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Knowledge transfer for the social era within journalistic organisations. A study of Spanish cases

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Abstract

Introduction: Fluid knowledge transfer is essential to for the transmission of best practices and for improving organizational performance. In the media sector, which several authors consider to be a “high risk” industry, this process is even more important because it increases the innovative strength of the organisational culture and allows professionals to become aware of the need to adapt themselves to the changing environment. **Methods:** This paper uses non-participant observation and interviews with the heads of knowledge transfer of four Spanish news media companies —*El Confidencial*, *Vocento*, *Civio* and *Weblogs SL*— to explore the importance they give to knowledge transfer, the methods they use to achieve it as well as the barriers and drivers they encounter in the process. **Results and discussion:** The results confirm that the knowledge transfer mechanisms and conditions detected within the media companies under study, such as workload, usefulness attributed to knowledge and sender-receiver trust, are similar to those existing in international industries.

Keywords

Knowledge transfer; media innovation; organisational culture; *El Confidencial*; *Vocento*; *Civio*.

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1. Introduction

Knowledge transfer has proven to be an important mechanism for improving the performance of receiving units in different industries (Argote and Fahrenkopf, 2017). The media industry is no exception. In a market characterised by continuous technological and sociological ups and downs (Castells, 1997: 89), and by greater, faster and more heterogeneous transformations (Kong, 2017: 204-205), flexibility and constant learning are essential requirements for the success of media organisations (Baumann, 2013: 79; Porcu, 2017). In this context, professionals in the different units of a news media organisation must be able to acquire and assimilate, as quickly as possible, the best practices that are generated within their company –and abroad– to optimise their work, achieve better results and give the company a competitive advantage (Zapata Cantú, 2004). Effective knowledge transfer, which is linked to internal innovation, is therefore seen as key factor for departments to abandon organisational inertia (Küng, 2017:96) and adapt their practices to the needs of the context.

In the media, this case has been illustrated in recent years by the proliferation of innovation units and departments, also known as labs, which have diverse objectives, such as the development of digital applications, the exploration of new narratives and formats and the promotion of new business projects (García Avilés, 2018: 360; Salaverria, 2015: 402). However, as innovation managers, these labs are also, in part, responsible for spreading their results to the rest of the professionals and working groups within their organisations (Cea Esteruelas, 2010: 40). In this way, an effective knowledge transfer allows the mid-term and long-term objectives of a company's business roadmap to permeate the organisational culture of the newsroom to make it more flexible and open to transformation (Porcu, 2017).

Despite its importance in the journalism industry and its implicit relationship with innovation in all sectors (Burnett and Williams, 2014), research on internal knowledge transfer in media companies is scarce (García Avilés et al., 2018). As Porcu (2017: 12) points out, “the largest gap in literature on media innovation (...) seems to be the shortage of academic attention paid to the learning and innovation processes of professional journalists in innovative newsrooms. It is surprising, because innovation (...) is inextricably linked to learning processes: without learning there is no innovation”

In this sense, this study has three main objectives. The first one is to determine the importance attached to knowledge transfer in the business strategies of a sample of media companies, regardless of whether

they have specific innovation units. The second objective is to review the methods used by companies for knowledge transfer; and the final one is to identify the factors that facilitate and hinder the reproduction and extension of best practices among professionals. The analysis also takes into account examples of international organisations that belong to various industries and have been analysed in the academic literature.

To this end, the study is based on the case study of four Spanish news media companies with very different profiles in terms of size, revenue and structure: *El Confidencial*, which is one of the most successful and innovative born-digital news media in Spain, according to various academic studies (De Lara, 2015), and has the richest innovation unit in the country (Valero Pastor and García Ortega, 2018: 25); *Vocento*, a regional traditional newspaper group, whose innovation lab (*Vocento Lab*) has undertaken a plan for digital and mobile transformation; *Civio*, a non-profit foundation specialised in transparency and data-driven journalism and one of the most innovative media in Spain (De Lara, 2015); and *Weblogs SL*, a parent company that produces dozens of specialised digital publications.

The study reveals that these journalistic companies consider that the transfer of fluid knowledge from their most innovative units —whether labs or not— to the rest of the organisation is essential. In this way, newsrooms can be imbued with the innovation culture necessary to face the challenges of the new paradigm. While some factors, such as workload and personal reluctance, can complicate the transfer process, the usefulness of the knowledge acquired and the trust between the senders and receivers of innovation reinforce the process, in the same way that other international industries do. With regards to transfer methods, it has been found that explicit training through internal seminars, interdepartmental exchanges and innovation ambassadors, among others, are used in similar ways across Spanish journalistic organisations.

