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Effective Ideation Practices in Newsrooms

– Ideation consultation for Yle's regional
newsrooms



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Effective Ideation Practices in Newsrooms

- Ideation consultation for Yle's regional newsrooms

Journalists face hardships regarding ideation of content. The increasing amount of media platforms and the reign of artificial intelligence require content to be created faster each day. The battle of reaching audiences challenges editors' possibilities for careful designing of interviewees or topics, for example.

The goal of this thesis was to survey, evaluate, and improve the current ideation habits and tools in newswork. Quantitative research methods were used in two surveys about the ideation practices of the newsrooms of Yle, the public service media company in Finland. One was for their editors and another for producers.

The ideation hardship in journalism is mostly a time management issue. 77% of the editor-respondents reported that hurry challenges their creativity, and none of them had very much time for ideation. To the editor-respondents, ideation means both suggesting new ideas and getting time and help for implementing them. Many editor-respondents wish that the ideation processes would vary. For example, they wish to ideate in different group sizes. Editor-respondents valued conversations with co-workers, and found it easy to share ideas with others. The producer-respondents found it important that editors come up with ideas themselves, and that they think about the ideas' implementation as well.

As a development task, I created an ideation workshop and facilitated it at Yle Southwest Finland. Many of the participants found it interesting and useful.

Keywords:

ideation, ideation practices, journalism, news, newsrooms, Yle, Yleisradio

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Tehokkaat ideointimenetelmät uutistoimituksissa

- Ideointikonsultaatio Ylen aluetoimituksille

Ideointivaikeudet haastavat journalisteja. Lisääntyvät julkaisualustat ja tekoälyn valtakausi edellyttävät, että sisältöä luodaan jatkuvasti nopeammin. Taistelu yleisöjen tavoittamisesta haastaa toimittajien mahdollisuuksia huolelliseen suunnitteluun esimerkiksi haastateltavien tai aiheiden valinnassa.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tarkastella ja kehittää uutistyössä käytettäviä ideointimenetelmiä ja -työkaluja. Kvantitatiivisia tutkimusmenetelmiä käytettiin kahdessa kyselyssä, joissa keskityttiin Ylen aluetoimitusten ideointitottumuksiin. Toinen kyselyistä oli Ylen aluetoimitusten toimittajille ja toinen tuottajille.

Ideointivaikeudet journalismissa johtuvat pitkälti ajanhallinnasta. Kyselyyn vastanneista toimittajista 77 % kertoi kiireen haastavan luovuuttaan, eikä kellekään vastanneista ollut erittäin paljon aikaa ideointiin. Vastanneista toimittajista ideointi on sekä uusien ideoiden ehdottamista että ajan ja avun saamista ideoiden toteuttamiseksi. Monet vastanneet toimittajat toivoivat, että ideointiprosessit vaihtelisivat. He halusivat esimerkiksi ideoida eri kokoisissa ryhmissä. Vastanneet toimittajat arvostivat keskustelua kollegoiden kanssa, ja enemmistölle oli helppoa jakaa ideoita muille. Vastanneista tuottajista oli tärkeää, että toimittajat keksivät ideoita itse sekä miettivät niiden toteutustapoja.

Kehittämistehtävänä suunnittelin ja toteutin Yle Lounais-Suomen toimituksille ideointityöpajan. Moni piti työpajaa mielenkiintoisena ja hyödyllisenä.

Asiasanat:

ideointi, ideointimenetelmät, journalismi, uutiset, uutistoimitukset, Yle, Yleisradio

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1 Introduction

The newsworld is undergoing major changes. The increasing number of constantly evolving media platforms has forced journalistic content to be created faster and faster from start to finish, challenging the time and possibilities for careful designing and planning. There does not seem to be a lot of room for brainstorming editorial ideas anymore and it appears, that the selection of topics or themes may not be thought through so multidimensionally, or the chosen interviewees may not represent the most diverse or even professional selection, due to having little time to reach out to people or organizations in a hurry.

The rapid change of an unlimited number of publishing platforms on social media, and the fact that anyone can publish anything anytime, has challenged newsrooms to keep up with the competition of reaching audiences. Social media plays a crucial role in news consumption (Liedke & Wang 2022), because whereas before news was published mainly in the newspapers, radio, and TV at a certain time, nowadays news are everywhere at all times. This change has forced journalists to become faster in their work, but it should not affect the careful ideation or planning of content too much, or it should not happen at the expense of ethical journalism. As journalists face relentless commercial pressures that threaten to compromise story quality (Cooper, Gutierrez Lopez, MacFarlane, Makri, Missaoui & Porlezza 2022), it is perhaps more important now than ever to provide truthful and trustworthy content.

Also, the quick development of artificial intelligence (AI) challenges newsworld. Because artificial intelligence applications can, for example, write the opening lines of a TV broadcast just like that in only seconds, it forces us journalists to think about whether AI might replace media workers in the future. For the benefit of editors, it seems that the reliability of traditional media houses may even be emphasized in the future because of AI (Sillanmäki 2023), because it can also produce outdated and wrong information. This challenges traditional

newswork to maintain carefulness and productive ideation at an even better level. The importance of unique news topics might be now bigger than ever.

In this master's thesis, I researched how to secure enough time for ideation in editorial work and newsrooms. The thesis aimed to unravel what kind of ideation practices and planning – and how often – editors find to be most effective for their work. I explored how newsrooms could focus on well-designed and well-finished quality, and whether the scarced time reserved for designing content is the result of a lack of planning.

With this thesis work, I aimed to produce new knowledge and understanding of the current practices and improve employees' possibilities to hold onto the creative side of the work in the field of journalism, where hurry takes over easily. The thesis focuses on the Finnish public service media company Yle and its regional newsrooms' ideation habits and hopes. As a development task, I designed and implemented ideation consultation for Yle's regional newsrooms based on the results. As an expected outcome, Yle's newsrooms would gain a more comprehensive understanding of their ideation preferences and tools, differences between the newsrooms, and the best practices and editors' most wished-for tools to use.

The ideation consultation was executed in the form of an s workshop for both editors and producers at Yle Southwest Finland, including the newsrooms of Turku and Pori. The workshop was expected to offer the client (Yle) new perspectives to their work, and also share effective and inspiring ideation practices for journalists everywhere. The thesis also supports my personal career development as an entrepreneur, because I studied service design in order to understand the comprehensive concept of ideation consultation to have been able to host a workshop for Yle. It also enables me to offer the same kind of ideation consultation to other clients in the future.

The topic of this master's thesis is important also because of the morals and ethics of journalists. Once published, work can be edited or corrected, but in this public industry of journalism and media, it is difficult – or even impossible – to

make once done undone in the public eye. The journalistic guidelines note that all decisions concerning the content of media must be made in accordance with journalistic principles (Council for Mass Media in Finland 2011, §2). And because all news start as an idea to share something with the public, the ideation processes are important to review in order to try to be able to make the goal and the outcome meet.

In this thesis, I explore service design, ideation practices in general and in newswork, Yle's role in society and ways of working regarding the topic, and the key points of both research results and development task to the extent that publishing is agreed with the client. Some information, like the exact content of the presentation and other implementations of the ideation workshop, is shared only with the client as agreed on the thesis agreement.

2 Ideation processes in journalism

Journalism is all about ideation. Ideation means the process of generating ideas and solutions through different tools and practices. But whether the word ideation is seen as coming up with something new or improving something already existing, ideas are either way an enormous part of journalists' everyday lives. All journalists do ideation at least in the form of some type of sketching every day but this tool is just a tip of the iceberg.

It is crucial to investigate how journalists can be supported to produce original, impactful, and factually accurate stories under deadlines (Cooper et al. 2022). Designing and creating content often refers to starting to work on a certain new product, project, or publication. However, ideation – especially in journalism – is more of observing, largening, and focusing on a specific topic or theme thoroughly and multidimensionally.

