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What is This?

Marketplace public radio and news routines reconsidered: Between structures and agents

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Abstract
This article is based on a five-month in-depth ethnographic study of *Marketplace*, a US public radio business news show. While older news ethnographies have tended to focus more on organizational explanations for newswork, this article adds to a growing body of literature that shows the nuanced relationship between individuals and organizations. Using Giddens' structuration as a framework, this article argues that structures such as time and organizational identity limit agency, but that journalists are more purposive actors than they are given credit. Agency can most clearly shape structure when new technology is introduced.

Keywords
agency, ethnography, Giddens, news production, public radio, sociology of news

While news production studies aim 'to make and find plausible an order' behind what many journalists see as accidental (Schudson, 1989: 8), the ethnographies of the 1970s – Epstein (1973), Fishman (1980), Gans (1979), Schlesinger (1978), Sigal (1973), Tuchman (1973, 1980) and others – have left a legacy of scholarship that places greater emphasis on organizational dynamics than individual processes. Although these scholars have helped us to understand the constraints placed upon newswork – from source pressure to economics to organizational socialization – their work de-emphasizes how individuals might moderate these constraints. These ethnographies still continue to be cited, however, because they are, for the most part, the most complete, in-depth book-length studies of newswork available.

Taking into consideration both technological change and the shortcomings of the existing and extremely influential work of the 1970s and 1980s, scholars have called

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for a second wave of news ethnography. Both Klinenberg (2005) and Domingo (2008), for instance, argue that we should re-examine newswork in the light of new technology. Cottle (2000, 2007) addresses some of the problems with earlier work, arguing that in older ethnographies, 'ideas of journalistic agency and practices became lost from view in the theorization of bureaucratic needs and professional norms' (2007: 10).

Recent years have brought this second wave of news production studies (see Michelstein and Boczkowski, 2009), but few challenge the early ethnographies' focus on finding organizational patterns. Most of these newer ethnographies focus on adaption to the digital age, in part because the need for content can no longer be fulfilled through traditional structures (Powers, 2011).

However, a small set of recent scholarship has begun to look at the relationship between individual agency and organizational structure in newswork (Kaplan, 2006; Ryfe, 2009a, 2009b; Steensen, 2009). This essay seeks to provide additional depth and nuance to this discussion with a descriptive account of how structures and agents intersect across a variety of news processes through an in-depth, participant observation field study of an American public radio newsroom. From a theoretical perspective, I suggest that Giddens' structuration is one way to understand this relationship between individuals and organizations. Although Ryfe (2009a, 2009b) has used structuration to examine organizational change in a newsroom, he concluded that structures were far more powerful than a single change agent hoping to make a difference in organizational culture. My data, collected over five months at *Marketplace* public radio, however, suggest there is more that pairing Giddens with news ethnography can offer to our understanding of newsmaking.

Marketplace is broadcast to over 9 million Americans on approximately 500 public radio stations and has a growing terrestrial and online audience. It is a business news show with a quirky sound, intended as 'business news for the rest of us' – or the ordinary public radio listener in the USA. Although it is a small organization with a specific niche sound, *Marketplace* faces challenges common to all news organizations, from scheduling pressure to organizational norms (which I argue form a second structure). The case, therefore, can offer insights generalizable to our overall understanding of newswork.

I found that the structures that are most constraining to news production are organizational identity and time, whereas the agents are most able to change structure when they can introduce new routines into newswork via new technology. In addition, I found a recursive relationship between agents and structure as agents understand and shape organizational identity, illustrating Giddens' duality of structures. Finally, I believe this article contributes to the literature by providing a thick description of the purposive actions of journalists, which shows that even when constrained by structures, journalists are more agential than they have perhaps been seen before.

To extract these insights, I explored the following questions: How do the tensions between structures and agency impact newswork? In what ways does structure limit agency, and in what ways can agency change or influence structure? This essay proceeds with a review of both the literature and Giddens, a discussion of my methods, and then with findings.

Past and present ethnographic work

Earlier ethnographies suggested that journalists are swept up in organizational demands, and too tethered by these expectations to act of their own volition. Each study emphasized a different reason for constraint, be it bureaucratization (Fishman, 1980), time (Schlesinger, 1978), or sources (Sigal, 1973). The newsroom has also been compared to a factory, something even journalists interviewed agreed with, as one noted, 'The daily routine is like screwing nuts on a bolt' (as cited in Gans, 1979: 84). These routines are essential. To Tuchman (1973, 1980), they are the ordering force that makes newswork predictable in an otherwise unpredictable environment. Although new technology has changed many of these routines, these structures do continue to order newswork. A comprehensive review of these older ethnographies can be found in Cottle (2007).

