. But we will need to maintain our 'user-friendly' approach to journalism as we implement/ fine-tune our new, unfamiliar formats. The appeal of our analytical coverage will help us increase our revenue and provide investors with a return on their investment.	*Audience* Practical – this helps people understand issues and to apply our coverage to their daily lives. It helps people connect with others because they understand the topics we cover. Lasting – respect and a sense of being taken seriously because audience can understand the topics we cover. *Media outlet* Practical – appealing to our new audience with distinct, analytical coverage will boost our income, our directors' return on investment, and provide a new audience for our current and potential advertisers. Lasting – prestige, influence, and a competitive edge as we become the 'go-to' media outlet for people who want to understand the issues we cover. *Society* Practical – because our coverage explains things so clearly, decision makers and members of the public are more aware of how decisions impact society. Lasting – informed and accountable decision making. Popular understanding of politics, business, economics, and how decisions impact on society.		1
Accountable and transparent.	This gives us the credibility we want as owners and journalists. We must be seen to practice what we preach. This reinforces the principles of accuracy and fairness, and the impact and value they help to create.	Audience Lasting – respect and a sense of being taken seriously because we own up to, and correct, our mistakes. People know where they stand with our coverage because we are up-front about what we stand for. Media outlet Practical – a chance to develop skills and experience, because we learn from mistakes and try to improve our coverage. Lasting – recognition/prestige because we are seen to practice what we preach. Society Practical – it creates and/or enhances public awareness of how journalism works and its impact on their lives. Lasting – it helps us(the media) to make informed, accountable decisions. If we and other media are accountable and transparent, this gives use credibility when we then demand transparency and accountability from leaders.		5

EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET FOR STEP 4: PRIORITISING YOUR PRINCIPLES, VALUES, AND IMPACT TO CREATE VALUE (3 OF 3)

Which principles and values do you consider the most important?	How does the selected principle/value help your journalism to impact in the way you want, as identified in Step 2?	How do each of the selected principles/values create value for your key stakeholders? From the value you identified during Step 3, list: • the stakeholder group. • the type of value (practical or essential) created. • a short description of this value.	How important, to each stakeholder, is the value created? See scores in Step 3.	Order of priority. This might change as you weigh the importance of these principles/ values to you and your stakeholders.
Inclusive (within our audience segments).	We need to be more inclusive if we are to appeal to a wider audience and grow our audience, revenue, and so on. Inclusive coverage means more accurate, fair, analytical, and accountable reporting. Therefore, inclusivity contributes to the impact and value we create by being accurate, fair and analytical..	*Audience* Practical – better understanding of issues that affect their lives. Our journalism provides fresh perspectives from people not normally heard. Our events provide audience members from diverse backgrounds with the opportunities to connect with people in leadership roles. Lasting – job satisfaction, influence, respect, and a sense of being taken seriously among audience members from backgrounds that other media often marginalise or ignore. *Media outlet* Practical – additional income, a chance to develop skills and experience as a result of reaching new audience segments, and helping advertisers sell products and create awareness of their brands to these audiences. Lasting – recognition/prestige, influence, career development, and a competitive edge by providing more rounded coverage of issues from perspectives of people who might not usually be heard. *Society* Practical – decision makers become more aware of how they impact marginalised sections of society. The public accesses information about how issues and decisions impact such sections of society. Lasting – informed and accountable decision making. Popular understanding of politics, business, economics, and how decisions impact on different sections of society.		2. (because needs more focus to reinforce accuracy and fairness, also key to plans for reaching new audience).

Comments (use this space for any additional thoughts or ideas about your priorities, e.g. you may want to reflect on the selection process, the reasons you omitted certain things, and/or how you weighed your principles and values in relation to their impact on/the value created for key stakeholders)

'Analytical' seems so important in helping people to make sense of things in an accessible and appealing way. This seems a key ingredient for so much of the impact we want to have and the value we want to create.

Accountability/transparency didn't seem to contribute to impact and value as much as expected. However, both are important in helping people to understand the role of media and how we make decisions. In which case, this should contribute to some of the other impact and value(s). We should find out from key stakeholders how important this is to them.

STEP 5: PUTTING PRIORITIES INTO PRACTICE

Now you can decide how – in your day-to-day journalism – you want to apply the ethical principles and editorial values that you prioritised in Step 4, in ways that will have the desired impact while creating value for your key stakeholders.

PLANNING
The **worksheet for Steps 5 and 7** will become your plan for this (see template in Appendix section). You can come back and revise it, if necessary, each time you review your strategy, as described in Step 7.

First enter the relevant information from the **worksheet for Step 4:**

• decide which ethical principles and institutional values your journalism should focus on.
• assess whether these principles, values, and practices create enough value for you audience, your media outlet, and your society.

While keeping in mind the impact you want your journalism to have and the value you want this to create for key stakeholders, try answering the following questions for each priority principle/value:

1. How can you apply this principle/value to how you, a) research, b) produce c) distribute your stories and engage with your audiences? What approaches, methods and tools can you use to enhance your journalism in a way that has the impact and creates the value you want? Are there any activities you can organise?

2. How will the practices you identified above contribute towards the impact and value you want to have?

3. How will you know these practices are having the impact and creating the value you want? What information can tell you this (see sources you identified in the **worksheets for Steps 2 and 3**) and who is responsible for gathering and analysing this information?

4. What additional resources, e.g. skills, knowledge, time, money and so on, might you need to practice your journalism this way? Who is responsible for the availability of resources?

Tips:
1. As you answer each question, add your final answers to the corresponding columns in worksheet for Steps 5 and 7.
2. You could divide the team into groups and assign each group a priority principle/value to work on using the template. Then come back together, so each group can explain what it has done. Other groups can then make suggestions until the plan for each principle/value is agreed.

ASSIGNING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
The finalized worksheets from Steps 1- 5 now form your editorial strategy.

Identify who is responsible for:

• overseeing the implementation of the strategy (this includes **Step 6 and 7**)
• making sure that people responsible for different parts of the strategy, e.g. data gathering and helping journalists to implement it, play their part.
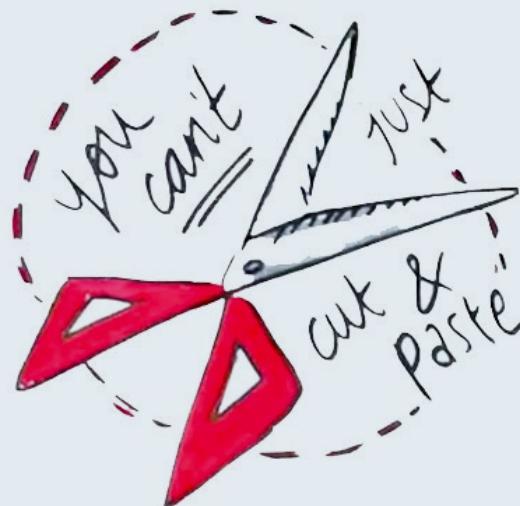
Tip: Ideally the editor or another senior decision-maker should oversee the strategy. However, everyone has a part to play in implementing and reviewing it. You might want different team members to be responsible for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of each priority principle/value.

Try to assign roles and responsibilities as the final part of Step 5. Alternatively, the person with overall responsibility can do this later, but preferably as soon as possible, so that people know what they are expected to do.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENTING YOUR STRATEGY

Now you need to integrate your strategy into the organisation's day-to-day practices and routines. These changes in behaviour can take time and it might be worth starting with a specific project or a team to instruct and inspire others as you roll out the strategy across the whole organisation. The following tools might also help.

STORY CHECKLIST

Using the **story checklist template** included in the Appendix section, your journalists can make a quick assessment to see which aspects of the strategy are addressed in a story they are planning. Editors can also use the checklist to assess the stories they are editing. Using the checklist can inspire new ideas and story angles: it can also help colleagues to become more familiar with the strategy.

1. Cut-and-paste the relevant information from the strategy into the template and then give each journalist and editor in your team a copy of the checklist.
2. Journalists and editors then run through the questions as they plan and edit stories.
3. If you have a physical newsroom, you could also put a copy of the checklist on the wall to remind the team of what you are trying to achieve together.

(See example that follows.)

CURATING EXAMPLES OF STORIES WITH VALUES, VALUE AND IMPACT

As you implement your strategy, you can ask team members to share stories they think demonstrate how you are putting your editorial strategy into practice. You can ask team members to explain:

1. What aspect(s) of the editorial strategy does the story demonstrate – which ethical principles/editorial values were applied in the story?
2. How does the story contribute to the impact you want your journalism to have and the value you want it to create?

Consider asking team members to identify stories that they feel have not applied the strategy and discuss how these stories could be improved.

You can use the **Worksheet for Step 6: Curating examples of stories with values, value and impact** to document these examples and to record your answers to the questions (see template in Appendix section).

Tip: Over time, these exercises should help the team to internalise the strategy and feel responsible for it. One way would be to make 'story sharing' a feature of editorial or other team meetings. Encourage all members of the team to select stories, perhaps on rotation. Once you have curated some stories, you could publish your findings as a way of explaining and demonstrating your strategy to your audience and getting their feedback. Journalists and editors can also provide feedback from their use of the story checklist.

EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET FOR STEP 6: CHECKLIST FOR STORIES WITH VALUES, VALUE, AND IMPACT (1 OF 2)

The answers to the checklist below are based on the author's eye-witness account of conditions inside a hospital serving the most populous part of Namibia at a time of high demand (during an epidemic). The author deliberately focused on conditions from the patients' perspective. He did not include the viewpoints of staff and hospital authorities, although he did refer indirectly to the pressures on hospital staff.

It was an accurate description of conditions, as the author saw them. To make this clear, he wrote the story in the first person. Obviously, the authorities might have seen the account as 'one-sided' and thus dismissed it.