1.1. Knowledge transfer: process, drivers and barriers

Definitions of the concept of knowledge transfer abound in academic literature on organisational strategies. Argote and Ingram (2000: 151) understand it as a process by which one unit of the company (for example, a group, department or division) is influenced by the experience of another. Wang et al. (2004:173) describe it as a systematically organised procedure for the exchange of information and skills. For them, a successful transfer is that in which the receiving unit accumulates and assimilates new knowledge. For his part, Szulanski (2000:10) explains that knowledge transfer allows the organisation to “recreate and maintain a complex and causally ambiguous set of routines in a new configuration”, while Liao and Hu (2007: 403) focus on productivity and define it as the process by which recipients acquire knowledge from issuers so that it can be accumulated to renew the company’s productive capacity.

A common feature that can be drawn from the previous definitions is the conception of knowledge transfer as a process, and not as a one-off act. Szulanski (1996, 2000) was one of the first authors to defend this view and propose a model for knowledge transfer within companies, based on sociological

theories of the dissemination of innovation (Rogers, 1962; Sahin, 2006), social change (Glaser et al., 1983), the introduction of technologies in productive environments (Tyre, 1991) and technology transfer (Galbraith, 1990). This model has served as a theoretical framework for numerous subsequent studies (Duan et al., 2010; Joia and Lemos, 2010; Zapata Cantú, 2004). The conception of knowledge transfer as a process allows the academic debate to address the difficulties companies encounter in each of its phases (Joia and Lemos, 2010; Liao and Hu, 2007; Szulanski, 1996; Szulanski, 2000).

The academic literature has also identified specific conditions for effective knowledge transfer in companies (Davenport and Prusak, 2001; Joia and Lemos, 2010; Szulanski, 1996; Zapata Cantú, 2004). One of them is the effective management of time by individuals, which is essential for knowledge transfer. When it comes to transferring tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1962), enough time is necessary to experiment, reflect, talk and establish contacts and social relations that lead to the transfer, which is unusual in the current business ecosystem (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000: 362). In addition, when explicit knowledge is what is being transferred, the systems that enable it, “such as documents and Intranet, require time to be developed” and processed by workers (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 211). Therefore, time is one of the factors that enable knowledge transfer and, thus, companies must realise that the time invested in these purposes has mid-term and long-term benefits (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 413).

Mutual trust between the source of knowledge and the receiving unit also significantly influences the results of the process. Knowledge transfer, especially when it is tacit, requires numerous and diverse individual exchanges (Nonaka, 1994: 19), whose success depends to some extent on the ease of communication and the level of “intimacy” of relationships (Marsden, 1990: 455). The greater the trust and mutual understanding between senders and recipients in the sociocultural context in which they find themselves—or, in Szulanski’s words (1996:32), the less arduous the relationship is—the lower the risk of ambiguities and uncertainties in knowledge transfer (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 413), and a more faithful the reproduction of shared practices (Liao and Hu, 2007: 404). With regards to the receiver’s trust towards the sender, in addition to personal affinity, the source of knowledge must be perceived by the unit or recipient as reliable, experienced and capable for the process to start effectively (Szulanski, 1996: 31). In other words, the reputation of the source and its participation in previous transfers with positive results increase the chances of success of the knowledge transfer (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 210).

In order for there to be an understanding between all actors, they must share the same language, so that the same terminology and jargon is used by senders and receivers and there is no communicative gap that slows down the process (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 413). This factor requires special attention in contexts where the knowledge to be transferred is tacit, since it cannot be stored verbally (Polanyi, 1962; Zapata Cantú, 2004: 33) and, therefore, many senders are unable to transmit to recipients the practices and techniques that are routine and even obvious to them (Davenport and Prusak, 2001; Haldin-Herrgard, 2000).

Just as receivers must rely on the reliability of the source, trust towards the content of the message, the perception of the knowledge itself is key in the transfer process. When a practice is considered to have been previously useful in its source unit, its reproduction by the receiver is less complicated, as there is a greater willingness to adopt it (Szulanski, 1996: 32). In this sense, ambiguity about the factors and interactions that have caused the previous positive results may hinder the process (Lippman and Rumelt, 1982). Conversely, if the reasons for the success of the practices are clear, the transfer is more likely to be completed in the desired way (Szulanski, 1996: 31).