It seems to have been so for over a decade now, that customers might not always need in-depth and background information news and thoughtful commentary, but superficial news, entertainment information, and everyday life are enough for them (Pietilä 2007). Still, journalists must aim to provide truthful information (Council for Mass Media in Finland 2011, §8). Mistakes or poor judgment in journalistic publications are often made due to hurry and could have been prevented by better ideation in advance. This leads to thinking, that even perhaps things such as the diversity of interviewees or background checks on the topic could be done better if there was more time to plan editorial work.

Good ideation enables to create well-finished content that is thought to fit especially the company's main target group. It can be, that when content speaks directly to the needs and interests of the audience, it is more likely to capture their attention, encourage interaction, and foster a sense of connection (AIContentfy 2024). This is why it is important to focus on ideation for example from the perspectives of where, when, and how journalists talk about a specific topic to their audience, what or who they use in doing that, what is wished to be achieved with the publications, and why are they relevant.

Ideation is all about taking one or many newly formed ideas under screening and working on them further from there. In addition to typical brainstorming, when people meet in a group to suggest new ideas to choose from for possible development, ideation can also be done effectively alone or in pairs.

It must be noted that because different personality types communicate differently and different ideation methods are based on different types of communication, there may be differences in the effectiveness of an ideation method for different personality types (Wood 2014). Therefore what works for some individuals or organizations might not work for others.

2.1 Different ideation tools and habits

Ideating helps to create a successful concept whether it is for a service or a product. In ideation, it is important to understand the effectiveness of different ideation methods for different people. This is because some ideation techniques will never fully explore the potential of a group of individuals because of differing communication and decision skills, and ideation preferences. This is because there are significant differences in the ideation results of different personality types across a set of ideation methods (Wood 2014). For example, organizational people can score higher in mindmapping, analytical people in sketching, and communal people in group ideation methods such as brainstorming (Wood 2014).

This is why it is important to try several different ideation methods when practicing ideation. Using many tools also makes it possible to get various solutions and ideas in short amount of time. An ideation process should include various different techniques such as brainstorming, mindmapping, prototyping, collaborating, or sketching ideas. These are all useful tools in order to generate and capture ideas.

Writing down, discussing, or drawing things visually are also popular ideation tools depending on how much time there is to ideate, where or with whom. In addition, it can be good to try to come up with the worst possible idea or use the

"3x3x3" technique, in which three ideas are always expanded into three more. However, It is important to understand, that only setting a reminder or making time for these activities regularly such as daily, weekly, or at least monthly, shapes ideation into an effective habit that leads to long-lasting outcomes. Truly, the best way to learn how to ideate is to take the theory and techniques learned from the experts, and apply and test them in one's own context and adapt them to one's own needs (Friis Dam & Teo 2024). Consistency is key in finding effective ideation practices for one's own organization and the individuals partaking in ideation.

In many editorial newsrooms everywhere, it is common to focus on only the current news topic instead of trying to ideate the next or especially the one or two after that during a regular meeting. Instead, if a completely new or rare ideation moment, such as a workshop, takes place, the ideation meeting's structure is designed and the entity is constructed usually more precisely. That is why either organizing a proper workshop or ordering ideation consultation from an outside source could be very beneficial in motivating and intensifying newsrooms' current practices every now and then. In a workshop there is usually time to really dive into a topic and try out different ideation tools such as writing exercises like "future headlines" or "what if" -scenarios.

2.1.1 Solo ideation

Microbreaks, for example, are important for creative thinking, because a mind can rest and re-charge for even a brief moment. Microbreaks mean short pauses from workflow, which last from about half a minute to a few minutes and can help with calming down and restoring focus on the right things (Vikman 2018). During a microbreak, one might stare out of a window, stand up to stretch a bit, or grab something to drink or eat. A study shows that it is in a company's best interest to give employees microbreaks when needed because it helps to manage energy and engage in work throughout the day (Cho, Kim & Park 2022). While a microbreak is an important solo moment for creative

thinking, it is not necessarily an ideation exercise. It can lead to a fresh view of something already on the table or to a completely new idea but it usually requires action after the break to lead somewhere further.

The aim of ideation is often to generate a large quantity of ideas that the team can then filter and cut down into the best, most practical or most innovative ones (Friis Dam & Teo 2024), which is what "100 ideas in a minute" is an excellent solo ideation tool for. Also, the "change of perspective" helps to view ideas in different ways, as the change of perspective can be used to formalize the cognitive process of creativity (Knoll & Horton 2010).

A good example of ideation alone is trying out different creative writing exercises. When one starts to draft anything on paper or even phone notes, thoughts can become more clear and achievable. "What is on my mind right now?", "Why does something seem interesting to me?", or "How could I find out more about this and share it with others?" are all great questions for journalists to start ideation with. All in all, writing lists of interesting themes or things, or really anything down for a few minutes on a timer, can be very effective for refining and sorting out one's thoughts and ideas.

For some, visualizing a concept is the best way to work through the creative process (Meazell 2024). This is why ideation exercises should always be adjusted to a person's own needs and preferences. Some find storyboards or vision boards, for example, better instead of writing. It can also be good visual ideation to take photos of interesting things when they appear and browse them later at work in the hope of coming up with a topic from one of the pictures.

Solo ideation tends to suit especially well for introverts.

2.1.2 Ideation in pairs or small groups

Working in pairs or in groups of 3–5 people can benefit everyone's active involvement in the ideation process. For journalists, it is natural to ask questions, and this can definitely be utilized in coming up with news topics and

approaches to them. In pairs, it is good to ask questions from one another, either related to a specific given theme or anything that comes to mind. Ideas don't tend to come forced, which highlights the importance of any conversations at a workplace as an ideation tool.

In pairs or small groups it is easy, for example, to write down random words and make others try to come up with something content-worthy based on the words. The focus should be first on quantity rather than quality, so it is good to start sharing thoughts freely without brainstorming too deeply at first. The best ideas will be polished later with more time and thought.

Another good tool is to try to continue a prompt (first few words of a sentence) into a sentence, or challenge someone's current work with different points of view and approaches. When groups are small, everyone has more time, and perhaps courage too, to talk. Groups could have facilitators, too, if there are enough resources. A good facilitator makes sure all ideas are heard (Talent Garden 2023) at all times.

2.1.3 Ideation in large groups

The more different people participate in innovative work, the more diverse the results are (Solatie & Mäkeläinen 2009). Brainstorming and mind mapping are perhaps the most common ideation tools in large groups. However, if there aren't clear speaking turns for everyone, brainstorming can drift in a certain direction quickly based on one or a few loudest and fastest speakers. If results are required rapidly, this can be very good way to ideate. But on the other hand, if there is no hurry, and the more ideas the better, it might be good to have someone moderating the brainstorming discussion to avoid the limited views.

It might be difficult to have a say in a large group during a busy day at an editorial newsroom. Group meetings can be great for achieving everyone's feedback at once, but they can also be intimidating or overwhelming for some. Not all journalists are extroverts, and dividing a large group into smaller groups

or breakout rooms in a video conferencing applications can be beneficial for more diverse and active dialogue.

Sometimes it is helpful, when practicing ideation in a large group, to give everyone special areas to focus on. When one thinks of possible interviewees, another one the interview's location, and a third person publishing platforms, journalistic content has multiple points of views and dimensions to the work.

Group ideation tends to suit especially well for extroverts.

2.2 Benefits of active ideation

Creativity and verification are important in journalism, but their role is often poorly visible in news story creation (Cooper et al. 2022). Journalism is a creative industry, but still often described as literature in a hurry. It is impossible to change the fact that a considerable part of all journalistic content happens at an unexpected time and requires a fast reaction. Nevertheless, or perhaps even because of this, putting thought into ideation processes prevents journalists from making significant mistakes.