Therefore, he could/should have done a follow-up story from the perspective of staff and hospital authorities. Nevertheless, the 'eyewitness' approach gave the story its authenticity and accuracy – the author covered conditions in the health system not only during a pandemic but also from a perspective not usually heard. At the time, most health reporting covered official decisions and announcements, not how people experienced the health services. This approach was one reason, according to the judges, why the story won Magazine Article of the Year in the Namibia Media Awards.

The story applies these ethical principles and editorial values	Yes / no / not sure	The story contributes to this impact	Yes / no / not sure	The story helps create this value	Yes / no / not sure
1. Analytical (make sense of things)	Y	Our analysis differentiates us from coverage in other media.	Y	It provides people with understanding of issue they don't get from other media.	Y
		We take the time to explain topics in an easy-to-understand and attractive (product design) way.	Y	This helps people understand issue and apply our coverage to their daily lives.	Y
		Appeals to new audience segment.	NS	It helps new audience segment understand issue and how it impacts on society.	NS
2. Inclusive	Y	Appeals to a wider audience because includes perspectives not usually heard in other media.	NS	Provides audience with fresh perspectives from people not normally heard.	Y
		Provides more rounded coverage because includes perspectives not usually heard in other media.	Y	Story helps audience understand how topic impacts on different sections of society.	Y

EXAMPLE OF WORKSHEET FOR STEP 6: CHECKLIST FOR STORIES WITH VALUES, VALUE, AND IMPACT (2 OF 2)

The story applies these ethical principles and editorial values	Yes / no / not sure	The story contributes to this impact	Yes / no / not sure	The story helps create this value	Yes / no / not sure
3= Accuracy	Y	Decision makers can feel confident referring to the story and taking the information seriously because it is accurate.	Y	Decision makers can make use of the story because it is accurate.	Y
		Existing audience will refer to the story because the information is reliable.	Y	Audience members can use the story because it is accurate.	Y
		New audience segment will refer to the story because the information is reliable.	Y	New audience segment can make use of the story because it is accurate.	Y
3= Fairness	Y	Coverage appeals to people from different political and social backgrounds because it presents multiple perspectives in a fair way.	NS	Coverage provides audience members with a more rounded picture of topic than available in other media.	Y
		Decision makers will feel confident referring to the story and taking the information seriously because it provides rounded view of the topic.	Y	Decision makers can use the story because it covers different viewpoints in a fair way.	Y
5 Transparent / accountable	Y	Decision makers and audience take story seriously because it conforms to ethical principles and reflects our values.	Y	Decision makers and audience can rely on the story because it conforms to our ethical principles and reflects our values.	Y

STEP 7: REVIEWING YOUR PROGRESS, ADJUSTING YOUR STRATEGY

On a regular basis, perhaps every six months, take time to assess how well you are progressing with implementing your strategy and to see whether you need to do anything differently:

1   Ahead of the progress review meeting, each team member
    a.   Reviews the data gathered to assess the impact and value created (under 'Monitoring the impact and value of your journalism' in the worksheet).
    b.   Fills in the accompanying **Self-Assessment of Progress scoresheet** (see template in Appendix section).
2.   The team then comes together to share the findings from scoresheets and discuss the following:
    a.   How satisfied are you with your progress?
    b.   Which aspects of the editorial strategy do you seem to be addressing the most?
    c.   Are you focusing on some aspects of the strategy more than others? Do you need to emphasise other aspects of the strategy?
    d.   What do the findings tell you about the impact your journalism is having and the value it is creating?
    e.   What, if anything, do you need to do differently?
3.   Then enter your findings in the relevant 'Progress update' columns in the **worksheet for Steps 5 and 7.**

Tip: If possible, the people responsible for gathering and analysing data should add this to the worksheet before you start the review. If your team is big enough, you could assign small working groups to take responsibility for each value/standard in the strategy. Each working group could then analyse their part of the strategy, ahead of the review meeting, and bring to that meeting their findings and recommendations, which everyone then discusses, and agreement is reached.

we are already producing great journalism .... its how we package it!

Chapter 5: The evidence

What is 'good' journalism?

IMS' understanding

IMS' understanding of what constitutes 'good' journalism and how it is practiced has evolved as the media industry has undergone rapid change. In its 2012 policy framework, IMS aimed to back "quality content and public service programming". At the centre of the organisation's 2015-18 strategy was the "sustained production and distribution of ethical, professional and diverse public interest media content", which the 2020-2023 strategy referred to as "ethical and inclusive public interest content".

Like most media organisations, IMS deferred to internationally recognised ethical standards for journalism as benchmarks for how this content should look and sound. In 2018, IMS committed to four ethical principles of journalism – accuracy, independence, fairness, and accountability – while also being "guided" by a fifth: humanity.[9] These principles were distilled from more than 400 ethical guidelines and journalistic codes of practice from all over world. However, many of these codes pre-dated the digital era.

The latest IMS strategy embraces the role that journalists and other content producers play "in transforming societies for the wellbeing of the public", which requires the sustained production and distribution of "ethical, fact-based and gender-transformative public interest journalism and other media content".[10] Public interest journalism "informs members of the public about issues that shape their lives in ways that: serve the public's rather than any political, commercial or factional interest; encourage and inform public debate; hold those in power to account; and challenge discriminatory societal norms."[11] Journalists can practice this kind of journalism by:

- Deploying effective strategies to understand and reflect the needs of their targeted audience segments, including marginalised and underserved communities.
- Amplifying the voices of marginalised and vulnerable groups, where possible, by enhancing the representation of these communities in media outlets and the content outlets produce.
- Using audience and data insights to make decisions about such content.
- Developing codes of conduct and using these to self-monitor and self-regulate editorial standards and organisational processes to complement inclusive and independent regulatory mechanisms.[12]

Contested norms

Journalists, media activists, and academics are questioning how a traditional understanding of journalism's role in relatively stable and prosperous liberal democracies has been applied uncritically to less liberal, less stable, less prosperous, and less democratic societies.[13] In such places, journalists who strive to uphold rights-based, internationally recognised ethics in pursuit of social justice often do so at great risk in rapidly changing societies with colonial and authoritarian traditions, where media is less well-resourced yet invariably innovative.

For over a century, generations of journalists in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East have campaigned for social justice by challenging slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and autocracy. In the early 2000s, with the post-Cold War wave of democratisation surging through much of the world, Berger tried to 're-engineer' traditional theories of media and democracy to reflect the realities of media freedom and the growth of privately-owned media in southern Africa.[14] Meanwhile, Nyamnjoh argued that democratisation had been accompanied by "a crisis of ethics" in African journalism, with journalism showing "little creativity … in terms of reflecting the

9 IMS (2018). The Ethical Principles of Journalism IMS Subscribes To. *IMS practice note.*
10 IMS (2023). IMS Global Strategy 2024-28. p.3.
11 Ibid, p.29.
12 Ibid, p.29.
13 See for example: Chadha, K. and Koliska, M. (2016). Playing by a Different Set of Rules: Journalistic values in India's regional television newsrooms. *Journalism Practice* 10 (5). p.608-25, https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1032324; Lehmann-Jacobsen, E.T. (2017). Inside a contested profession: A comparative study of journalism in Singapore and Vietnam. *PhD thesis.* Copenhagen University. https://ccrs.ku.dk/staff/?pure=en%2Fpublications%2Finside-a-contested-profession(c481dcff-3546-46a9-940d-cd4e516e51be).html; Lush, D., Le Pelley, M. and Funk, K. (2012). A Matter of Principles: Self-Regulation, Working Conditions and Corruption in African Journalism. *Africa Media Barometer Brief.* Windhoek, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. https://collections.fes.de/publikationen/content/titleinfo/456118; Mano, W., & Milton, V. (2021). Decoloniality and the push for African media and communications studies. In the *Routledge Handbook of African Media and Communication Studies (1st ed.)* by Mano, W., & Milton, V. (Eds). p.1-18. London, Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351273206; Moyo, L. (2020). *The Decolonial Turn in Media Studies in Africa and the Global South* (1st Edition). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52832-4; Mutsvairo, B., Columbus, S. and Leijendekker, I. (2014). Reconnoitering the role of (citizen) journalism ethics in the emerging networked public sphere. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 35 (3). p.4–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2014.963279; Nyamnjoh, F. (2010). Africa's Media: Between Professional Ethics and Cultural Belonging. *Fesmedia Africa Series.* Windhoek: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. https://www.nyamnjoh.com/2011/06/africas-media-between-professional-ethics-and-cultural-belonging.html; Ogola, G. (2014). (Re-)Framing the 'Quality' Debate: The Arab Media and Its Future Journalism. In *The Future of Quality News Journalism – A Cross-Continental Analysis*, by Anderson, P., Ogola, G. and Williams, M. (eds). p.282–96. London: Routledge; Ogola, G. and Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2014). The Future of Quality News Journalism and Media Accountability in South Africa and Kenya. In Ibid, p. 227–47; Sonwalkar, P. (2014). Where More Is Not Better: Challenges Facing Quality News Journalism in 'Shining' India. In Ibid, p.267–81.

concerns and interests of the majority of Africans".[15] More recently, Chasi and Rodny-Gumede called for a "decolonial public interest journalism" based on the African moral philosophy of ubuntu, which advances free expression in a way that:

- Promotes co-operative social interactions fostered by trust, shared common ground, and solidarity, as well accountability through deliberation.
- Values accuracy as a commitment to truthfulness in a way that enables audiences to engage knowledgeably and maturely with issues that arise in the world.
- Grants recognition and dignity to audience members, as people capable of friendly relationships when afforded accurate information.[16]

As digitisation has made media production more accessible and affordable, entrepreneurial journalists have launched digital start-ups as alternatives to mainstream media that has been captured and/or corrupted. Their "democratic resistance" comes in the form of "stories that matter",[17] which is perhaps epitomised by the "counter journalism" of the Febrayer Network, a group of media start-ups from the Middle East and North Africa.[18]

Practitioners of new and innovative genres and formats – such as constructive, alternative, and sustainable journalism – are attempting to stay more in touch with, and thus relevant to, their increasingly fragmented audiences Technological change has also led to new journalistic methods: data journalism, mobile journalism, user generated content, gaming, and others, all of which push and sometimes cross the traditional boundaries of journalism.