Trust in the message triggers motivation in the recipient, which is another decisive factor for knowledge transfer. If the recipient is willing and committed to adopting the activity, the process is more likely to be completed satisfactorily (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 211), while the lack of motivation can lead to “foot-dragging, passivity, false acceptance, concealed sabotage or resounding rejection in the implementation and use of new knowledge” (Szulanski, 1996: 31).

However, the source’s motivation also plays an important role in this regard. The senders of the transfer may be reluctant to share their experience, as knowledge empowers individuals and groups within the organisation (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 415), and their transfer may result in the loss of their privileged position (Davenport and Prusak, 2001; Szulanski, 1996: 31). In addition, sources of knowledge may be demotivated if they believe that the rewards offered by the company for their role in the knowledge transfer are scarce (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 414), or if they believe they will have to devote too much time and resources to an activity beyond their core competencies (Szulanski, 1996: 31).

In addition to predisposition, actors’ capabilities and skills also influence the degree of success of the transfer. Receivers may be unable to exploit the sources due to a lack of absorption capacity (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990: 128), which depends on their pre-existing knowledge and manifests itself in the ability or inability to value, assimilate and apply new activities and practices satisfactorily (Szulanski, 1996: 31). For example, if the activity performed by the receiver in his or her workstation is not similar to that performed by the sender, the receiver may not be able to implement the new knowledge due to the lack of skills to implement it (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 211). Academic literature has documented numerous cases in which knowledge transfer has been hindered or impeded by the lack of capacity to assimilate a new technology or process (Joia and Lemos, 2010; Szulanski, 1996; Zapata Cantú, 2004).

Recipients’ retention ability, understood as the ability to institutionalise the use of new knowledge (Szulanski, 1996), is another conditioning element for the process, as the transfer is considered fully effective only when the transferred knowledge endures and is stored in the organisation (Glaser et al., 1983). Without this capability, initial difficulties in the integration of the received knowledge can be used as a pretext for not using it and revert practices to the initial state whenever possible (Zaltman et al., 1973). In the transfer of tacit knowledge, the retention of the acquired knowledge is essential, since the practices and activities are stored by individuals themselves without relying on documents or computer systems, due to the considerable difficulty of encoding it verbally (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 415; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1997).

Finally, organisational context is decisive. Research shows how the company's formal structure, systems and, in general, contextual attributes influence the number of attempts required to effectively transfer knowledge and the quality of the results obtained through those attempts (Szulanski, 1996: 32). Therefore, the internal generation of knowledge requires a fertile organisational context (Szulanski, 1996:32), with a business culture that motivates the organisation's members to innovate, flexible working conditions that allow this generation, and an open work philosophy (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 206). The environment of the organisation must be psychologically safe so that workers can freely express opinions and ideas that differ from those already established and can enrich the knowledge of the company (Sun and Scott, 2005: 86). That is why the transfer is benefited when there is an environment that supports the open, honest, thoughtful and critical dialogue capable of generating and harbouring new perspectives (Fayeh and Prusak, 1998: 268).

Internal bureaucracy, which is represented, for example, by hierarchical chains of command, inflexible configurations, and independent practices for each worker, makes it difficult for such contexts to exist, as it limits the competencies of professionals, as well as the time, flexibility and complexity required for the transfer of tacit knowledge (Argote and Fahrenkopf, 2016). In very rigid contexts, each unit is responsible for its results, and interdepartmental collaboration and alteration of chain of command are not conceived, even though contact between professionals could be beneficial to whole the organisation (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 414).

1.2. Knowledge transfer methods within companies

The academic literature identifies knowledge transfer methods as another influential factor in the development of the process. New staff and workers who move across areas require adequate training, as early as possible, to become familiar with the practices they will develop (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 414) and need to be reasonably fast and efficient (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 105).

There are several formal and informal methods for undertaking this training (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 212), depending on the nature of the knowledge that needs to be transferred. If the knowledge is explicit, such as organisational rules, procedures, and codes, companies can use formal instruction, using courses, presentations, instructors, seminars, or distance learning systems (Zapata Cantú, 2004: 415). However, if companies need to transfer tacit knowledge, which cannot be coded (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1997), the training needs to include demonstrations and opportunities to observe and practice what is being learned (Argote and Fahrenkopf, 2016: 149). Strategies such as mentoring and coaching, for example, consume more time and resources, but are more appropriate for these purposes, as they allow ideas to flow from the most experienced to the newest employees (Joia and Lemos, 2010: 415).