Ideation techniques are designed to help push boundaries and think out of the box (Talent Garden 2023). An ideation strategy, on the other hand, gives the structure needed to generate and develop new ideas into business strategies and growth opportunities (Mailchimp n.d.). It helps to know what to do and which things to take into consideration when working on something. Active ideation doesn't necessarily mean an always ongoing practice, but the fact that there is some kind of a plan and will to focus on this matter whenever possible. Active ideation in journalism can be one meeting a day, week, or month to focus on and discuss topics and tasks further than during an everyday hurry. Focusing on ideation actively enables learning more about a company's business models and the type of message one wants to convey about one's brand (Meazell 2024).

Active ideation also helps to know target audience in depth (Meazell 2024), which enables journalists to write follow-up content on well-performed publications. Feedback is an important part of journalistic ideation as well. It can help to determine whether one should rethink the current approach (Meazell 2024), based on what has had low or high reach or positive or negative feedback from the audience.

It should be noted, that it is also a necessary part of ideation to understand and decide when an idea is not worth working on further. For example, sometimes it is not ideal to focus more time or resources to refine an idea due to financial or either time or personnel-related issues.

3 The Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle)

Yle, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, is a public-service media company. The company operates under the Act of Yleisradio Oy. Yle's most important mission is to inform, educate, and entertain along with strengthening democracy and culture (Yle's public service 2024).

According to Yle, their public service supports people to act in their own lives and society. Yle's broadcasting also safeguards the pluralism of communications in different ways (Yle's public service 2024), considering the various publishing platforms and contents. Yle highlights that their content is transparent and they involve the audience in their journalism (Yle News 2023). For example, the company appreciates feedback and always strives to improve its journalism.

For Yle, it is crucial to design content carefully because of their responsibility to serve all citizens of Finland due to the public broadcasting tax. Their strategy includes helping people feel that they are part of the society around them (Yle's strategy 2020), and they especially try to reach more young people to be able to offer reliable news content and minimize disinformation. Yle is always under observation in a way in Finland, so everyone working for the organization must plan content well from all ethical, visual, and attractive aspects. They must not get ingrained in old habits but evolve and evaluate their work constantly.

3.1 Yle's regional newsrooms

Yle is the only media company in Finland with a comprehensive network of editors throughout the country (Yle's public service 2024), with a total of 11 regions including 27 newsrooms from the north to the south of Finland. Yle's regional newsrooms belong to The News and Current Affairs unit, which is responsible for Yle's Finnish news and current affairs and regional content in all distribution channels (Yle's units 2024).

Yle underlines that they show the whole picture of the country and ensure that even sparsely populated areas have diverse media offerings. The Regions are responsible for regional news and current affairs operations (Yle's units 2024), and have approximately 390 workers in total. The regional newsrooms' have their own chiefs, but there are also a Head of Regions, development managers, and producers for all regional operations.

For my bachelor's thesis *Instagram as part of news outlet's daily work - Manual for Yle's regional newsrooms* (Sjöblom-Hasselblatt 2021), I found out that publishing on social media varied a lot between Yle's regional newsrooms because there were no common guidelines for publishing content on social media, nor employees focused on the task. Since my bachelor's research, this matter of differences in publishing has improved and there are now new social media editors in some of the regional newsrooms as well. However, designing content still varies between the regional newsrooms. Therefore I am interested in researching newswork designing, and ideation in general is a development target Yle wishes a broader look into.

3.2 Ideation habits in Yle's regional newsrooms

In brief, some of Yle's regional newsrooms have meetings reserved for ideation regularly but there is not a common guideline for this. Therefore some of the regional newsrooms don't ever have an ideation meeting specifically, or at least not on a regular basis, but ideation is practiced and viewed among other tasks. All regional newsrooms provide both content requested from them by Yle and content created as a result of the newsrooms' own ideation.

Yle's regional newsrooms' ideation meetings consist mostly of free conversation between the entire newsroom. The ideation meetings can also include guided conversations or sharing ideas with everyone by turns during the meeting. The newsrooms follow Yle's strategy, so for example trying to reach more young people (Yle's strategy 2020).

4 Research findings

Research data for this thesis was collected through two surveys focusing on the journalistic ideation habits in Yle's regional newsrooms. One survey was for Yle's regional newsrooms' editors and the other one for their producers. The surveys were executed in November 2023 via Google Forms, as requested by the client, Yle.

The surveys consisted of both scale questions and open questions. The majority of the questions' layout was presented with a Likert scale, in which the respondents choose the option that best corresponds with how they feel about the statement or question (Bhandari & Nikolopoulou 2023). These surveys relied on the 5-point Likert scale, even though 3-, 4-, or 7-point scales are also possible to use.

A total of 88 editors and 8 producers from Yle's regional newsrooms participated in the surveys. As a percentage this means 22% of the editors and 27% of the producers in Yle's regional newsrooms.

4.1 Ideation as a part of editors' workday

Even though ideas come to mind whenever and not forced at a certain time, the surveys revealed that many editor-respondents wish to have the possibility for ideation within other work tasks (68,2%) or during a certain time reserved for ideation (46,6%), as presented in figure 1. Still, 45,5% didn't mind the fact, that ideation often happens in one's free time after working hours.

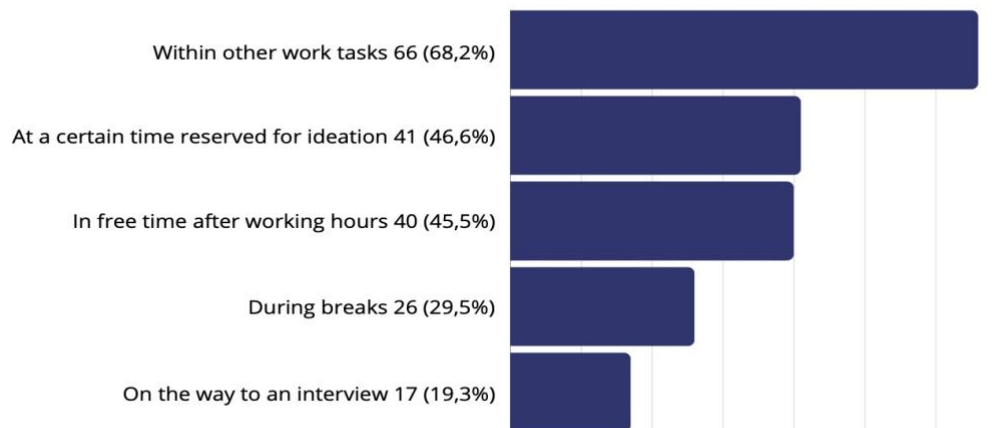


Figure 1. "When would you prefer to ideate news content?" (n=88)

It is still notable, that none of the editor-respondents had very much time to come up with new ideas during the workday. Instead, 45,5% of editor-respondents said, as presented in figure 2, that they have only moderately time for ideation during their shift, and the majority (55,7%) usually have the ability to come up with only a few new ideas per month, as presented in figure 3.