Ethical principles revisited

Journalism ethics

Ethics are a set of rules that shape the behaviour of a group or society – in some respects, they determine what that group or society considers to be right and wrong behaviour. Ethics "rarely provide clear answers about the best way to handle quandaries" but are rather "about asking the 'right' questions to best illuminate our duties and potential impacts on others".[19]

To function effectively, journalism requires independent and ethical editorial systems, good governance and transparency in management, and a commitment to accountability that ensures engagement with the audience and responds to its concerns. In the digital age, ethical journalism is a distinctive form of communications that "is about the sharing of 'other regarding' information which delivers news and commentary in a process shaped by public interest and community values":[21]

"(Ethical journalism) is practiced by people who exercise self-restraint and who gain credibility and public trust by working according to an agreed code of principles. This is in sharp contrast to other voices in the public information space – political spin, corporate public relations, or social networks, for instance – who engage in 'self-regarding' communications, often reflecting the political, commercial or cultural bias of special interests or simply driven by personal prejudice."

From objectivity to empathy and solidarity

For a long time, objectivity was considered a cornerstone of ethical journalism but there is a growing realisation that like everyone else, journalists have their own views, biases, and prejudices. Instead of pretending these can somehow be put aside, journalists should be aware of/honest about them and keep an open mind while actively seeking out different perspectives. Acknowledging this shift in perspective, IMS chose "fairness" rather than objectivity as one of the ethical principles it recognised in 2018.[22]

The same could be said for emotions. Wahl-Jorgensen identifies the "emotional turn" in journalism studies that has coincided with the emergence of digital and social media.[23] Even conventional "hard news genres" are shaped by an engagement with emotion, which points to a more empathetic approach to journalism that has previously been obscured by the view of journalists as "detached observers".[24] Empathy is a psychological construct that describes how individuals react cognitively and emotionally to another person's

14 Berger, G. (2002). Theorizing the Media – Democracy Relationship in Southern Africa. *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)* 64/1. p.21-45.

15 Nyamnjoh, F. (2005). *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging.* p.81-99. London: Zed Books.

16 Chasi, C. and Rodny-Gumede, Y. (2022). Decolonial Journalism: New Notes on Ubuntu and the Public Interest. p.1633 in *Journalism Studies* 23/13. p.1625–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2083006.

17 Deuze, M. and Witschge, T (2020). *Beyond Journalism.* p.108-128. Cambridge, Polity.

18 *Febrayer* and IMS (2022). The Power of Collaboration: The *Febrayer* Network of Independent Arab Media. *International Journalism Festival* panel discussion. Retrieved 28 January, 2024 from https://www.journalismfestival.com/programme/2022/the-power-of-collaboration-the-febrayer-network-of-independent-arab-media; Nielsen, A.G. (2018). 'A Processual Evaluation of the February Meet-Up Network'. IMS report.

19 Plaisance, P.L. (2016). Journalism Ethics. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication,* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.89.

20 White, A. (2018). Media Ethics in a Context of War or Conflict. IMS internal discussion paper. p.3.

21 Ibid.

22 IMS (2018)

23 Wahl-Jorgensen, K (2020). An Emotional Turn in Journalism Studies? *Digital Journalism* 8/2. p.175–94.

24 Ibid, p.180.

experiences[25] and is already valued in other professions and forms of storytelling. For example, healthcare workers are committed to providing empathetic care, while the ability to create empathy is the hallmark of a good book, film, or play:[26]

'"When I go to a great movie I can live somebody else's life for a while. I can walk in somebody else's shoes. I can see what it feels like to be a member of a different gender, a different race, a different economic class, to live in a different time, to have a different belief'".[27]

With algorithms and software using emotional cues to get audiences' attention and to prolong engagement, "journalists need to … adopt new storytelling techniques such as scrolling texts and gamification that create pleasure and empathy for audiences while also imparting serious information and challenging ideas, thereby reaffirming traditional – and much neglected – journalism values such as transparency, expertise, and independent and critical reporting and analysis".[28]

However, journalists might need more than empathy to address the social injustices that audiences may experience:[29]

"News reporting … often encourages audience empathy instead of solidarity by representing social injustice as individual problems…This distinction is important because strictly evoking empathy for individuals places journalism on a trajectory to suggest individualistic remedies to an issue…., whereas inviting solidarity charts a course for large-scale social change."

Comparing the coverage of homelessness by media outlets in San Francissco, USA, Varma distinguishes between empathy and solidarity, the latter being a political commitment to addressing social injustice that translates into collective action.[30] While coverage by the mainstream San Francissco Chronicle stirred empathy for the homeless, it focussed on individuals and their problems but overlooked systemic issues that contribute to homelessness in the city. The digital start-up AlterNet, on the other hand, portrayed a community of homeless people living with shared struggles, such as not having access to basic amenities, dealing with the city's practices of confiscating their possessions, and not being able to afford housing despite working fulltime jobs. This coverage sought systemic solutions to the systemic conditions that denigrated their collective dignity.

Empathy is arguably a step towards addressing social injustices, Varma concludes, but does not address the politics and systemic causes of these injustices:[31]

"Whether journalism facilitates incremental change (by encouraging empathy) or fosters societal transformation (by inviting solidarity) begins with how journalists humanize marginalized communities, which, in turn, charts a course for the possibilities for social change."

Inclusivity and diversity

Journalists with similar backgrounds and life experiences are arguably best placed to empathise with their story subjects and audience members. If public interest journalism is to "amplify the voices of marginalised and vulnerable groups", as IMS' current global strategy envisions,[32] then members of these communities need to be more involved:[33]

"Media content does not reflect society if the newsroom does not reflect society. On the contrary, newsrooms that have a preponderance of a specific group tend to sideline the voices, perspectives, and interests of other groups. IMS will therefore continue to support the development of inclusive workspaces, free from discrimination and harassment, through inclusive and transformative policies and mechanisms."

25 Davis et. al. in Varma, A. (2019). When Empathy Is Not Enough: The Possibilities for Solidarity in The San Francisco Homeless Project. *Journalism Practice* 13/1, p.106.
26 Carruthers, P., Palmer, C. and McKeown, M. (2023). Empathy Machines: Using Theatre and Film in the Training of Compassionate and Reflective Health Professionals. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies* 17/1. p.153-70.
27 Ebert in Ibid, p.156.
28 Beckett, C. (2017). Emotionally networked journalism: regaining trust, rebuilding truth? *Polis blog.* Retrieved 6 November, 2022.
29 Varma (2019), p.105.
30 Ibid, p.106.
31 Ibid, p.117.
32 IMS (2024), p.15.
33 IMS (2021). IMS Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2023. p.14.

Chapter 5: The evidence

With IMS support, women journalists in Somalia, for example, have won the right to paid maternity leave, while IMS media partners in Somalia and other countries have introduced policies against sexual harassment, resulting in more women journalists remaining in their jobs for longer and the creation of more stories by women.[34][35][36]

In 2022, IMS organised a series of workshops, entitled Reaching Young Audiences, for its partners. Participants and presenters said that involving young people in storytelling helps to build empathy and trust with young audiences:[37]

"The greatest opportunity in reaching young audiences with social media is letting them tell their story in their own way."

A leading Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* teamed up with a civil society organisation, the Women's Initiative for Peace Alliance (IMP), to provide 15 women activists with the platform to tell their own stories about the country's peace process.[38] The activists decided what stories to tell, how to tell them, where to go, who to interview, what to publish, and what not to publish.[39] Journalists guided the exercise, but women social leaders made the decisions, changing the usual journalistic routines in the process:[40]

'"Here we changed everything. From proposing the theme, the focus and, above all, highlighting stories that were of interest to them (the women social leaders) or their communities, their struggles or needs. This is how we met their need for communication and representation."'

The PRIMED programme[41] found that a combination of strategies and interventions by three media partners in three different contexts over three years managed to improve gender representation in the following areas:[42]

- Workplace gender equality
- Gender-sensitive and gender-balanced content
- Increasing the media outlets' reach and appeal to women.

Different interventions and approaches seemed to complement and reinforce each other, reaffirming the importance of clearly defining gender goals and implementing practical, achievable initiatives to obtain the desired changes.[43] A key determining factor, however, seemed to be the level of commitment from an organisation's leadership.

Transformative 'public good'

IMS' mantra 'good journalism, better societies' implies that journalism should help improve the communities it serves; journalism is not a passive portrayal of events, it should contribute towards constructive social change, whether a shift in an individual's mindset or the things people do collectively to improve their lives and the lives of others around them.

The wish to inspire and galvanise constructive change motivates the journalism of most IMS partners and resonates through the "journalism that matters" and "democratic resistance" that Deuze and Wietschge find in their study of digital start-ups around the world.[44] It also seems to encapsulate the concept of journalism as a public good:

"…information that empowers citizens to exercise their fundamental rights, supports gender equality and allows for the participation and trust in democratic governance and sustainable development".[45]

This sense of agency and transformation resonates too in the active verbs – 'promote, 'grant, 'enable', 'challenge, 'encourage, 'hold', and so on – that pepper contemporary definitions of public interest journalism and public interest news.