Regarding formal communication mechanisms, in 2004, Cantú (p. 191) noted that meetings were one of the main formal methods of knowledge transfer, while computerised databases were also important

to achieve these effects. On the contrary, the use of internal documents was not so useful, judging by the opinion of the employees, due to the low acceptance of coded knowledge, which requires more time to be acquired. In terms of informal aspects, face-to-face conversations, easy access to knowledgeable people, and joint work to share successes and mistakes were perceived as the most effective methods (Cantú, 2004: 192).

For their part, Leon et al. (2007: 4) focused on explicit initiatives undertaken by companies to disseminate generated knowledge to distinguish methods such as worker exchange groups and interdepartmental visits, communities of practice—which Schmitz Weiss and Domingo (2010) consider to be innovation centres—and learning events to share specific knowledge and experiences. These authors also highlight the need to enable channels of communication between workers, such as email, chats, forums, discussion lists, and phone lists. In this regard, they also note the need to eliminate social distances (hierarchies and cultures), as well as temporal and spatial distances to allow workers to share knowledge through informal conversations.

Finally, the existence of innovative individuals within newsrooms also positively affects the transfer of new knowledge and practices generated within companies (Steensen, 2009: 6). According to Rogers' theory of diffusion of innovation (1962), if we understand the newsroom as a social system, these professionals would constitute the group of early adopters, users of new practices that not only employ them in their daily work but also act as ambassadors for innovation for the rest of the workforce. Therefore, using these pioneers to foster flexible business culture within the newsroom is another method that companies can use for knowledge transfer.

2. Methods

Based on the literature review and the objectives of this article, we proposed the following definition of the concept of knowledge transfer applicable to the field of media innovation:

Knowledge transfer is a process by which best practices and innovations are spread between units of the organisation, or between them and the market, in order to achieve internal agility, better results and a competitive advantage; and, in the long term, generate changes in the corporate culture that help the organisation adapt to changes in the market.

In addition, also based on the literature review, we propose the following classification of the knowledge transfer methods used in innovative media companies:

Table 1. Proposal for the classification of knowledge transfer methods

Types of methods	Methods
Formal teaching	Seminars, classes, courses, presentations, distance learning
Informal teaching	Mentoring, coaching
Mixed teaching (formal and informal)	Learning events (teaching and networking)
Formal communication	Meetings, databases, internal documents
Informal communication	Face-to-face conversation, ease of access to people with knowledge, collaborative work
Mixed communication (formal and informal)	Email, internal chats, forums, discussion lists, phone lists
Professional resources	Worker exchange groups, interdepartmental visits, ambassadors (early adopters)

Source: Authors' own creation

The study aims to answer the following three research questions:

- What level of importance is attached to knowledge transfer in the business strategies of the selected sample of media companies?
- What methods do the selected media organisations use to transfer their best practices and innovation from one unit to another?
- What factors condition the success of knowledge transfer in these companies?

The analysis is based on the case study of four Spanish media companies that are very different but have made important innovative efforts: *Civio*, *El Confidencial*, *Vocento* and *Weblogs*. *El Confidencial* is one of the most prosperous and innovative native digital media in Spain, according to various academic studies (De Lara, 2015); *Vocento* is a traditional media group with numerous regional projects under its umbrella, and the national daily newspaper ABC; *Civio*, a non-profit foundation specialised in transparency and data-driven journalism and one of the most innovative media in Spain (De Lara, 2015); and *Weblogs SL*, a parent company that produces dozens of specialised publications,

such as technology site Xataka and auto site Motorpasión. Of these media, only *Vocento* and *El Confidencial* have innovation units, *Vocento Lab* and *El Confidencial Lab*, which is the largest department dedicated to these purposes in Spain (Valero Pastor and García Ortega, 2018: 25).

Table 2. Case studies

Media company	Workforce	Revenue	Type	Innovation unit
<i>Civio</i>	5 to 15	200,000 - 500,000	Journalism foundation	No
<i>El Confidencial</i>	More than 150	> \$10,000,000	Born-digital news outlet	Yes
<i>Vocento</i>	More than 150	> \$10,000,000	Multimedia group	Yes
Weblogs	50 to 100	500,000 - 1,000,000	Multimedia group	No

Source: Authors' own creation

To achieve the research objectives, the people responsible for innovation and knowledge transfer in each medium were asked to answer an open questionnaire, adapted to the characteristics of the companies. The questionnaire consisted of three main blocks that addressed each of the research objectives and issues: the importance attached to knowledge transfer, the conditions surrounding knowledge transfer and the methods used to ensure a successful knowledge transfer within the selected companies. The people interviewed were Alejandro Laso, Head of Innovation and Strategy at *El Confidencial* and leader of *El Confidencial Lab*; Borja Bergareche, Head of Innovation at *Vocento* and *Vocento Lab*; Antonio Ortiz, Head of Strategy at *Weblogs SL*; and Miguel Ángel Gavilanes, Head Training at *Civio*. In addition, we selected another interviewee from *Vocento* due to the fact that this medium owns dozens of regional media: Iker Barinagarrementería, member of the innovation team for Regional Newspapers. All interviews were conducted at the headquarters of each of the selected companies throughout March 2018.