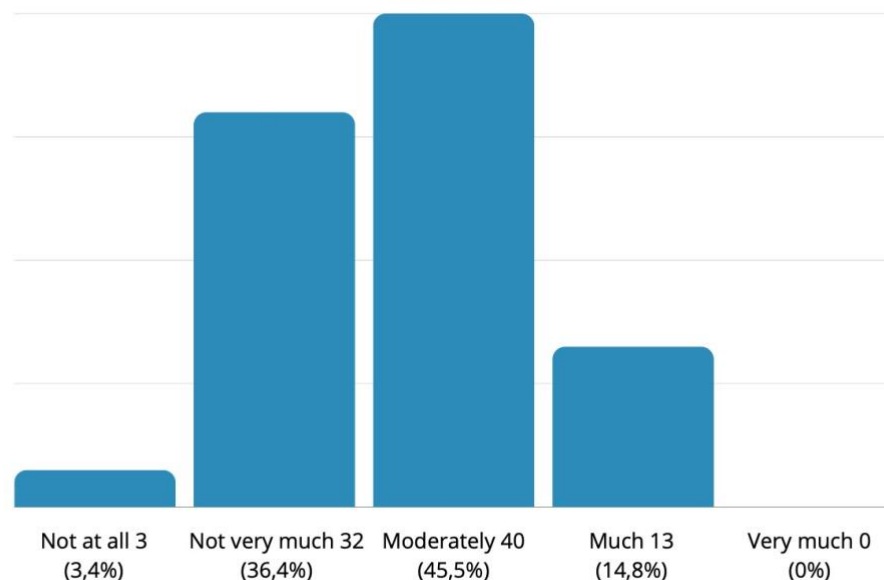


Figure 2. "How much time do you usually have to ideate new topics during a workday?" (n=88)

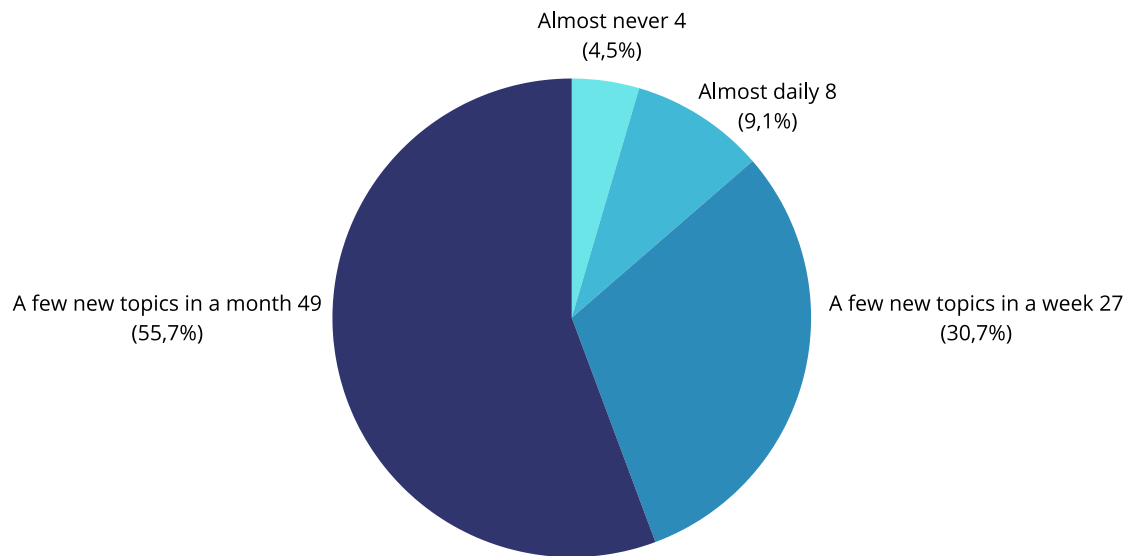


Figure 3. "How often do you have time to ideate new topics on a weekly or a monthly basis?" (n=88)

Nevertheless, the majority of editor-respondents said that they still feel like they can fulfill their creativity in newswork well (54,5%), and that their creative ideas fit Yle's publishing platforms well (37,5%) or very well (27,3%).

The survey results also showed, that editor-respondents find good ways of coming up with ideas such as observing the environment, talking with interviewees or one's friends and family, and scrolling through social media and other news outlets, as presented in figure 4.

Interaction with followers helped 55,7% of the editor-respondents. It is possible that this object of review is connected to the fact that some interact with the newsrooms' followers more. For example, a radio host is often in contact with the listeners through direct messages, and a social media editor replies to followers' comments personally.

Interestingly, sports or culture didn't get much support, as presented in figure 4, even though many commented that ideation is often left to do in one's free time after the working hours.

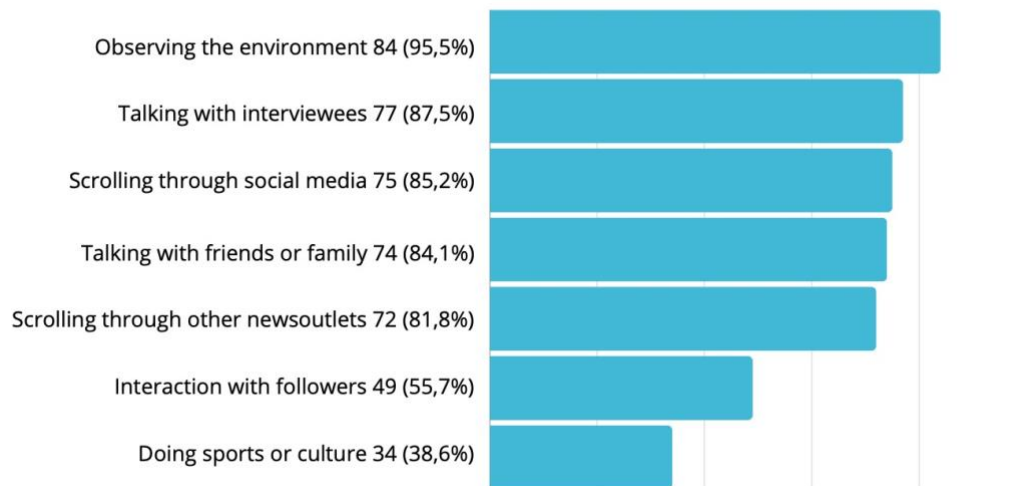


Figure 4. "What helps you to ideate news topics?" (n=88)

4.2 Editors' ideation challenges

Perhaps the biggest challenge in journalistic ideation is that ideas don't tend to come forced just like that, even if there was a specific time reserved for ideation. It can be conducted from the surveys' open comments, that sometimes a meeting reserved for ideation can be very productive, but at other times, not so much.

This could explain why Yle's regional newsrooms' editors said that they prefer to design content rather for less time more often (for example, for an hour each week) than for a longer time rarely (for example, for a full day once a month), as presented in figure 4 below – because it is important to reserve time for ideation regularly to improve the chances of the ideation to succeed as well.

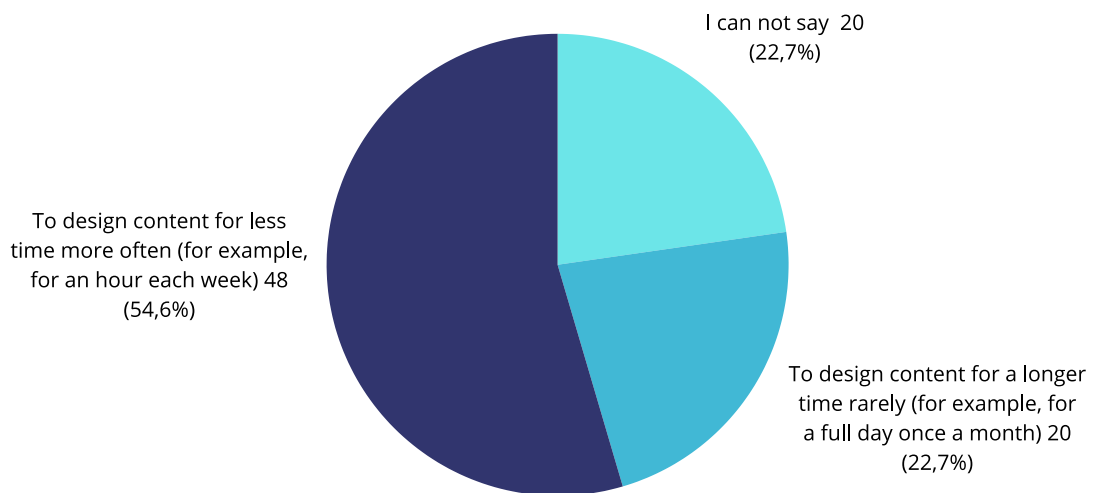


Figure 5. "Which option would you prefer regarding ideation?" (n=88)

Hurry was found to be the editors' biggest challenge regarding ideation in newswork. This could be explained by the fact that hurry and work overload can weaken creative thinking since studies have shown that breaks are important for the brain. For example, task switching strengthens flexibility and can further improve creative performance (Albulescu et al. 2022), which makes breaks important moments for the creativeness of the mind to recharge a bit.