In more recent news production studies, journalists 'live out in their every day practices a tension between tradition and change' (Michelstein and Boczkowski, 2009: 575). There are two major trends in recent literature: a focus on professionalism and a focus on the organization. When scholars have taken journalists' agency into consideration in a changing news world, their focus has predominantly been on professionalization and perceptions of roles and identity with far less emphasis placed on structural constraints (Singer, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Singer and Ashman, 2009). Robinson (2007, 2009, 2011), among others, has also looked extensively at the limits of journalists' occupational ideology, particularly as newsrooms shift to web-first with focus on what this means to *journalists* rather than organizations. Domingo (2008) argues this research is valuable because it shows how journalists take up technology and incorporate it into their professional ideology.[1]

On the other hand, other new developments in news production work have focused more exclusively on organizational concerns rather than on journalists' agency. Boczkowski (2004, 2010) and Anderson (2010, 2011), for example, focus on technological change and how it can be explained by sociological patterns of production. Both offer thick description about how journalists work, but the studies continue the search for new explanations of organizational routines in the digital age. Klinenberg (2005) also seemed to reiterate the dominance of organizational control, contending that overwhelmed journalists face a 'news cyclone'. Embedded in the 24–7 multimedia world of news production, many journalists feel powerless to do anything to stop it.[2]

Some recent literature addresses the relationship between organization and individual autonomy, opening the door to this study of *Marketplace*. Steensen's study of an evolving features section in a Norwegian newsroom attempts to bridge the gap between 'structural and individual perspectives' (2009: 826). Ryfe (2009a, 2009b) looks at structure, action, and change by identifying the 'deep structure of news reporting' in beat journalism. He argues that it is nearly impossible to change news practices, however, because journalists are deeply wedded to managing uncertainty. Similarly, Kaplan (2006) recognizes the importance of understanding how both news organizations and journalists adapt to change, and proposes new institutionalism as a framework for inquiry. These scholars identify the need to understand the interaction between the structures of newswork and journalists' experience, thus setting the precedent for my inquiry.

A brief interlude: Structuration

To build one theoretical bridge between individual agency and organizational constraints, I look to Giddens' (1979, 1986) theory of structuration. His work offers a departure from sociologists who look at mainly processes, patterns, and routines. Giddens' theory rests on an understanding of the relationship between agents and structures: the 'notions of action and structure *presuppose* one another' (1979: 53).

The defining characteristic of agency is that 'at any point in time, the agent could have acted otherwise' (1986: 56). We should look at agency as intention rather than output, and understand that agents are continuously reflexive. When agents have time, they 'elaborate discursively' (1986: 4) about the reasons for their actions. Structures are the 'rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction' (Giddens, 1986: xxxi). Rules are the patterns of action and resources are what people make.

The 'duality of structures' underscores Giddens' contention that agents cannot be understood as separate from structures. Rules and resources, while responsible for mediating the duality of structure, are not static; rules, for example, develop as a result of repeated action. In such a system, structures arise from actions, and actions are mediated by structures. 'In and through their activities, agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible' (1986: 2), continuously reshaping the structures that, in turn, constrain and shape their action. Embedded rules or norms are structures that are more difficult to change, but they exist only because people have created them. The potential for change exists because agents, as Giddens contends, are purposeful actors (1979: 56).

Thus, while structures may be limiting, agents may have more power to change them than past theorists may have suggested. Previous journalism studies literature has given excellent attention to the reflexivity of newsworkers (Ettema and Glasser, 1998; Usher, 2010; Zelizer, 1992), but these have largely been outside the context of day-to-day newsroom production pressure. To place Giddens in the context of news routines, we can look at how *Marketplace*'s journalists at work have the capacity to shape norms, rules, and routines.

Marketplace

Marketplace, an American Public Media show, is broadcast out of Los Angeles in a non-descript, downtown office building. There are multi-person bureaus in New York and Washington, DC. At the time of my research, there were also one-person bureaus in the Pacific Northwest, Florida, North Carolina, Shanghai, and London. *Marketplace* has about 40 journalists in Los Angeles, including producers, editors, and reporters. *Marketplace* has a morning show, which is broadcast as a rotating eight-minute morning segment throughout rush hour, a half-hour afternoon drive-time show, and an hour-long weekend personal finance show. *Marketplace*'s website is underdeveloped compared to that of National Public Radio (the largest and most prominent national public radio network), but *Marketplace*'s site offers podcasts, daily updates, and archived stories. The staff has a fairly even gender distribution across the power hierarchy, some racial diversity, and an age distribution that follows an increase across the hierarchy.

The workflow for the afternoon show (called *PM*) begins with a daily morning meeting attended by editors, producers, and sometimes the host and reporters. This meeting is oriented around selecting the day's news stories. These day-of stories, or 'spots', are assigned around 9 a.m. and are due by 1 p.m. PST, as PM airs live at 2 p.m. PST, after the stock markets on the East Coast close. In addition to the morning meeting, there is a weekly afternoon staff meeting, a producer's meeting to schedule feature stories, and a features meeting attended by editors and producers. Biweekly, the executive producer meets with the staff.