3. Results

3.1. Knowledge generation and transfer within the sample of companies

Knowledge transfer has been recognised by the four selected organisations as a process of paramount importance for their activity and, above all, for the adaptation of their newsroom culture to the post-industrial journalistic ecosystem (Porcu, 2017). In this regard, Alejandro Laso, head of *El Confidencial Lab*, explains that, in its creation in 2013, this unit only had four workers and was seen by the rest of the organisation with some reluctance because it experimented with technologies that had no prominence in the Spanish journalism industry. However, over time, the lab grew to accommodate 30 professionals and now leads the adaptation of the organisation, which is composed of more than 120

workers and 30 permanent employees, to the market's current and future demands. In this process, knowledge transfer has become one of the key objectives of the unit, since, as Laso states, it aims "to make the culture of *El Confidencial* innovative, because it is not the same to have four people with a row, that everyone rowing. It is not about having people working in the future, but about getting the whole company to work in the same direction".

In the case of *Vocento*, the company also has an innovation unit, but knowledge generation and transfer is also managed by other transversal teams, such as Customer Strategy, which focuses on market research, and Regional Media Innovation, which allows core corporate teams to be in touch with the multiple projects that make up the group. The lab focuses on identifying new practices and trends in the market, coordinating transversal processes and supporting the implementation of innovative initiatives. In addition, it has a small budget allocated for the development of its own projects, to experiment and test innovations, such as Infoesquí, Infoplayas and, above all, Eslang, the website for millennials. This project is a testing ground for the whole organisation and, therefore, a way to generate knowledge in the company, which will later be transferred to the media group's outlets through diverse initiatives. For this group, it is key to enable formal and informal knowledge transfer channels, since it seeks to achieve a digital transformation in a decentralised structure with more than 1,200 workers.

Just as *Vocento* uses Eslang to test new formulas without compromising the prestige of its most relevant brands, such as ABC, and regional outlets, *Weblogs SL* uses its pilot project, Magnet, to preserve the tone and style of its flagship brand, Xataka, and its more than 30 projects, while generating knowledge through experimentation. *Weblogs SL* does not have an innovation unit as such, so Magnet allows it to develop new genres, formats, processes and technologies. In this organisation, knowledge is also generated through working groups created for specific exploratory tasks, such as adaptation of products to social networks. In these cases, several people with experience and a high degree of responsibility in the organisation are gathered to strategically analyse elements such as good practices, narratives and key performance indicators (KPI). Knowledge transfer becomes relevant in this medium, in which 95% of the editorial work is carried out remotely, following the trend of Beyond journalism (Deuze and Witschge, 2017), to "involve people who are very alien to these processes (...) and rely on the methods we had five years ago", as Antonio Ortiz, the Head of Corporate Strategy, points out.

Finally, *Civio* neither has a unit dedicated exclusively to innovation. Due to its small workforce of 10 employees, and the innovative profile of most of its journalists and technicians, *Civio* does not have a specific group to generate knowledge, although individual and collective research in the work process serves to identify the most effective processes and incorporate them into its organisational culture. Without a doubt, the formation of multidisciplinary teams made up of journalists and computer scientists favours the generation of knowledge, because ideas can flow in all directions. In addition, as a non-profit foundation, whose main objective is to promote transparency in the public sphere, *Civio* does not focus so much on knowledge transfer within the organisation as on the dissemination of its research results, conclusions, processes and even source-code repositories and information.

3.2. Determining factors: knowledge transfer drivers and barriers

Knowledge transfer in the media companies under study is influenced by certain factors that editors have to manage effectively in order to disseminate innovative practices. The available time, the configuration of physical space, the trust between the knowledge source and receiver, the perceived usefulness of the message for the receiving unit, and other contextual factors of the organisation, such as hierarchy, transparency and, in short, internal culture can constitute barriers and, at the same time, drivers if they are managed strategically and consciously.