34 Marimbe, S. (2023). Challenging Old Practices with a Feminist Approach. In *Collaborating for Good Journalism - IMS Annual Report 2022*. p.40–43. Copenhagen: IMS.
35 Hedegaard, J. (2020). How a group of Somali women journalists gained their tight to maternity leave. *IMS blog*. Retrieved June 29, 2024.
36 Chocarno, S. (2019). *The Safety of Women Journalists: Breaking the Cycle of Silence and Violence*. Copenhagen, IMS.
37 Bjerkestrand, S. (2023). Reaching Young People on Social Media. *IMS Learning Brief*. p.7.
38 This participatory journalism project was funded by IMS and used a methodology designed by IMS and El Espectador. The activists' stories can be found at https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/mujeres-escribimos-la-historia/.
39 Morales Castillo, C.S. (2023). How are Colombian women being represented in the media? *IMS blog*. Retrieved 19 May, 2024.
40 Gloria Castrillón in Ibid.
41 The three-year Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) programme, which supported public interest media in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone between 2020-23, was implemented by a consortium of media development organisations led by BBC Media Action with the Communications Initiative, Free Press Unlimited, IMS, the Global Forum for Media Development, and the Media Development Investment Fund (see https://projects-primed.gfmd.info/ for details).
42 PRIMED (2024). Gender Equality in the Media. *PRIMED Learning Brief*.
43 Ibid.
44 Deuze and Witschge (2020).
45 UNESCO (2021). Windhoek + 30 Declaration: Information as a Public Good, World Press Freedom Day 2021, Article 7. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378158.

Impact for whom?

The change journalism helps bring about – journalism's impact – can vary significantly depending on the goals and priorities of different journalists and newsrooms,[46] while it is difficult to isolate and measure the precise impact of journalism in its wider ecosystem.[47] Still, journalists and media organisations worldwide are engaged in assessing the impact of their work, driven by a dual motivation of self-evaluation and the need to demonstrate value to donors, investors, and the public.[48]

Until now, efforts to measure this impact seem to have focussed more on the perspectives of donors and investors, as a way of evaluating their investment,[49] and less on the impact that journalists and media outlets want to have.

Accountability and transparency

The need for journalism to be empathetic, inclusive, diverse, and transformative also challenges journalists to think differently about editorial independence. The 2018 IMS ethical principles of journalism envisaged "a clear separation between owners, advertisers, and funders on the one hand and editorial decision making on the other".[50] This is impossible for most smaller media outlets invariably owned by journalists involved in generating much-needed revenue,[51] and all the more reason for them to be transparent, accountable, and live up to the values they espouse, by:

- Explaining how stories are produced and how data is used.
- Being upfront about their core values, ownership structures, and any conflicts of interest.
- Putting in place independent, accessible, inexpensive, and responsive ways for audience members to correct, challenge, and complain about stories.
- Responding quickly and openly to inaccuracies and mistakes.

Human dignity and the 'ethics of listening'

Humanity is one of the principles that emerged from the Ethical Journalism Network's analysis of more than 400 journalism codes of ethics from around the world:[52]

"Journalists should do no harm. What we publish or broadcast may be hurtful, but we should be aware of the impact of our words and images on the lives of others."

Wasserman considers human dignity as an ethical principle for media in a young democracy like South Africa, as it "can enhance citizen voices and contribute to the development of their capabilities".[53] However, politicians can use this as a "spurious defence against the media's unearthing of corruption and wrongdoing" and, therefore, human dignity manifests in the "ethics of listening", which entails journalists:[54]

- Listening attentively to stories, especially those of people who might not otherwise be heard "because they find themselves too often in the shadows of the public sphere", and to "their narratives about their everyday lives, their struggles but also their victories, their pain but also their pleasures".
- Making a proactive intervention to try and change society "rather than just mirroring it as it already is".
- Becoming "gate openers" rather than "gatekeepers" by decentralising the power structures inherent in media production and involving news subjects "as equal partners in the production process".
- Departing from "the professional ideology of control and dissemination of information into a much more interactive, reciprocal relationship with citizens".

46 Schwaiger, C. (2023). How to track the impact of your investigative journalism. *The Fix website*. Retrieved 1 July, 2024.

47 Schiffrin, A. and Zuckerman, E. (2015). Can We Measure Media Impact? Surveying the Field. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved 1 July, 2024.

48 Journalism Funders Forum (n.d). Measuring Journalism's Impact: Not a Cakewalk. *Journalism Funders Forum website article*. Retrieved 1 July, 2024 .

49 For example, see Media and Journalism Research Center (2023). Pluralis Fund Uses MJRC Expertise in Its Media Impact Dashboard, MJRSC website article. Retrieved 1 July, 2024 from https://journalismresearch.org/2023/06/pluralis-fund-uses-mjrc-expertise-in-its-media-impact-dashboard/.

50 IMS (2018).

51 Deuze and Witschge (2020).

52 EJN (n.d.). Who We Are. *Ethical Journalism Network website*. Retrieved 19 April 2024.

53 Wasserman, H. (2013). Journalism in a new democracy: The ethics of listening. *Communicatio* 39/1. p.77.

54 Ibid, p.78-80.

Editorial values

While ethical principles determine what we consider right and how we ought to behave, our values shape what we think is important and how we actually behave. Sometimes values might be at odds with ethical principles. As a matter of principle, journalists strive to be accurate and fair, yet the countless studies have revealed that media coverage is often inherently biased. The Global Media Monitoring Project's *Who Makes the News* study, for example, has found repeatedly that women are vastly underrepresented as both the subjects and sources of news stories.[55]

As the IMS ethical principles document points out:[56]

"Many ethical guidelines, codes, and regulatory mechanisms are blind to or silent about the media's often prejudicial and misinformed coverage of women and other disadvantaged groups. Given that powerful cultural norms shape and dictate this coverage, we should go out of our way to ensure that these principles are applied equally to all sections of society in our journalism…"

The recent fragmentation of media makes it more difficult to apply ethical standards. Regulatory and self-regulatory bodies responsible for media content may not have jurisdiction over what is published online. And many journalists now work from home, which dissipates the collective newsroom culture that used to influence how editorial teams applied their ethical standards.

In this ethical vacuum, the values of a news outlet, individual journalists, and their audiences may now have a greater influence, on how journalism is practiced, than professional codes of ethics. Commercial, political, and social pressures can push journalism further away from ethical standards, given the financial rewards that online platforms offer to clickbait and disinformation. But this prioritisation, of reach over quality, undermines what distinguishes journalism from other forms of information, not to mention journalism's credibility. As a result, there seems to be a growing consensus that public interest values can and should enhance a media outlet's viability and, thereby, the sustainability of its public interest journalism.

News values reflecting a range influences, from workplace routines to ideology, have long determined what stories journalists and media outlets choose to cover; they become part of a newsroom culture that journalists absorb and internalise.[57] But journalism cultures vary from country to country.[58] [59]

When comparing the perceptions of Vietnamese and Singaporean journalists, for example, Lehmann-Jacobsen identified five journalistic "ideals" that "guide journalists in the two countries and serve as a legitimising base for their profession".[60] And while journalists from both countries orientated themselves around three similar ideals, their "interpretation and consecration" of these ideals differed because of a complex interplay of influencing factors – notably the countries' political systems.[61] Journalists in both countries were also cognizant of and respected the publics' expectations, but responded to these expectations differently too, as illustrated by these quotations from two of the journalists Lehmann-Jacobsen interviewed:[62]

'"I mean in terms of the public we bear the burden of being seen as propaganda and also being compliant and… and that's one… That's the baggage that we have. But in the new day and age because information is so cheaply available – it's free – they tend to not think that the work you do is valuable"' (Singaporean journalist).

"The audience is much better informed and know many things already. It is therefore up to the journalists to provide them with something new. They are not listening in the same way as they used to – and that has made our jobs as journalists more difficult. We have to be more creative and find new angles on stories" (Vietnamese journalist).

Wasserman and Maweu found that owners' and shareholders' interests directly and indirectly influenced the ethical decisions of journalists working for East Africa's largest media group, Nation Media, mainly through their appointment of the company's top executives and the "'silent policies'" put in place to protect owners' and shareholders' interests.[63] From a societal perspective, Leal found that conventional news values and theories about news consumption may not automatically apply to poor or marginalised people in polarised societies such as South Africa.[64]

55 See https://whomakesthenews.org
56 IMS (2018).
57 Caple, H. and Bednarek, M. (2013). Delving into the Discourse: Approaches to News Values in Journalism Studies and Beyond. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism Working Paper*. p.7. Retrieved 23 April, 2024.
58 See The Worlds of Journalism Study (n.d.). *Worlds of Journalism Study website*. Retrieved 28 January 2024, https://worldsofjournalism.org/.
59 Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I. and Coman, M. (2011). Mapping journalism cultures across nations: A comparative study of 18 countries. *Journalism Studies* 12/3. p.273–93.
60 Lehmann-Jacobsen, E.T. (2017), p.101-110.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid, p.139-141.
63 Wasserman, H. and Mwende Maweu, J. (2014). The freedom to be silent? Market pressures on journalistic normative ideals at the Nation Media Group in Kenya. *Review of African Political Economy* 41/142. p.623–33.
64 Leal, S. (2019). 'News Is About What Happens on the Inside': News in an Informal Urban Settlement in South Africa. *Communicatio* 45/4. p.1–18.

Creating value

The rapid and global technological changes that have disrupted how journalism is produced and consumed "compel those of us who see the industry as more than a business to consider fundamental questions of how news organizations create value, and what must be done to improve value creation to keep them viable".[65] This requires commitment to and utilisation of journalism's fundamental values to create better value for key stakeholders in journalism: consumers, advertisers, media investors, journalists, and society.[66]

Types of value

Value reflects the worth of something: its importance and usefulness, what we appreciate about it. "Value is in the mind of the consumer and is a measure of the worth or importance placed on a product or service".[67]

One measure of value is the amount of money something is worth. But there are other ways we assess value, particularly when it comes to the ethics and beliefs that shape the way we think and behave. "Intrinsic value" reflects the ultimate importance of something, the factors that make it valuable in its own right. From a business and finance perspective, this is the ultimate value that something has, taking into consideration all factors and not just the price it fetches in a market.[68]

Then there is "instrumental value"; factors that contribute towards achieving what is ultimately important; a means to an end. Something that is of instrumental value can "lose that value when it is no longer necessary to achieve the end in question" because something else can be used to achieve that end or "when the end in question is no longer desired".[69]

Journalism's value

Journalism has both intrinsic and instrumental value. While it provides people with information to use in their day-to-day lives (instrumental value), this can also enhance people's sense of identity, wellbeing, and purpose, which contributes to development and democracy (intrinsic value). For a long time, journalism has relied on this intrinsic value. But with many other sources of news and information now available, journalism must provide something different and more distinctive if people are to give it their money, time, and attention.[70] This "value proposition" is determined, for example, by the quality of journalism, the design of journalism products, their availability and usability, along with additional features and experiences they may offer.[71] This is created throughout journalism's "value chain", the process by which journalism is researched, edited, designed, packaged, curated, and distributed.[72]

While journalists play a crucial role in this value creation process, they rely on money, information, and other inputs provided by media owners and investors, audience members, advertisers, and the wider society. Journalism creates value for all these various stakeholders.[73] However, Olsen found that stakeholders in local news providers in Norway may perceive the value of journalism differently, "which suggests that news media's value creation is not a friction free process but rather a complex set of inter-actions between parties and interests that may or may not be aligned".[74]

Balancing interests

Olsen's integrated value creation model identifies "value flows and gaps" between local newspaper businesses, audiences, and society that emerge from these stakeholders' converging and conflicting interests,[75] which suggests that when it comes to journalism, and public interest journalism in particular, value creation is a constant balancing act that involves weighing various stakeholders' interests.