In the open questions, many respondents commented that ideation is often left to be done in one's free time. "It would be nice if there was time reserved for it during working hours", one commented. Another noted, that producers might want ideas from editors daily, even if there isn't time reserved specifically for ideation even weekly or monthly. Editor-respondents said that they would like to also have time at work to sometimes "just lay down and wonder what's going on in the world with others".

Difficulties in journalistic ideation seem to be both tangible and intangible. In addition to hurry, a loud work environment was a challenge regarding ideation for 14,8% of editor-respondents and remote work for 10,2%. Bigger difficulties related to ideation turned out to be independent from the surroundings. For example, a fear of the fact that ideation is not considered as effective working

bothered 31,8%, difficulty coming up with ideas alone 28,4%, and insecurity of one's own ideas 22,7% of the editor-respondents, as presented in figure 6. "If own ideas are not implemented, the desire to share ideas decreases", one explained.

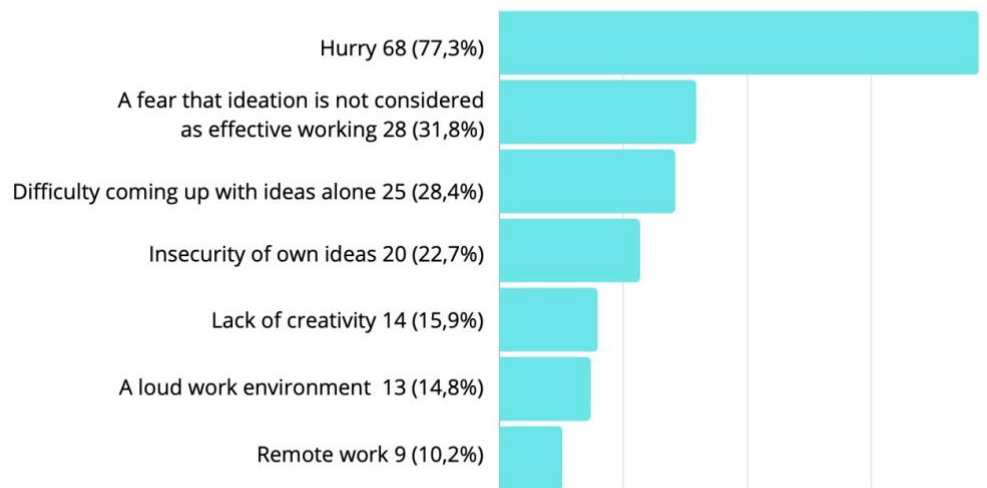


Figure 6. "What challenges your ideation in newswork?" (n=88)

4.3 Editors' ideation preferences

Based on the survey, editor-respondents said that they wish that the ideation processes would vary in their work. This is interpreted from the fact that editor-respondents told that they like to design content both in small groups (71,6%) and in pairs (52,3%), but also alone (59,1%), as presented in figure 7. Many editor-respondents said that normal discussions with friends or family can be as beneficial regarding coming up with news topics as talking with one's colleagues. Only 21,6% liked to ideate in large groups, which is usually the current practice. It can be concluded from this, that the current ways of ideation

could be improved. Trying different group sizes or tools, differing from the current habits, could benefit the newsrooms.

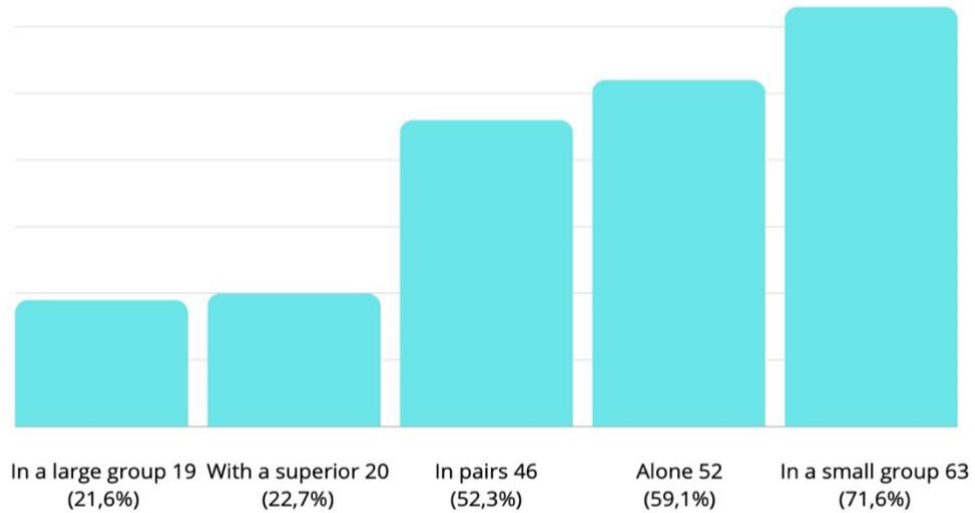


Figure 7. "In which group size do you prefer to ideate news content?" (n=88)

Despite some confidence issues related to ideation, as presented in figure 6, it appears that sharing ideas with colleagues and superiors was still easy for the majority of editor-respondents. Sharing their own ideas with a superior was very easy for 47,7% and easy for 31,8% of editor-respondents. Also, as seen from figure 8, sharing ideas with colleagues was very easy for 53,4% and easy for 29,5% of editor-respondents.

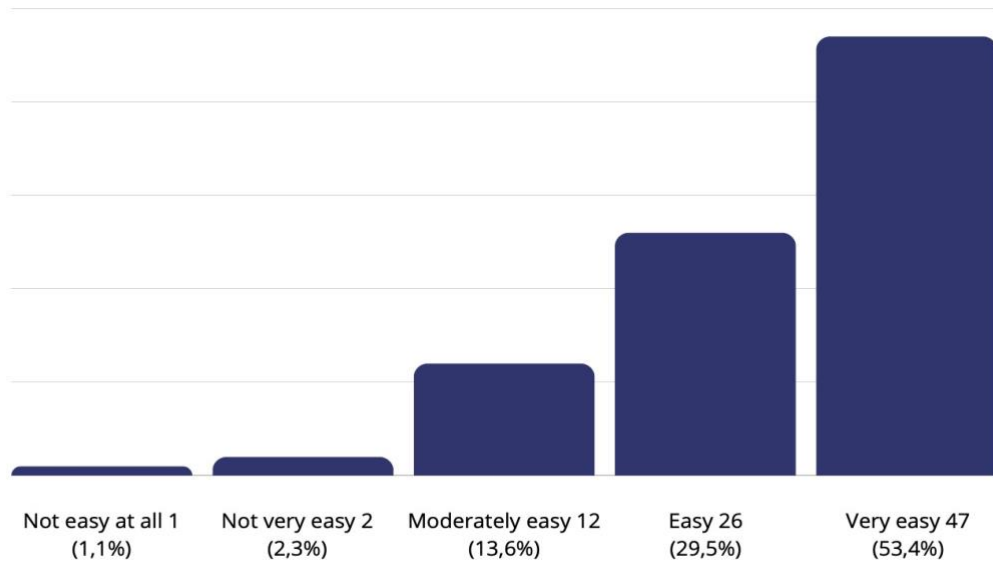


Figure 8. "How easy it is for you to share your ideas with colleagues?" (n=88)

It can be seen from figure 9, that for the editor-respondents in Yle's regional newsrooms, other colleagues' age, education, or work experience does not affect notably suggesting their own ideas to others. It affects roughly every fifth editor-respondent, but not the majority.