Time is a classic condition in the media industry, because of its indissoluble relationship with latest news and the heavy workload of professionals. The same is true for knowledge transfer. Based on the theory of the innovator's dilemma (Christensen, 1997), all media leaders recognise the importance of strategic actions in the medium and long term, so that immediate, tactic decisions do not saturate the activity of the newsrooms. In this sense, companies enable channels that combine different working pace in the newsrooms, i.e., short-term, with mid-term and long-term goals. While *Vocento* and *El Confidencial* have labs that are in charge of their strategic vision, while *Weblogs SL* has transversal teams with slower rhythms to create products and brands and generate knowledge, and *Civio* implements institutional channels so that the daily coaching work does not prevent the development of large information projects.

Precisely, the need to establish a second speed in the media is what has led *El Confidencial* to separate its lab from the rest of the newsroom with glass walls. Most authors recommend that newsrooms be open for a more fluid knowledge transfer (Kong, 2017: 82; Robinson, 2011), *El Confidencial* prefers this layout to prevent the lab's members from being engulfed by the news storm. *Vocento* neither perceives physical space as a condition for transfer, since, due to its large size, it is impossible to place all units near the sources of knowledge. For their part, the leaders of *Weblogs SL* and *Civio* do recognise the need to share the same space for knowledge transfer. While *Weblogs* seeks to strategically place workers in space, for example, by sitting the youngest professionals in the group alongside directors to infuse notions of generational change, in *Civio* the reduced office space is perceived as a favourable factor for sharing ideas.

Trust between workers and towards the sources of knowledge is also perceived as a condition in the media under study. Borja Bergareche, Head of Innovation at *Vocento*, recognises the importance of giving the positions related to digital transformation to journalists who have worked in the newsroom, and not to "guys with a tie" who generate reluctance in the workforce. The innovation unit of *Vocento* follows this model, and so does the unit of *El Confidencial*, as Alejandro Laso is also part of the Council of Directors of the medium as Head of Strategy. In this model, all actors involved in the transfer share the same language and concerns and it is easier for them to convey new concepts effectively so that they can be incorporated into the daily work.

This assimilation also significantly influences the recipient's perception of the usefulness of the knowledge to be transferred. In Bergareche's words, "knowledge reduces the fear of uncertainty in such changing ecosystems, so if usefulness is perceived, it generates satisfaction", allowing the process to be completed with positive results. An illustrative example of this reality is the content management system (CMS) of *El Confidencial*. Although it is recognised that there are areas in the newsroom that do not perceive new technologies as very useful, the CMS has been successfully adopted by the entire workforce, as its usefulness to facilitate daily work is evident. In addition, in this sense, both organisations seek to make writers aware that the correct use of distribution tools increases the dissemination of their stories, so that they can perceive the usefulness of the knowledge to be transferred.

Another important factor is executives' understanding of the processes established to transfer innovation, as the creation of a fertile business environment in which workers enjoy autonomy to test and improve new practices depends on it. In the case of *Vocento* and *El Confidencial*, the heads of innovation insist on the need to explain the process in terms of benefits for the company's business, to gain credibility and trust from the directors. Alejandro Laso illustrates the importance of delegated leadership by stating that *El Confidencial* began to grow economically when the centralist style of former director Jesús Cacho gave way, at the time of his departure from the company, to the current collaborative philosophy.

This context promotes the autonomy of work teams, individual professionals as well as the knowledge transfer so that workers understand and are aligned with the company's objectives and are able to act for themselves in the right direction. Autonomy is also extended in *Civio*, which is based on non-hierarchical model. Although there needs to be professionals with more authority in decision-making in different fields, their selection does not correspond to their rank, but to their professional skills and judgment. Other workers place their trust in them and share ideas, proposals and opinions for the development of the processes.

To achieve this innovative context, business culture must be prepared to abandon inertia (Küng, 2017:96) and seek new paths. *Weblogs SL*, for example, aims to promote autonomous innovation by workers, but the lower levels show little initiative to change the processes which, with some exceptions, are implemented by the management. Although there is no prior review of the contents and the opinions of writers are accepted, innovation is not yet fully integrated into the culture of the medium. The other two organisations, *Vocento* and *El Confidencial*, considered it is essential to gradually incorporate knowledge, adopting a rhythm that helps changing the newsroom dynamics, but at the time does not involve a radical rupture in the way of doing journalism, as in many cases journalists have developed part of their career in traditional media and, in the case of *Vocento*, are still related to paper format.