As media have become increasingly reliant on audiences for revenue, audience data has become integral to the editorial decisions of many newsrooms. This data has tended to focus on metrics such as "clicks, likes and shares", which have little to do with journalism ethics and editorial values,[76] although some media are trying to measure quality too. *The Guardian*, for example, recently started measuring how "deeply" articles are read, with their lists of "most viewed" and "most deeply read" articles often containing completely different stories.[77]

[65] Picard, R.G. (2006) Journalism, Value Creation and the Future of News Organizations. *Harvard Kennedy School, Shornstein Center for Media, Politics and Public Policy paper.* p.6. Retrieved 27 December, 2022 .

[66] Ibid, 3.

[67] Picard, R.G. (2010). *Value Creation and the Future of News Organizations: Why and How Journalism Must Change to Remain Relevant in the Twenty-First Century.* p.10. Lisbon: Media XXI.

[68] Kolb, R.W. (2008). Instrumental Value. *Encyclopedia of Business Ethics and Society.* Thousand Oaks CA, SAGE Publications.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Picard, R.G. (2010), p.110-11.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Picard, R.G. (2011). *The Economics and Financing of Media Companies: Second Edition.* Fordham University Press.

[73] Picard, R.G. (2010).

[74] Olsen, R.K. (2021) The Value of Local News in the Digital Realm: Introducing the Integrated Value Creation Model. *Digital Journalism* 9/6. p.813.

[75] Ibid, 813-825.

[76] For example, see Lush. D (2022). How African newsrooms are using AI to analyze data and produce good journalism, *IMS website article.* Retrieved 23 April, 2024.

[77] The Guardian (2024). What is the 'Deeply read' list? *The Guardian.* Retrieved April 23, 2024.

A key takeaway from a series of IMS staff webinars on media viability, held in 2020, was that the values espoused by media should drive their efforts to generate income:[78]

"There was a sense from the webinars' presentations and discussions that good journalism can sell without undermining what media partners, their audiences, and IMS believe in."

In this respect, Martina Klárová's analysis of how news leaders evaluate the success of a news story is informative, coming from someone who makes a living helping publishers to monetise their content:[79]

"The magic of a successful article goes beyond numbers – it ignites curiosity, sparks conversations, and provokes thought. In the quest for success, one should not be confined by data alone. Rather, go and seek out the intangible connections that resonate deeply with your readers. It is these elements of empathy, authenticity, and a genuine passion to enlighten that truly set an article apart. After all, the road to success is not just paved with data – it is built on the foundation of genuine human connections and lasting impact."

Valuable journalism

Olsen's value creation model "casts audiences in a role as active co-creators of value, rather than passive recipients of a value delivery… Being sensitive to what audiences truly appreciate is an urgent objective for news operations".[80] Costera Meijer has identified three experiences of journalism that audience members considered valuable:[81]

- Getting recognition.
- Learning something new.
- Increasing mutual understanding.

These experiences are achieved by applying the six "journalistic virtues": accuracy, sincerity, listening, hospitality, being a good friend, and keeping a proper distance.[82] However, these virtues may not always be compatible and therefore may require journalists to negotiate which virtues are most important in a particular story or context.[83]

Shifts in journalism practice

Ironically, the art of storytelling is emerging as an antidote to journalism's current existential crisis, prompting changes in journalism practice that seem to reflect the shifts in ethical principles and news values referred to earlier.

"We used to think our (journalism's) power was in reach, audience, and storytelling. We have lost our reach, and we don't necessarily have the audience anymore. So, the only thing we're left with is storytelling. If we start with the acceptance of that, then let's see what we can build."[84]

Innovation and re-invention

Recognising that "the plurality of audiences, behaviours and technologies challenge the classic models of journalism in a way that encourages innovation",

Moreira Flores identifies three areas of change in "journalism as a process and product": content and narrative, technology and format, and business model.[85]

Forms of storytelling used by novelists are more effective in transferring knowledge to news consumers than journalism's inverted pyramid,[86] which has been journalists' stock-in-trade ever since space and speed became a premium for newspaper publishers (Kulkarni et al., 2022):[87]

"While the professional norms, habits, and preferences exercised by journalists might be much less easy to redefine, our research suggests that it might be innovation in the narrative structure that makes online news more engaging, convenient, and useful than the alternatives currently available."

[78] Lush, D. (2021) Supporting Media Business Viability. *IMS Learning Brief.* p.6.
[79] Klárová, M. (2024). How do news leaders define success in their newsroom? *journalism.co.uk.* Retrieved 7 February, 2024 .
[80] Olsen, R.K. (2021), 826-827.
[81] Costera Meijer, I. (2022). What is Valuable Journalism? Three Key Experiences and Their Challenges for Journalism Scholars and Practitioners. *Digital Journalism* 10/2, p.230–52.
[82] Ibid, 243-5
[83] Ibid.
[84] Workshop participant in Abbott, S. and Lush, D. (2020) Media innovation. *IMS Learning Brief,* p.10.
[85] Moreira Flores, A.M. (2017). Innovation Journalism: A Multiple Concept. *Brazilian Journalism Research* 13/2, p.156–79.
[86] The model for journalistic story writing that arranges facts in descending order of importance.
[87] Kulkarni, S., Thomas, R., Komorowski, M. and Lewis, J. (2022). Innovating Online Journalism: New Ways of Storytelling. *Journalism Practice* 17/9. p.1859.

Storytelling that "first reaches and then captures the audience's attention in innovative ways" could help media to sustain public interest journalism in tough media environments:[88]

"From new methods of audience research to involving the audience in content creation, the role and importance of audiences in this new era of journalism is both exciting and requires continual reflection, iteration, and a willingness to try new approaches."

The experiences of some IMS media partners suggests that "being upfront about their values seems to give these media the confidence to experiment with both income generating and storytelling formats":[89]

"Some of these formats are risqué and purists might question their adherence to ethical journalistic standards, but these partners seem able to push these boundaries without crossing them because it remains clear to everyone that these formats are consistent with their values."

Emotional intelligence

As journalism opens up to its "emotional turn",[90] emotional intelligence – our ability to recognise and manage emotions – enables journalists to deal with the wide range of emotions that they encounter in their work.[91] "Moral courage" rather than "old-fashioned journalistic grit" allows journalists to go to great lengths to cover conflict and to expose crime and corruption.[92] Both, it seems, are needed to avoid the "moral injury" and emotional burnout that many journalists experience from covering issues that violate their personal morals and values.[93 94 95]

Empathy, emotional intelligence, moral courage, and the risk of moral injury converge when journalists cover political violence. Photojournalist Joseph Mathenge's coverage of the Westgate Shopping Mall siege in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2014[96] won awards, not for the sensationalism of his photos but the sensitivity he showed towards the people he photographed:[97]

"His colleagues all mentioned one word concerning Joseph's work: empathy. Joseph Mathenge showed great empathy towards the victims on the scene."

Similarly, photojournalist Mimi Chakarova's decision not to show the potentially sensational scars born by the women she met during her seven-year investigation into the plight of sex trafficking victims from Eastern Europe made an impression on fellow freelancer Barbara Matejcic:[98]

"That kind of a decision implies a large dose of basic human empathy and a lack of journalistic egotism, which is precisely what I believe is missing from today's journalism."

Having assessed how fear and trauma affected journalists in some of the countries where IMS operates,[99] psychosocial support became a component of the organisation's strategic approach to journalists safety.[100]

From competition to co-operation

Journalism is an increasingly cooperative venture. Throughout its history, IMS has supported journalists working together to investigate stories, particularly across borders.[101 102 103 104] And media start-ups often have collaborative management structures, partly as an alternative to the hierarchical structures of legacy media.[105 106] Cooperation is also a revenue strategy for politically pressured media, but can be a source of tension in collaborative editorial practices:[107]

"The conditions for collaborative approaches were most favourable where interdependence offered editorial, practical, and commercial opportunities for mutual support. Success depended as much on conduct and shared values as it did on resources and operational considerations."