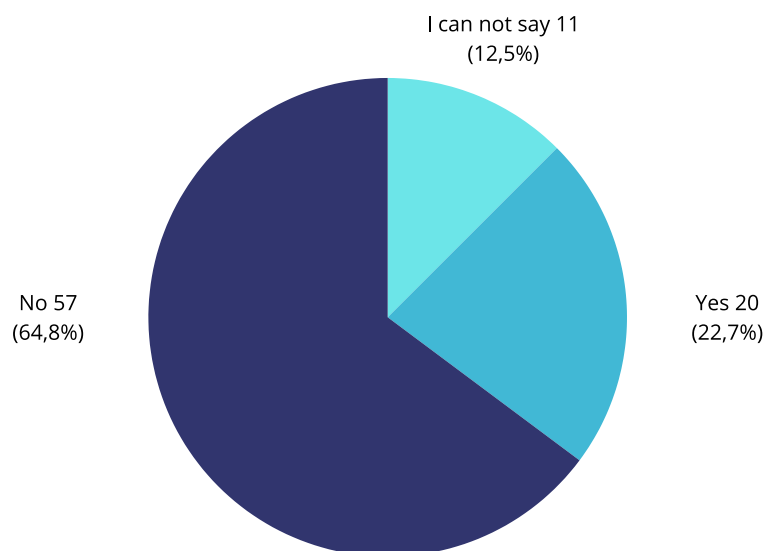


Figure 9. "Does other colleagues' age, education or work experience affect if you dare to suggest your own ideas to others?" (n=88)

However, it was pointed out in the open-ended questions by a producer-respondent, that "presenting ideas requires psychological safety in the work community, which is up to the whole community".

4.4 Producers' ideation preferences

Inventing new ideas doesn't seem to be as big of a problem in newswork as polishing those with thought and time. Many producer-respondents said it to be on a good level in newsrooms, how editors come up with news-worthy ideas. The majority of producer-respondents of Yle's regional newsrooms, 62,5% said that editors suggest their own ideas on a moderate level. In addition to this, 25% thought that editors present their ideas on a good level, and 12,5% believed it to be on a very good level. However, implementing ideas into practice does not always go as wished.

Despite Yle's regional newsrooms' diversity of ideation meeting practices, as described in chapter 3.2 and showed in figure 10, the majority of producers have found an ideation meeting to be useful (50%) or very useful (12,5%).

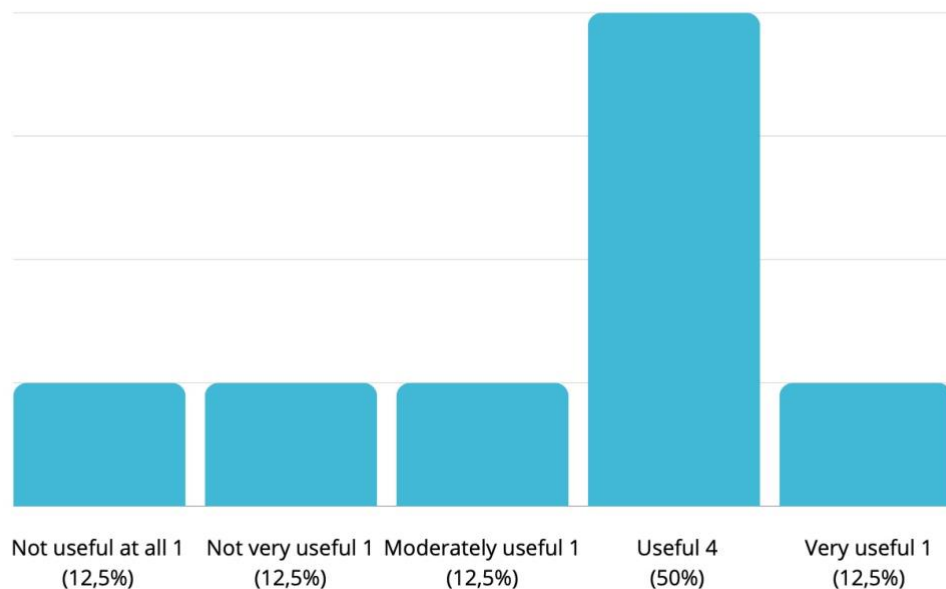


Figure 10. "How useful have you found an ideation meeting or similar to be?" (n=8)

Some of the producer-respondents at Yle's regional newsrooms also found it important that editors come up with ideas themselves. One explained in the survey, how "the outcome is often much better when a motivation for the topic already exists in advance".

In addition to this, 75% of producer-respondents found it important at least at some level, that when editors present their own ideas, they have already thought about the method of implementation as well. This could mean, for example, to have thought of whom to interview, how, and where, or on which platform the content should be published if there are several possibilities such as text, video, or audio content.

However, one producer noted in the survey that "if an idea is required to be too well-thought early on, no one will suggest rough ideas which could be eventually polished into diamonds". This showcases how it is good, but not always necessary, to have thought of an idea too much before sharing it.

4.5 Key findings

Some of the key findings of the surveys were, that the ideation hardship in journalism is not necessarily a question of creativity, but rather a time management issue. Hurry is a challenge to 77,3% of the editor-respondents' ideation in newswork.

The results also show that the ideation practices vary between the studied newsrooms as some of the newsrooms had a meeting reserved for ideation or designing content daily (37,5%), some weekly (37,5%), some rarely (12,5%), and some never (12,5%), as presented in figure 11. However, it might be that some newsrooms don't have a meeting or similar for ideation specifically, but include this in their other gatherings.

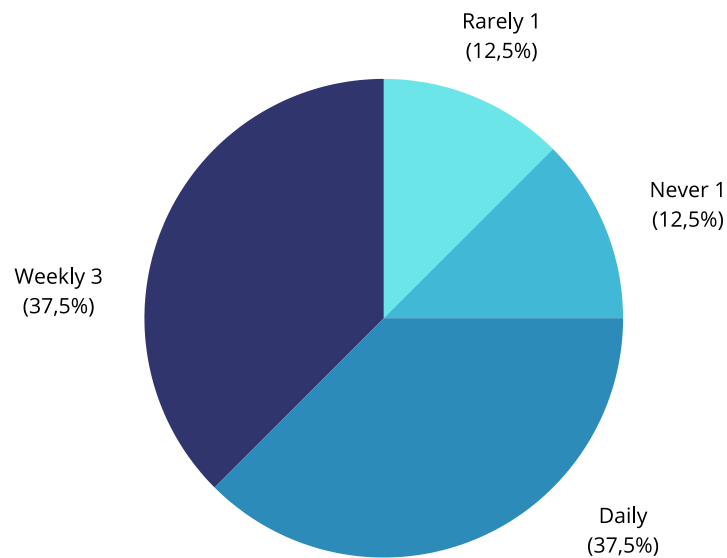


Figure 11. "How often is there an ideation meeting or similar in your newsroom?" (n=8)

Among editor-respondents, ideation was not thought of only as coming up with new ideas but also as being able to advance them and get both time and help for the implementation of the ideas. The majority of the editor-respondents said in the open-ended questions that ideas don't usually come forced. This led many to think that things such as silence, breaks, freetime, or even occasional boredom during working hours are good for the mind. According to some, this can be sometimes even more effective than organized ideation meetings. Editor-respondents also said that they value conversations with co-workers a lot, and feel like brainstorming with others can help develop their ideas further.