The organisation's transparency, both outwards and towards its employees, is another relevant factor for the creation of a context in which workers are able to act independently to gain knowledge. The

open exchange of ideas is perceived by respondents as a useful mechanism to review processes and implement improvements. In this sense, in addition to *Civio*, whose main function is to promote transparency in society, the rest of the organisations are willing to share their know-how with the world, although they have reservations to share certain types of knowledge, like a project's coding. Alejandro Laso emphasises the importance of confronting ideas and ensures that the fact that other companies know how *El Confidencial* works does not decrease its competitive advantages, because “the important thing is not to know how things are done, but to have the capacity needed to implement the processes well”.

In short, the structure and context of each organisation greatly affects innovation and knowledge transfer. Miguel Angel Gavilanes, *Civio*'s head of training, points out that the poor institutionalisation of certain processes, which are more informal in the company he leads, causes loss of information. The people responsible for *Vocento* and *El Confidencial* mentioned agile methodologies as effective tools to coordinate complex tasks and share knowledge almost automatically on a day-to-day basis.

3.3. Knowledge transfer methods within media companies

Although the factors mentioned above are decisive for knowledge transfer, the companies under study do not let the process to depend exclusively on them and adopt formal and informal methods to encourage it. One of the most widespread initiatives in this regard is the creation of internal memos and newsletters that promote the adoption of new practices and philosophies. Well-known examples are the Innovation Report (2014), Our Path Forward (2015) and Journalism That Stands Apart (2017), which have served The New York Times to articulate their digital transformation (Nafría, 2017: 191).

Weblogs SL circulated among all its workers a memorandum titled “When you get up and have the face of Terra”, which refers to the outdated look of the veteran website and aims to shake the company and make its employees see that, although the organisation is born digital, the market has evolved in the 13 years it has been on the scene, and it is necessary to adapt to it. For its part, *Vocento Lab* sends some of its members a newsletter, with no fixed periodicity, that analyses the emerging trends of the ecosystem that could be successfully applied to its case. This newsletter is sent to media directors and managers from different areas, but also to writers who are considered early adopters (Rogers, 1962) of new digital practices.

These pioneers of innovation are revealed as important resources for the units in charge of promoting new practices, because they not only adopt innovations, but also serve as ambassadors of the pro-digital culture within the newsrooms (Steensen, 2009). Their main motivation is not only to facilitate their work, but, in Bergareche's words, “they have a greater sense of pride in belonging to an innovative project”. All the companies under study, with the exception of *Civio*, due to its structure, claim to take advantage of these ambassadors to introduce new practices in the newsroom. To favour the emergence of these figures, companies choose to reduce reviews and not penalise error harshly, unless it is caused for lack of diligence at work, as Antonio Ortiz states. In addition, creativity is

rewarded. For example, *El Confidencial* organises an internal hackathon, the LabDay, in which those workgroups that incorporate non-lab professionals receive a higher score. *Weblogs SL* also seeks to promote the creativity of its classical writers through immersion. These journalists make long stays, lasting a month, in Magnet, the experimental medium of the company, so that they learn to adapt to the new paradigms and practices.

Regarding this type of transfer-related activities, *El Confidencial* carries out two events: the *i+Day*, which is held once a month on Fridays to allow workers to get out of the routine and develop innovations on their own, and the internship communities, which are held every Friday to allow team members to talk about their experience with new technologies and processes. In the same way, *Weblogs SL* organises weekly seminars with industry professionals and videotapes them for remote viewing. *Vocento* carries out training courses for the entire group about different specialties, such as data-driven journalism, editing in After Effects, and agile methods. *Vocento* also carries out the annual summit of social networks, the *Descubre Vocento* monthly programme, aimed at the 800 employees of the Madrid headquarters, and the lab sessions, which are regular meetings with professionals, including Alejandro Laso. For its part, *Civio* does not provide this type of self-taught training and its professionals are the ones who transmit their knowledge to the outside, through their participation in different training programmes for journalists, open forums, like the Medialab Prado, the newsrooms of other media and even NGOs, such as Greenpeace. In *Civio*, the knowledge obtained from other professionals in the market is generated entirely through collaborations for large projects, like its collaboration with *La Sexta* network for the Medicamentalia project.