88 Abott, S. and Lush, D (2021), p.10.
89 Lush, D. (2021), p.6.
90 Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2020).
91 Šimunjak, M. (2023). Managing emotions in journalism. *journalism.co.uk*. Retrieved 28 January, 2024 .
92 Feinstein, A. (2023). Why journalists risk their lives for a story. *journalism.co.uk*. Retrieved 19 May, 2024 from.
93 Granger, J. (2024). Have your say: new study wants to know how UK-based journalists cope with moral injury. *journalism.co.uk*. Retrieved 19 May, 2024.
94 Šimunjak, M. (2023).
95 Green, D. (2019). How to handle sensitive topics and protect reporters' mental health – Tip of the Day. *journalism.co.uk*. Retrieved 19 May, 2024 .
96 See https://citizen.digital/news/westgate-series-mathenge-the-photojournalist-72884 and https://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/18/world/africa/african-journalist-awards-2014-winners/index.html
97 Akhundova, G. and Lygnerud Boberg, E. (2021). The right to know and the duty to protect: terrorism and the media. *IMS blog*. Retrieved May 19, 2024 .
98 In IMS (2011). We are laying the foundation for a new kind of investigative journalism. *IMS blog*. Retrieved 19 May, 2024 .
99 Betz, M. (2019). Fear, trauma and local journalists: Cross-border lessons in psychosocial support for journalists. *IMS Assessment Report*.
100 IMS (2023), p.19.
101 IMS (n.d.). Good journalism. *IMS blog*. Retrieved 20 May, 2024, (retrieved 20 May, 2024).
102 IMS (2019). Mediabridge: upcoming platform for stories from underreported regions. *IMS blog*. Retrieved 20 May, 2024.
103 Sabbagh, R. (2016). Despite growing repression, investigative journalism survives in the Arab world. *IMS blog*. Retrieved 20 May, 2024.
104 Brice, K. and Kamwi, M. (2013). Investigative Journalism Learning Review: Learning from the Experience of SCOOP Classic and Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism. *IMS evaluation report*.
105 Deuze and Witschge (2020).
106 Sakr, N. (2016). Survival or sustainability? Contributions of innovatively managed news ventures to the future of Egyptian journalism. *Journal of Media Business Studies* 13/1. p.45–59.
107 Cook, C.E. (2023). Assessing conditions for inter-firm collaboration as a revenue strategy for politically pressured news media. *Journal of Media Business Studies* 20/1. p.52–71.

In her study of three Egyptian media start-ups, Sakr found that "in authoritarian contexts, operating 'collaboratively, transparently, and ethically' may have short term implications on productivity and profitability but lay stronger foundations for sustainability among media teams, as well as with readers and advertisers, in the long run".[108]

Participation and active listening

The participation of audience members in story production and other aspects of the media operation used to distinguish community media from privately owned and taxpayer-funded media.[109] But participation is becoming more mainstream, as all types of media try to engage more with their audiences.[110] Enabled by digital technology, citizens journalism, user-generated content and other forms of participatory journalism are motivated by a strong sense of social responsibility, particularly when practitioners of legacy media fall short of the professional values they espouse.[111 112 113 114]

There are varying degrees of participation: audience members might respond to stories via a website's comments section or a radio programme's phone-in; they might shape a media outlet's news agenda by advising journalists on what stories to cover; they might even follow through and help select story angles and/or have a say in editing.

"Genuine participation generates a strong sense of community ownership whereby the media is demystified because community members see and understand for themselves how the medium works."'[115]

This involves "active listening", wherein a media outlet moves beyond just representing a community of people or acting as the "voice of the voiceless" and instead provides a space where a community can speak out and receive attention.[116] Commercial considerations often discourage such active listening journalism, even within community media outlets:[117]

"The impetus for listening is usually driven by a desire to understand a local situation and… to build a strong relationship of loyalty with a particular readership or audience. The impulse is also a social justice one – to take responsibility for redressing the inequalities of the democratic present."

The ten-step Citizen's Agenda[118] model, which is designed to shape journalists' election coverage based on what audiences want to know rather than what politicians want to say, starts with journalists listening to what their audiences would like politicians to talk about.[119] The "voters' agenda" that arises from this process then becomes the template for journalists' coverage of the campaign.[120]

If translated into journalism practice, the "story listening" method that enabled former child soldiers to create an animated film based on their shared experiences of the Colombian civil war "could offer a more inclusive and bottom-up approach" to storytelling.[121]

User needs and social change

There was a time when journalists paid little attention to what their audience wanted or needed. But as audiences have abandoned mainstream media for other platforms, journalists have embraced story telling methods that address "user needs" by providing audience members with information they find pleasing and useful.[122] This approach is based on "uses and gratification theory", which "relies on the notion of the audience simply as a collection of diverse, isolated individuals each of whom will read the media according to her or his own needs and interests".[123] This risks overlooking:

- How audience members interact with and make sense of journalism within their social and professional settings.
- What impact – if any – this interaction and interpretation might have on the life of the individual and on their society.

108 Sakr, N. (2016), p.45.
109 Lush, D. and Urgoiti, G. (2012). Participation Pays: The Sustainability of Community Broadcasting in Perspective. *Fesmedia Africa Series.* Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Windhoek.
110 For example, see: Castillo (2023); Mawindi Mabweazara, H. and Mare, A. (2021) *Participatory Journalism in Africa: Digital News Engagement and User Agency in the South*, 1st ed. New York : Routledge, 2021, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429242908.
111 Terah Ambala, A. (2014). Reimagining the Kenyan television broadcasting scape: Active user-generated content (AUGC) as an emancipating platform. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 35/3. p.39–53.
112 Cook, C. and Dickinson, A. (2014). UK Social Media, Citizen Journalism and Alternative News. p.202-24 in *The Future of Quality News Journalism*, by Anderson, P., Ogola, G. and Williams, M. (eds). London: Routledge.
113 Dugmore, H. and Ligaga, D. (2014). Citizen Journalism in South Africa and Kenya: The Quandary of Quality and the Prospects for Growth. p.248-64 in *The Future of Quality News Journalism – A Cross-Continental Analysis*, by Anderson, P., Ogola, G., and Williams, M.(eds). London: Routledge.
114 Mutsvairo, B., Columbus, S. and Leijendekker, I. (2014). Reconnoitering the role of (citizen) journalism ethics in the emerging networked public sphere. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 35/3. p.4–22.
115 Fairbairn in Lush, D. and Urgoiti, G. (2012), p.8.
116 Garman, A. and Malila, V. (2017). Listening and the ambiguities of voice in South African journalism. *Communicatio* 43/1. p.3.
117 Ibid, p.13-14.
118 https://www.thecitizensagenda.org
119 Granger, J. (2024). Covering elections: how to not let politicians steal the narrative. *journalism.co.uk*. Retrieved 20 May, 2024 .
120 Ibid.
121 Jukes, S., Charles, M. and Fowler-Watt, K. (2021). Rethinking Journalism Practice Through Innovative Approaches to Post Conflict Reporting. *Journalism Practice* 15/6. p.780.
122 For example, see ten Teije, S. and Woudstra, J. (2023). The user needs for news, explained. smartocto website article. Retrieved on January 28, 2024 .
123 Kitzinger, J. (1990). Audience Understandings of AIDS Media Messages: A Discussion of Methods. *Sociology of Health & Illness* 12/3. p.320.

When assessing people's understanding of media messages about HIV and AIDS, researchers found that audiences "read" media messages within a social context and drew on a mixture of personal experience and their understandings of wider issues.[124] The researchers went on to conclude:[125]

"We are none of us self-contained, isolated, static entities; we are part of complex and overlapping social, familial and collegiate networks. Our personal behaviour is not cut off from public discourses and our actions do not happen in a cultural vacuum."

With this in mind, civic groups and documentary filmmakers in southern Africa teamed up to run screenings in community settings of the award-winning *Steps for the Future* documentary films about HIV and AIDS. Having watched one, the audience were invited to participate in discussions facilitated by activists and, in some cases, by people featured in the films who could address any misconceptions the audience had – about the disease and people living with HIV – in a diplomatic and culturally sensitive way that encouraged changes in attitudes and behaviour within the society.[126]

Levine found that, by respecting audiences "interpretive abilities" in this way, the films helped break the silence on, and denial of, HIV and AIDS that were prevalent in southern Africa at the time.[127]

Therefore, the way in which audiences engage with and make sense of stories, with other people where they live and work, seems to affect media's impact at both an individual and a societal level.

Conclusion

Journalism is no longer the exclusive domain of professionals working for specific institutions. Increasingly, public interest journalism is defined by the ways it is practiced, the quality of stories it produces and their impact – rather than by the institutions and individuals telling these stories.

Journalists have innovated in response to the seismic changes of the past three decades, while borrowing from other related and not-so-related fields: social change communication, documentary film, literature, computer science, and computer gaming, for example. Journalists are also having to develop new skills, such as data analysis, coding, mindfulness, critical thinking, and active listening.

However, the application of ethical standards and editorial values – with the intention of having a beneficial impact on society – continues to distinguish public interest journalism from other forms of information and storytelling. And therein lies public interest journalism's value and, arguably, its route to sustainability. Unlocking this value involves balancing the sometimes-competing interests of different stakeholders who have the means and motives to sustain public interest journalism.

Based on the research and other literature reviewed in this chapter, the handbook's framework and guide endeavours to provide journalists and their editorial teams with a useful way to design and implement editorial strategies that connect valuable, value-driven, and ethical journalistic practice with the impact they want their journalism to have. The evidence suggests the more that journalists and media outlets make a difference to the lives of people in their audiences and society, the more likely those people will be to give them the time, attention, data, support, goodwill, solidarity, and money so desperately needed to sustain public interest journalism. There is only one way to know for sure: try it and see.

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124 Ibid, 334.
125 Kitzinger, J. (1994). The Methodology of Focus Groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health & Illness* 16/1. p.117.
126 Vehkalahti, I. and Edkins, D. (2008). *Steps by Steps*. Johannesburg, Jacana.
127 Levine, S. (2008). Documentary film matters: The Steps for the Future media advocacy Project in Southern Africa. *Critical Arts* 27/2. p.235.

How this handbook was collated

This handbook is the product of an iterative process involving workshops, a short survey, a literature review, and discussions undertaken between January 2023 and March 2025, which aimed to unpack what 'good journalism, better societies' means in practice.

Given the upheavals in media in recent years, IMS wanted to deepen its understanding of:

- What constitutes public interest journalism, particularly in the regions where IMS operates.
- How the practice of public interest journalism can contribute towards the business viability of a media outlet.

The IMS Good Journalism working group[128] began by brainstorming what is understood by the term 'public interest journalism'. Then IMS staff and senior journalists from IMS media partners[129] were individually asked – via a short, voluntary survey – to identify an outstanding example of public interest journalism from a part of the world where IMS operates, and to explain their choice.