The ideation challenges are both tangible and intangible. The survey shows how editors might think that they are not that good with coming up with new ideas or they fear that ideation is not considered as effective working. In addition to this, many said they would also like opportunity to ideate in different group sizes, like alone, in pairs, or in small groups instead of just a large group.

Nowadays Yle's regional newsrooms mainly tend to ideate together as an entire newsroom, but this research revealed that only every fifth editor preferred this.

In addition to the editors' responses, the producers participating in the survey said they would hope for the editors to ideate more of current news ideas and content which attracts young audiences. This goes hand in hand with Yle's strategy to try to reach more young people (Yle's strategy 2020).

For the producer-respondents it was also important that editors come up with ideas themselves, and the majority wished that the editors think about the ideas' implementation as well before suggesting that idea to others. However, there were differences between how the producers in different newsrooms wished to hear about ideas, as well as how editors thought it depends to whom they present their ideas how those might be received and put into action.

5 Ideation and service design

Service design refers to a creative and collaborative practice that determines how an existing service should be improved, or how a new technology or product should be delivered as a service (Engine n.d.). The process of designing services relies heavily on discovering, defining, developing, and delivering (Moritz 2005), and includes the cornerstones of understanding both the client, the organization, and the market.

In this digitalized world, services are more often used online rather than in-person. However, services which establish a personal connection with users can better result in winning service propositions for businesses (Think Design n.d.). It is not only important to come up with ideas but also translate them into feasible solutions and to help implement them (Moritz 2005).

This thesis aims to develop new practices for ideation in newsrooms. Because everyday work in the newsrooms is so fast-paced, providing a well thought out and hurry-free one-time service appears to be the best way to achieve the required attention. Different ideation tools could be listed and handed out to newsrooms, but could easily become forgotten rather than put to use. This is why an on-site service led by an outside facilitator is more likely to make an impact. When practices are viewed from the outside, new perspectives appear.

5.1 Service design tools

Because utilizing creativity is essential (Solatie & Mäkeläinen 2009), it is important to include in service design as multiple views as possible to bring versatile tools and solutions to the table. According to Faljic (2019), design thinking works best when put together a heterogeneous team such as a service designer, a research designer, a product designer, and a business designer.

Besides considering many aspects when designing a service, it is good to use several tools to evaluate the service. One popular tool is the double diamond

template, in which the problem phase and the solution phase are visualized through the steps of discover, define, develop, and deliver. The double diamond presentation comes from adding two kites next to each others to help evaluate the different phases through facts, questions, findings, ideas, and prototypes.

Other good tools to use in service design are templates such as a value proposition canvas, which helps to ensure that a service or product is positioned around the customer's values and needs, or the business model canvas, which helps to understand the target group, profit, and the delivery's uniqueness.

During the journey of designing a service it is also good to try service design tools such as journey map, diary study, role playing, service blueprint, and success metrics, which are criterias defined alongside the service development as key factors that define the success of the implementation.

5.2 Designing a service for customers

Service design truly represents the client's perspective, as it is a multi-disciplinary platform of expertise (Moritz 2005). Therefore it requires thorough reasoning. A good idea fulfills the needs of both the business and the users, but also keeps the society's needs in mind. If one wants to create services one's customers love, there must be an understanding of the customers' needs, emotions, motives and values (Futurice 2019). A value proposition canvas, for example, helps to define a customer profile, visualize the value a service creates and understand the product-market fit well.

It is important to understand what the customers need and appreciate, and what the customers do in a certain phases of services. A step-by-step visualization of a customer's path with the service provided can include anything related to making the customer's life easier and for them to want to continue using a certain service after trying it out once. However, common mistakes of creating digital services include prioritizing and focusing too much on one aspect of the service, such as customers' needs alone. This is why there are many factors to

consider at the same time (Futurice 2019), like sustainability and commercialism, even though a service is provided for users in need of it.

5.3 Workshop for ideation

A workshop, which refers to a meeting of people to discuss and/or perform practical work on a subject or activity (Cambridge Dictionary 2024), is one example of an interactive on-site service. Workshop is a working moment which separates from the normal workflow and gathers people together. In a workshop attendees should go through different kinds of activities to try to solve problems or improve practices.

A workshop is usually led by a facilitator (Wirtz 2022). Workshops should last typically from a couple of hours to days even to reach their full potential. This is because the workshop's purpose is to create a space in which a group of people can discuss, brainstorm, and make decisions (Wirtz 2022). Workshop is a common service in consultation or a project type work.

Workshop is a great tool for ideation because it gives a team a well-needed break from the everyday routines which can become somewhat of creativity killers over time. A moment separate from the normal working cycle enables participants to think in new ways. Workshop can include working alone, in pairs, or in groups of different size, depending on the number of participants. Workshops should not be too busy but also leave room for breaks and open conversation. This is because workshops are also great for improving teamwork and team dynamics.

5.3.1 How to host a workshop?

When planning a workshop, it is important to know what its purpose is. Is there possibly a specific issue that needs to be improved, or is a completely new strategy or product wished for as the outcome of the workshop? The better the organizer or facilitator understands the challenge(s) to be solved as well as the

goal(s) and needs of everyone participating, the better conflicts and unhappy participants are avoided (Wirtz 2022).

Workshops don't have to always last for many hours or days. More important than the time given is that everyone involved attends and focuses on the workshop completely. It benefits the client the most when all participants are active and present in the moment. When a workshop separates activities from the everyday workflow or environment in which work typically happens, participants can experience new bursts of innovativity or energy. This is why a workshop would be good to host outside the normal conference room or the office, even.

At the beginning of planning a workshop, it is important to know the schedule to make a breakdown of the different parts and activities. The workshop's facilitator should familiarize oneself with the topic(s) well in advance so that it comes naturally for them to then present, lead, and motivate everyone to the topic(s) under consideration. It can also be good to test presenting some of the workshop's content with friends or family for example, in order to see if people understand the exercises or assignments planned easily.

If a facilitator doesn't work with or know the client, it is also very important to do background work and familiarize oneself with the client and its history, needs, and hopes for the future. A survey or interview with the client beforehand helps in understanding the audience and preparing the workshop specifically for them.

5.3.2 Journalists' preferences for ideation workshop

An ideation workshop is an excellent way to get editors ideating with time and thought. For this thesis I conducted a survey to find out, what Yle's regional newsrooms' editors would like to do in an ideation workshop. "Working further with the tasks already in progress" rose above all (60,2%) from the editors' wishes. To elaborate this, many editor-respondents mentioned how the current way of content ideation and design focuses on coming up with new topics rather

than taking time to design how and in what form to share different topics with the audiences.

"Proper ideation is not necessarily a quick eureka moment but often requires working hard and for a long time. For example, finding a gem in a bundle of hundreds of documents is impossible if you only have an hour a week for ideation", one editor clarified. Another editor-respondent noted, how "ideas come when they happen to come, but refinement of an idea into a topic and perspective is what I need more help with".

Editors' other wishes for the ideation workshop were having time for free planning (52,3%) and sharing ideas in turns (45,5%). In addition to this, 58% of editor-respondents and 75% of producer-respondents wished to try out different ideation tools and exercises during an ideation workshop.

The editor-respondents noted that ideation workshops should happen in a safe and inspirational environment, in which others don't knock out ideas, and that ideas should not be forgotten but written down somewhere. The producer-respondents also said that presenting ideas requires psychological safety in the work community.

The majority of Yle's 27 regional newsrooms were interested in trying out an ideation workshop, and believed that it would be beneficial if someone from outside the organization facilitated it.

6 Ideation consultation for Yle's regional newsrooms

Because ideation is a necessary everyday task in journalism and newsrooms, I want to improve the tools and thought put into it. As a development work of this thesis, I designed how to offer ideation consultation in the form of a workshop for newsrooms. The aim of this was to help editors and editorial newsrooms to focus on their current tools for ideation and how they could be improved.