In the day-to-day work, knowledge transfer is based on meetings between professionals. In recent years, *Vocento* and *El Confidencial* have adopted agile methods that institutionalise these regular short meetings. In the case of the latter, for example, all the members of the lab meet every Monday to check out the progress of the projects; the teams spend 10 minutes each morning to discuss the tasks of the day, and each group has three large weekly meetings: refinement, to plan the next week's action; the review, on Fridays, to assess what has been done over the past week; and feedback, also on Fridays, to analyse possible problems in the processes. In addition, the medium uses the figure of the agile coach, who attends some of the meetings to optimise the method. In *Vocento*, transversal teams also hold regular and weekly fixed meetings, such as the product meeting, which is held every Tuesday, and extraordinary meetings dedicated to different topics, such as the advertising observatory and the mobile innovation group. *Civio* holds a global weekly meeting and a previous meeting of the technical and journalistic groups to facilitate communication between the two.

Regarding meetings with the executive level of the companies, *Weblogs SL* has a writing table in which the directors of each medium of the company talk to the managers responsible for Digital Strategy, who have been included in it strategically to enhance innovation in the company. As an organisation in which innovation is usually top-down, these meetings serve to make directors aware of new practices and make them take responsibility for their application in their respective media. The opposite happens in *Vocento*, where the Digital Strategy Committee meets every Wednesday afternoon. This team, which consists of the head of Innovation, the head of Analytics and the head of Customer Strategy,

presents to the managing director and the general managers the progress with respect to the annual roadmap to raise awareness of the need for further innovation.

Despite the importance of these meetings, the people responsible of the media under study recognise that what helps the most to adopt the new practices is informal conversations, “the fine drop”, as Antonio Ortiz states. Miguel Ángel Gavilanes states that this is the most productive route in *Civio*, where informal communication is constant, due to its small size, and the greatest exchanges occur in this way. In *El Confidencial*, this type of transfer is encouraged through the establishment of physical panels that show the innovative actions of the medium in different areas. This initiative, according to Alejandro Laso, “provokes informal conversations with interested newsroom members, who come and ask us what all these post-its mean”.

Finally, computer applications play a very relevant role as methods of knowledge transfer. Work management tools, such as Slack and Jira, are used by all the companies under study. In addition, *Civio* has a repository in which all the information obtained in the documentation phase of the projects is shared with the other workers, and a GitHub account, where it shares its open source code with third parties. *Vocento* does not share its code but uses technologies like Twitter and Medium to highlight current trends, which also serves as a starting point for workers to come into contact with innovative business culture.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Having presented the results of the research, it is worth highlighting the relevance of the study of knowledge transfer in relation to innovation processes in the media industry. The relevance of the concept in this sense lies in its influence on the formation of organisational culture: knowledge transfer allows innovation to be more than a mere fad, perceived through isolated manifestations and reserved for certain units of a company. In other words, knowledge transfer allows innovation to permeate the culture of newsrooms and contributes to its adaptation to the medium (Porcu, 2017). Therefore, knowledge transfer methods and conditions in media companies constitute an interesting object of study to identify how the wholistic transformation of organisations can be enhanced.

One of the main findings is the great importance granted by the companies under study to knowledge transfer, both internal and external. All of them, to a greater or lesser extent, focus on reducing barriers and increasing driving factors so that knowledge and innovation flow across their units, even though, at the theoretical and discursive levels, few identify this process with the concept of knowledge transfer.

The news media organisations included in the sample recognise as conditions for knowledge transfer such factors as working hours and workload, which pose a dilemma between tactical and strategic actions; the physical space occupied by the senders and receivers of knowledge; the trust among all

actors and the existence of a common language that makes their communication possible; the usefulness and applicability of the knowledge to be transferred; the context of the company in terms of its structure, hierarchy and autonomy of staff; the existence of a business culture that exhibits certain openness to change; and the implementation of a transparent work philosophy, which allows workers to align with the company's goals. In this sense, it is noted that these factors largely coincide with the conditions detected in other industries by the existing literature, although it is true that in journalism time becomes particularly relevant, since it is difficult to make medium and long term plans due to its indissoluble relationship with today's reality.

Similarly, certain parallelism can be found between what is established in academic literature and what was found in this research regarding transfer methods. Informal routes continue to be an important form of exchange among employees while meetings are heavily important in terms of formal methods. Other initiatives such as interdepartmental visits, training seminars and coaching are also present in media companies. The greatest dissonance is seen in the use of internal documentation. In the case of the companies under study, computer tools encourage the exchange of documents, either through repositories, newsletters sent via email, and applications such as Slack and Jira.

This paper recognises limitations that could be eased by further research. The research design focuses on gathering the testimony of the people responsible for managing knowledge transfer and innovation in four news media companies. However, in order to offer an even more faithful portrait, it would be optimal to seek the opinion of professionals working in the different units and the newsrooms to check the level of penetration of the practices and attitudes the interviewees aim to transfer.

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