Themes from these findings guided the author's review of research and grey literature, which he analysed in relation to IMS' global strategy[130] and the ethical principles of journalism to which IMS subscribes.[131]

Based on this analysis, the author drafted the framework and guide and discussed them with a purposive sample of nine critical friends: four publishers (two women and two men), four media development practitioners (three women, one man), and two academics (men). These discussions focussed on the relevance and usability of the framework and guide. The author also tried out parts of the guide during a strategic planning workshop he facilitated for a non-profit media outlet serving his hometown.

Based on this feedback and piloting, the author then refined the framework and guide.

The process had the following shortcomings:

- There were relatively few responses to the voluntary survey. Most of the IMS leaders who responded came from the same country, while most IMS staff were based in the organisation's headquarters in Copenhagen. Therefore, the findings gave little more than a feel for what some colleagues and partners understood public interest journalism to be in practice.
- The process ran alongside others, resulting in pauses and a loss of momentum from time to time. However, this also allowed for further reflection and the incorporation of new information in between stops and starts, which helped the iteration.

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[128] A community of practice for IMS staff with specific expertise and experience in IMS' support to journalism. The working group was convened by IMS' Journalism Hub (J-Hub), a crosscutting knowledge unit within IMS, which spreads expertise between programmes, shares insights, and facilitates learning to inspire innovation.

[129] Five media leaders and 10 IMS staff responded. Eight of the 15 respondents were women.

[130] IMS (2023).

[131] IMS (2023).

Key terms

Business model: a multi-component framework for how a media outlet operates, where the revenue model is one part of its overall business offer. Key aspects are value proposition, channels, market position, partners, revenues, and customers. This reflects an outlet's **business strategy,** which is a roadmap for how management and staff will achieve the outlet's goals and assess its progress.

Business viability: refers to the business capabilities of media operations at the organisational level and being of service to a community, while implementing feasible business operations and staying financially afloat

Editorial strategy: a broad plan for how journalism will contribute to a media outlet's vision, mission and goals. This is different to a content strategy, which tends to cover all forms of content, including advertising, with a focus on marketing and an emphasis on data analysis and sales. While editorial strategy embraces many aspects of content strategy, particularly journalism's relationship with its audience, this handbook distinguishes between the two, in order to emphasise the contribution public interest journalism can make to a media outlet's viability.

Editorial values: values are beliefs that shape how we behave. Editorial values shape journalists' day-to-day decisions about story selection and how stories are covered. These decisions are often instinctive and may vary from outlet to outlet and journalist to journalist.

Ethical principles: ethics are what we consider to be right and how we ought to behave. Ethical principles of journalism are usually captured in professional codes that determine how journalism should be practiced.

Impact: lasting change which, in this case, journalism contributes towards, directly and/or indirectly.

Income stream: a sustained and recurring source of income into a business, such as membership fees, subscriptions, advertising, and services. One-off sources may include a time-specific crowdfunding campaign.

Journalism: the practice of gathering, analysing, and presenting fact-based news and information to the public (see also 'public interest journalism' below).

Media viability: a field within the media development sector that focuses on the enabling economic conditions and resource implications that affect media organisations. It is a systems approach.[1]

Public interest journalism: ethical, editorially-independent, fact-based journalism that informs the public about key issues in ways that serve the public interest rather than any political, commercial or factional interest; encourages and contributes to public debate; holds those in power to account; and challenges discriminatory societal norms.

Public interest media: editorially-independent media outlets that strive to produce and distribute public interest journalism.

Revenue model: the overall configuration of how a media outlet generates money. The revenue model is a core element of the business model as revenue streams and cost structures allow operations to keep going.

Start-up: often used for a new media business, which is typically characterised by lower overhead costs, fewer employees, and a tendency towards innovation.

Sustainability: the ability of media organisations to continue their activities and endure over time, producing public interest journalism in the medium-to-long term.
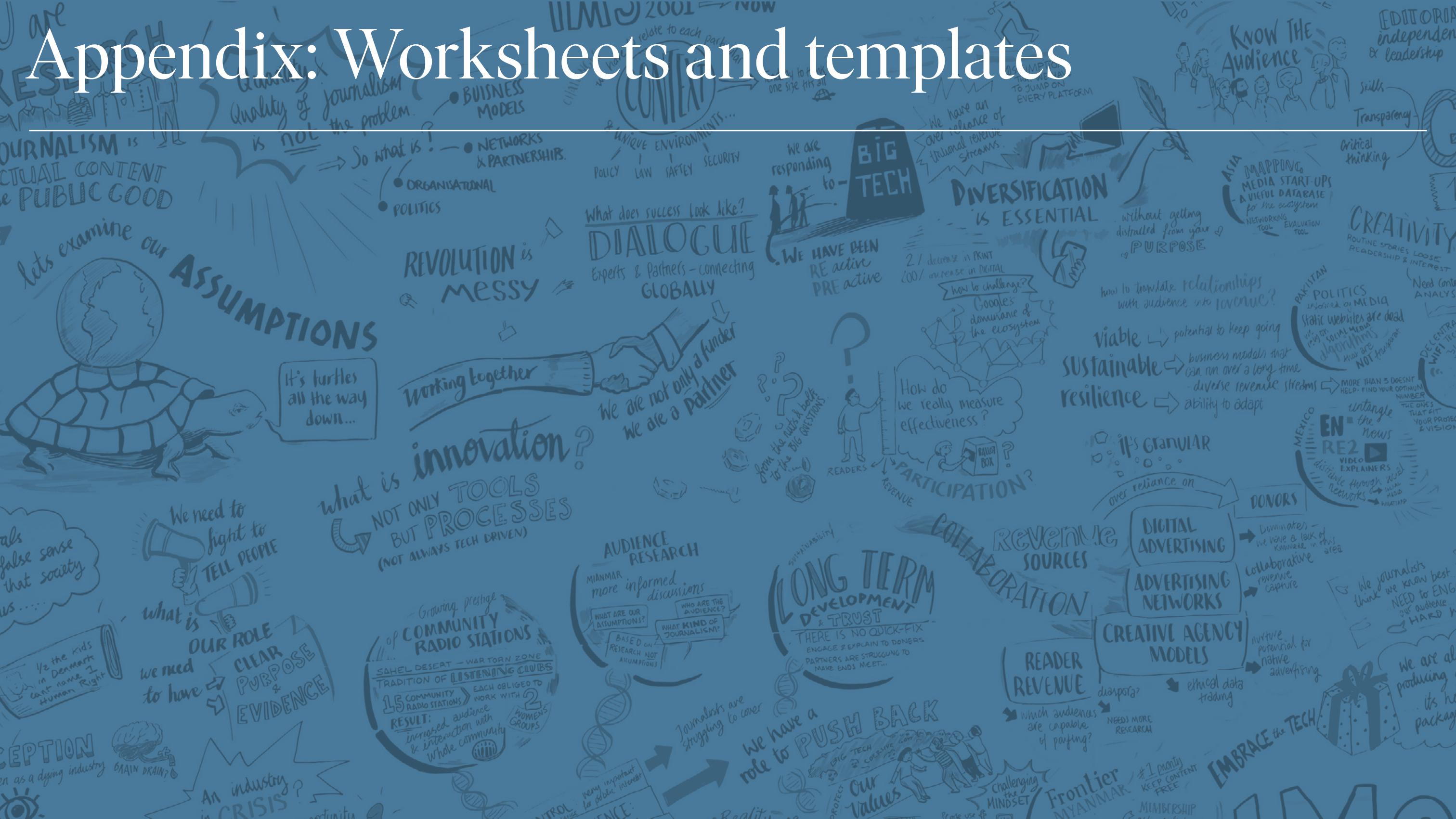
Value: a measure of the worth and importance we place – in this case – on a journalism product or service, usually based on the benefit we derive from it. Value is often in our minds, depending on how we think we can benefit.

Value proposition: the reason why consumers should consider using – in this case – one journalism product or service over another; the benefits it provides and what sets it apart.

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[1] The Media Viability Manifesto

Appendix: Worksheets and templates

Worksheet for Step 2: Aiming for impact

These worksheets and templates accompany the step-by-step guide to designing and implementing your editorial strategy. (Chapter 4)

> You can use this worksheet to record what impact you want your journalism to have.
> You can then refer to this as you continue with the steps that follow.

	IMPACT		How will you know if your journalism is contributing to this change – what information can you collect to measure this?	According to the information available, what is the current situation of the change(s) you want to see? What is your 'baseline'?
	What beneficial change(s) would you like your journalism to help bring for each stakeholder?	How will your journalism contribute towards such change(s)?		
Your audience(s)				
Your media outlet(s) The owners, staff, advertisers, funders, and investors.				
Your society				
Comments (use this space for additional thoughts or ideas, e.g. you might identify and wish to pursue a long-term goal based on the combined impact of the changes that your journalism brings to your audience, outlet, and/or society?)				

Worksheet for Step 3: Creating value

Use this worksheet to record what value you want your journalism to create for your key stakeholders, then refer to it as you continue with the steps that follow.

	VALUE			How will you know if your journalism is creating this value – what information can you collect to measure this?	What value, if any, does your journalism currently create for each stakeholder, according to the information available?
	What *practical benefits* can your journalism have for each stakeholder, e.g. money, data, entertainment, guidance, understanding, inspiration, self-expression, a way to connect with people?	What *lasting and essential benefits* can your journalism have for each stakeholder, e.g. health, happiness, wealth, influence, credibility, a sense of belonging, peace of mind?	On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 is low, and 4 is high) how important are these benefits to each stakeholder?		
Your audience(s)					
Your media outlet(s) The owners, staff, advertisers, funders, and investors.					
Your society					

Comments (use this space for any additional thoughts or ideas on the value you want your journalism to create/an impact it should avoid, e.g. the benefits to one stakeholder might boost or, conversely, limit the benefits to another. In either case, how might you address this?)