When designing the workshop, I used my professional experience from managing ideation meetings for different platforms in the past, and my personal experience of working as a journalist for over a decade. In addition to there being many steps involved in planning a workshop (Eventbrite 2023), I wanted to design the workshop to meet and rely on the client's wishes and needs.

6.1 Workshop for Yle Southwest Finland

The ideation workshop for Yle Southwest Finland, including the newsrooms of Turku and Pori, was held on a Monday morning right after the client's regular morning meeting. There were 20 participants present, both on-site and remotely via a video conferencing platform, Google Meet.

The workshop lasted for an hour and a half due to the client's busy schedule. It included sharing the results of the surveys distributed to Yle's regional newsrooms beforehand, emphasizing the importance of ideation based on previous studies, and trying out different ideation exercises in different group sizes. What carried through the workshop was a slide show presentation, but the most important thing considering the client's benefits from the workshop, was activating and involving the participants with several different exercises and conversations.

I guided the participants for example to try having a microbreak, do different creative writing exercises, have discussions with a pair and a small group, and

try to come up with ideas from a list of many different words which were related for example to the trending topics among young people or in the region.

The biggest challenge of the workshop was the execution itself regarding time and timing. It appeared that not everyone had time to participate in the workshop from start to finish at that particular time, even if it only lasted for an hour and a half, despite the definition of a workshop typically being from a couple of hours to days even (Wirtz 2022). Learning from this, it is important to identify in advance which sections of a workshop are the most important, so that the busiest participants could try to be present at least during that time.

The workshop's timing, which was out of my hands, was also noted in the feedback. For example, worrying about getting the day's work up to speed stressed some participants in the morning. Because the participants did not have an arranged break from other work tasks to participate in the workshop, it made it quite impossible for some to focus on the ideation when other workload was heavily in mind. It was also during a winter break, and that is why everyone could not be present that day.

6.2 Workshop feedback and results

Feedback from the workshop was collected via a simple Google Forms survey. The purpose of the feedback form was to understand how interesting the participants found the workshop, and how useful they think this kind of service could be for their own and their newsroom's future work. 20 people participated in the workshop, out of which 7, meaning 35%, gave feedback via a form.

The majority of the participants who gave feedback, found the ideation workshop interesting or very interesting . All feedback-respondents believed that participating in this specific workshop was either moderately useful (57,1%), useful (28,6%), or very useful (14,3%) for their own work in the future. Moreover, the participants who gave feedback found the workshop to be moderately useful (57,1%) or useful (42,9%) for the future work of their organization (Yle).

Based on the feedback, all participants enjoyed hearing their own organization's, Yle's regional newsrooms', survey results during the workshop. This supports the fact that no matter what type of workshop presentation you are creating, you must know your audience in order to give a successful presentation (Thinking Workshops n.d.). The survey shared with the participants beforehand also gave interesting and important data, which made it easier to design the presentation and activities because it was clear which areas to focus on with this particular audience.

7 Conclusions: Effective ideation requires effort

This thesis examined the current ways of ideation in Yle's regional newsrooms. The most significant findings of the two surveys were, that the difficulties related to this matter are strongly attributed to time management issues and lack of planning ideation specifically. Hurry is a common difficulty in the fast-paced journalistic work, and unfortunately an ongoing if not even increasing problem. As the majority of editor-respondents said that hurry challenges their ideation, it is important to view newsrooms' ideation practices regularly and in-depth.

The majority of the editor-respondents felt that they have time for coming up with only a few new ideas in a month regardless of the fact, that their superiors might ask for ideas daily. Inventing new ideas didn't seem to be as big of a problem in newswork as polishing those with thought and time. As seen from the survey results, none of the editor-respondents had very much time for ideation. Instead, it appeared that ideation was often left to do in one's free time. The challenge in this matter is that creativity does not bloom when forced, but when a mind can truly focus on ideation and creation. Considering that journalism is a creative industry, there should definitely be several opportunities for creativity to bloom at work and not only outside working hours.

The ideation practices and tools varied quite a lot in Yle's regional newsrooms. Some producers said they have an ideation meeting or similar weekly, but others might never have time reserved specifically for ideation. The concept of ideation is extensive, though. The majority of editor-respondents saw ideation in journalism as getting time and help for advancing their ongoing tasks and topics as well, rather than just coming up with new ideas. Because some newsrooms at Yle have found ideation meetings very useful and some not useful at all, it would be good to review the content and execution of the meetings more in details to truly understand what works and what does not. However, studies show that there may be differences in the effectiveness of an ideation method for different personality types, which must be considered when ideating.

In the survey, the editor-respondents said they prefer to design content for less time more often rather than for a longer time rarely, which suggests there is a need for purposeful ideation on a regular basis. However, an ideation workshop is great for trying several different ideation tools and practices, from which the best could then be selected and implemented into a routine in a newsroom. This could be beneficial for all newsrooms because the editor- and producer-respondents wished that the ideation processes would vary in their work.

The editor-respondents also valued conversations with co-workers a lot and felt like brainstorming with others can help them develop their own ideas further. It would be good to take active advantage of the fact that sharing ideas with both colleagues and superiors was easy for the majority of the editor-respondents. However, this relies heavily on each community because presenting ideas requires psychological safety in the work community. Therefore improving newsroom's ideation requires both concrete actions, such as trying different ideation practices, but also general encouragement and maintenance of the work community's sense of creativity and safety in ideation.

Because newsrooms must take responsibility for what they publish, designing is inevitably a part of every editor's every workday, even though there is not a lot of time reserved for it. Because information obtained must be checked as thoroughly as possible (Council for Mass Media in Finland 2011, §10), news should never be rushed even though it might have to be published rather fast. In order for newsrooms to focus on well-designed and well-finished quality in their journalistic content, it is recommendable to review ideation practices regularly.

It is also good to keep in mind that in order to maintain the newsroom's ideation at a good level, ideation does not necessarily require an hour each week when everyone from the office gets together to brainstorm. Open conversations in a large group might lead nowhere or only to the direction of a few of the loudest and fastest speakers. Instead, there are several effective ideation tools to implement in journalism in different ways and at several times, for example from creative writing. It is as important to pay attention to how often ideation occurs as it is to focus on how ideation is done. Everyone in the newsroom should also

be on the same page regarding when and how it is good to present ideas, how ready the ideas are expected to be, and are there really opportunities to polish ideas before they are being called for.

As a conclusion, ideation in journalism is truly real work and could always be improved and practiced more consistently. It is still something everyone does individually differently on their own without thinking about it, and therefore varies understandably. Still, journalistic ideation could be improved by taking a look into ideation in general within different fields.

This thesis provided Yle with a comprehensive understanding of their regional newsrooms' ideation preferences and how they differ from the current practices. As a development task, I created an ideation workshop for newsrooms and facilitated it at Yle Southwest Finland. The majority of the participants who responded to the feedback survey found it interesting and useful for both editors themselves and the newsrooms. Researching the Finnish public-service media company, Yle, regarding editors' and producers' ideation preferences, gives a good and versatile perspective of the industry as Yle is the country's leading organization.

The survey results could have provided a better overall picture of the editors' and producers' views if a higher percentage of participants had been reached. All in all, this thesis serves as a good starting point for the topic yet under-researched in the industry. The work could continue from this by taking a closer look into how a certain newsroom's content reach might alter after an ideation workshop. Newsrooms could benefit from a toolbox in which different ideation exercises and tips are listed. However, a product might easily become forgotten and not put into action, which is why a service makes an impact more likely.

Feedback from the workshop at Yle Southwest Finland was very positive and supports the assumption that there is a demand for such service in Finland and possibly elsewhere too. Therefore this thesis supports many parties including Yle, other newsrooms, and my personal employment opportunities as an entrepreneur if I will provide this type of service as a business.

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