Worksheet for Step 4: Prioritising your principles, values, and impact to create value

You can use this worksheet to record the ethical principles and editorial values you want your strategy to focus on, i.e. those that are most important for achieving the desired impact of your journalism and the value you want to create for key stakeholders best placed to sustain it. You can then refer to this sheet as you continue with the steps that follow.

Which principles and values do you consider the most important?	How does the selected principle/value help your journalism to impact in the way you want, as identified in Step 2?	How do each of the selected principles/values create value for your key stakeholders? From the value you identified during Step 3, list: • the stakeholder group. • the type of value (practical or essential) created. • a short description of this value.	How important, to each stakeholder, is the value created? See scores in Step 3.	Order of priority. This might change as you weigh the importance of these principles/ values to you and your stakeholders.
Comments (use this space for any additional thoughts or ideas about your priorities, e.g. you may want to reflect on the selection process, the reasons you omitted certain things, and/or how you weighed your principles and values in relation to their impact on/the value created for key stakeholders)				

You can use the spreadsheet to record how you want to practice each of your priority principles and values in a way that creates the value and impact you are striving for.

You can then capture and measure your progress using the same worksheet (see 'Progress review' columns).

When reviewing your progress, use the **scoresheet for step 7** to assess your progress (see template in Appendix section). You add your findings to the 'Team's average self-assessment score' column in the relevant 'Progress review' section of the **worksheet for Steps 5 and 7**.

PERSON RESPONSIBILE FOR OVERSEEING THIS PLAN _____

PRIORITY PRINCIPLES, VALUES, IMPACT AND VALUE (FROM WORKSHEET 4)		
Priority principles and values	**The impact you want to have**	**The value you want to create**
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)
(Enter priority 1 from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter impact from Step 4 worksheet)	(Enter value from Step 4 worksheet)

WHAT PRACTICES, SUCH AS ACTIVITIES, TECHNIQUES, METHODS, OR TOOLS, CAN YOU USE TO ENHANCE EACH OF YOUR PRIORITY PRINCIPLES/VALUES IN A WAY CREATES THE IMPACT AND VALUE YOU WANT?		
Story research	Story productoin	Story distribution and audience engagement

MONITORING THE IMPACT AND VALUE OF YOUR JOURNALISM			ACCESSING THE RESOURCES YOU NEED	
How will these practices help you have the impact and create the value you want?	How will you know this practice is contributing to this impact and value (see data sources identfied in Worksheets 2 and 3)?	Who is responsible for gathering and analysing this data?	What additional resources, such as skills, knowledge, time, and/or money, might you need to practice your journalism in this way?	Who is responsible for making sure you have these resources?

PROGRESS UPDATE 1: (DATE)			PROGRESS UPDATE 2: (DATE)		
Team's average self-assesment score (see accompanying score sheet)	Comments / analaysis	Action points	Team's average self-assesment score (see accompanying score sheet)	Comments / analaysis	Action points

PROGRESS UPDATE 3: (DATE)			PROGRESS UPDATE 4: (DATE)		
Team's average self-assesment score (see accompanying score sheet)	**Comments / analysis**	**Action points**	**Team's average self-assesment score** (see accompanying score sheet)	**Comments / analaysis**	**Action points**

PROGRESS UPDATE 5: (DATE)		
Team's average self-assement score (see accompanying score sheet)	**Comments / analaysis**	**Action points**

Worksheet for Step 6: Checklist for stories with values, value, and impact

You can use this checklist to see how a story addresses your editorial strategy.

The story applies these ethical principles and editorial values	Yes / no / not sure	The story contributes to this impact	Yes / no / not sure	The story helps create this value	Yes / no / not sure
(Enter priority 1 principle/value from Worksheet for Steps 5 and 7)		(Enter impact of priority 1 from Worksheet for Steps 5 and 7)		(Enter value created by priority 1 from Worksheet for Steps 5 and 7)	
(Enter priority 2 principle/value)		(Enter impact of priority 2)		(Enter value created by priority 2)	
(Enter priority 3 principle/value)		(Enter impact of priority 3)		(Enter value created by priority 3)	
(Enter priority 4 principle/value)		(Enter impact of priority 4)		(Enter value created by priority 4)	
(Enter priority 5 principle/value)		(Enter impact of priority 5)		(Enter value created by priority 5)	
(Enter priority 6 principle/value)		(Enter impact of priority 6)		(Enter value created by priority 6)	
(Enter priority 7 principle/value)		(Enter impact of priority 7)		(Enter value created by priority 7)	
(Enter priority 8 principle/value)		(Enter impact of priority 8)		(Enter value created by priority 8)	

After completing the checklist, you can use this space to note down any new ideas you have about doing the story differently:

Worksheet for Step 6: Curating examples of stories with values, value, and impact

You can use this template to curate examples of stories you think demonstrate how you practice your editorial strategy.

Story title	Author(s)	Date published	Where published (add link to story if possible)	Which priority principles and values do the story apply?	How does the story contribute to the desired impact and to value creation for key stakeholders?		
					Author(s)	Media outlet	Society

Each member of the team fills out this scoresheet, ahead of meetings, to review progress with the implementation of the editorial strategy.

The average scores for the team are then added to the relevant 'Teams self-assessment score' column of the **Worksheet for Steps 5 and 7**.

Questions:

1. How well are you implementing our priority principles and values in the way you research, produce, and distribute your stories and engage with your audience?
2. To what extent is this having the impact and creating the value you want?
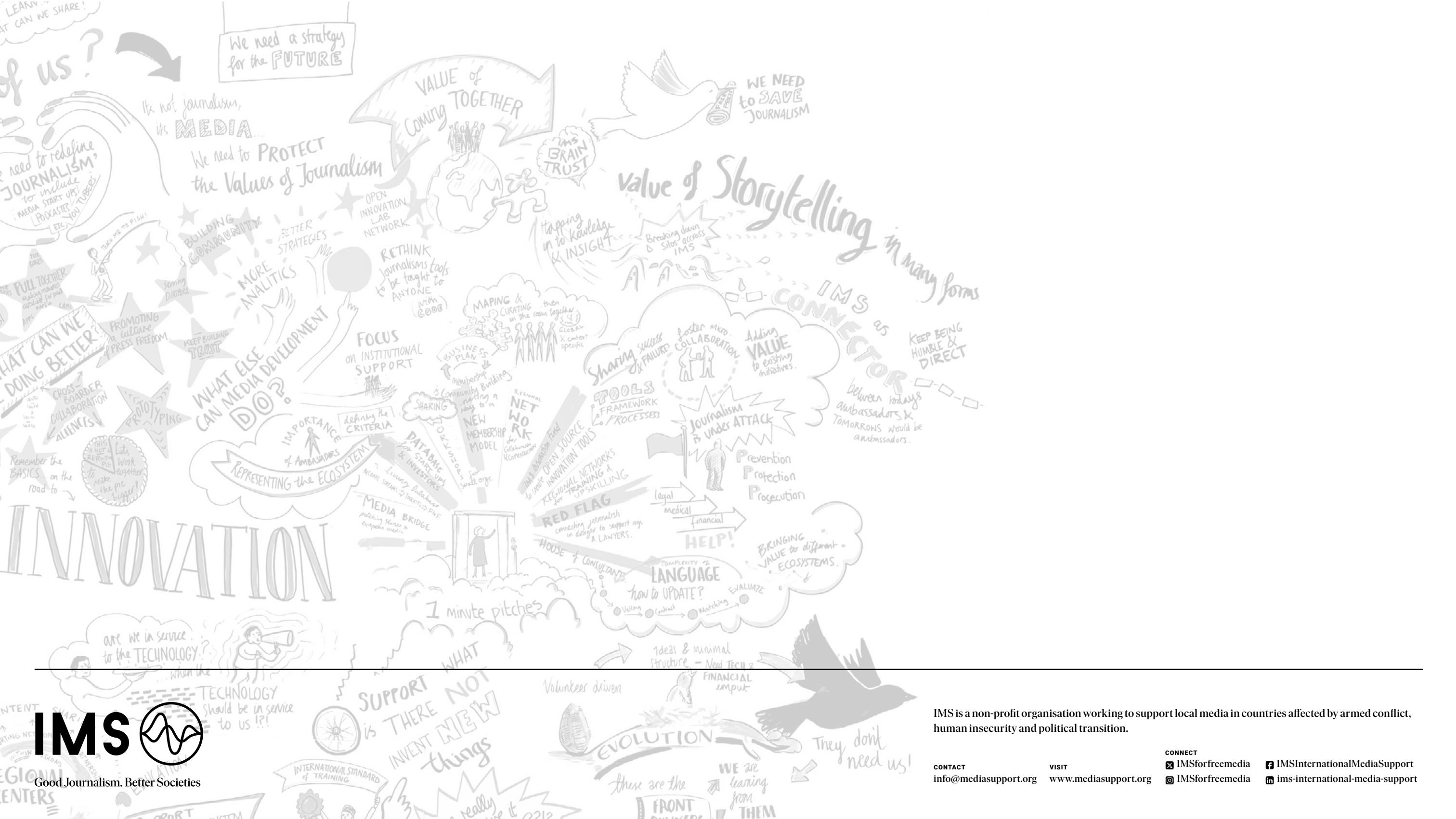
Priority principle/value	Very good (2)	Good (1)	Poor (-1)	Very poor (-2)	Not sure (0)	Please explain your answers below.
(Add priority 1)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						
(Add priority 2)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						
(Add priority 3)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						

Priority principle/value	Very good (2)	Good (1)	Poor (-1)	Very poor (-2)	Not sure (0)	Please explain your answers below.
(Add priority 4)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						
(Add priority 5)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						
(Add priority 6)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						

Priority principle/value	Very good (2)	Good (1)	Poor (-1)	Very poor (-2)	Not sure (0)	Please explain your answers below.
(Add priority 7)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						
(Add priority 8)						
Story research						
Story production						
Story distribution and audience engagement						
TOTAL						
Average score (Add together totals for each column then divide by number of questions answered)						

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