This study can be placed in a larger context, despite its unique case features. In the past, scholars have grouped together studies from the BBC and network news (Epstein, 1973; Schlesinger, 1978) and large and small newspapers (Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1980) with newer work on innovation in newsrooms – including in the USA and Argentina (Boczkowski, 2004, 2010) and even niche Finnish financial newsrooms (Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009), suggesting that there is something that we can reliably point to as being uniform about newswork. At the same time, there is justification to add to the literature on radio ethnographies, of which there are rather few (Brannon, 2008; Eliasoph, 1988; Usher, 2011). *Marketplace* was also an ideal study site because as a small radio newsroom, I could see in close detail the relationship between structure and agency.

Method

I spent five months at *Marketplace* observing the production of the PM show.[3] I attended the morning editorial meetings and the weekly feature meeting. I was given access to the *Marketplace* email system to observe intra-office communication. In addition to meetings, I observed communication between reporters, producers, and editors by shadowing journalists across the organizational hierarchy. I supplemented my work with 13 interviews (these generally took place during my last month in the field), which each took approximately 30–45 minutes. In exchange for access and to better understand radio production, I also worked as an intern for one day at the show, where I assisted with a myriad of production and book-keeping duties. Newsroom employees are only identified by position, on their request, with the exception of obviously identifiable public figures.

For data collection, I kept a notebook on hand for jottings and dialogue which were then compiled as field notes. I also relied on supplementary documents and interview data. All of this material was analyzed using the constant comparative method as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967). First I developed codes, which were organized into broader themes. This grounded theory approach led me back to Giddens as an explanatory theoretical framework.

Tensions between structure and agency in shaping news: The impact on news

Structure at *Marketplace* can be classified as the 'deep' structures of newswork and the structures that make *Marketplace* unique, both of which influence production. The deep structures include the pressure to produce content according to a given time clock (especially intense in a broadcast newsroom); the need to take into account audience demands;

the hierarchy of decision-making; the pressures of a beat; source pressure; and the need for uniformity across unpredictable story content, among others.

More specific to *Marketplace* is the structure invoked by the word 'Marketplacey'. Marketplacey is both an expression of professional identity and a description of how to shape a story for this outlet. In 2008, *Marketplace* staff had a series of meetings to try to define Marketplacey. The staff came up with this mission and vision statement:

> Mission: *Marketplace* makes money, business and the global economy understandable and even fun, giving you the power to change your life and the world.

> Vision: The place to go for smart, entertaining news about money, business and economics. (Distinctively Marketplace FAQ, n.d.)

The document also contained a list of factors that guided story selection. These included covering big business and economic stories accessibly, advancing a business story by 'digging deeper', noting impact on consumers by using a strong character, and selecting a mix of technical, light and 'weighty and water cooler stories'. Goals included: 'Reporting counterintuitive stories, asking counterintuitive questions.' Thus, Marketplacey serves as a structure orienting how news gets produced.

This raises an interesting point for reflection. Are these statements the product of socialized norms and organizational conformity as Breed (1955) observed? Or, did agents come together to negotiate norms using their predefined sense of organizational structure? We will see this structure as recursive as this article develops.

These structures of newswork play an important role. For instance, consider a discussion with the host, the associate producer, and the senior producer about covering the first 100 days of Obama's presidency. Kai Ryssdal, the host, did not really want to cover the 100 days, nor did the associate producer.

> 'It's just stupid journalist convention,' Ryssdal said.

> 'I don't get why everyone makes a big deal of it,' the associate producer said.

> 'We can't cover this seriously, if we do it at all – and I'm not saying we have to do it,' said Ryssdal.

> After some silence, Ryssdal said, 'I've got it. We get some CEO that's been on the job for 100 days and ask him what he's done. It'll be great. The CEO from the ACME Widget Company in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.'

> The senior producer replied, 'I hadn't thought of going funny, but I think that's great.'

> They talked about covering it on the 97th day, well before other news organizations would be doing the first 100 days. They then talked the possibility of getting back up 'Vox' (voices from ordinary citizens) and asking them, 'What have you done in the last 100 days?' in case they couldn't find their widget CEO. (field notes, 9 April 2009)

The '100 days' is a journalistic convention that many American newsrooms feel compelled to cover. In fact, *Marketplace* is hard pressed to find a way to avoid it – audiences will be hearing about it elsewhere – and it is a planned, prescheduled event that can be easily scheduled into the *Marketplace* news hole, making the production of the radio

show easier. In this way, the structures of newswork are in tension with what the journalists want to do, which is not to cover the tired refrain at all.

This example demonstrates that journalists are keenly aware of the structure and its constraints, noting how frustrating and conventional the deep structures of newswork can be. Their conversations show their negotiations between these news norms and their own sense of what they would rather do. And in the end, we see them bend toward covering the story. We get something definably Marketplacey.

Another way to demonstrate this tension between structure and agency is to compare what journalists *think* they might accomplish while sitting around the editorial table with the actual news story that results. Gans (1979) and Tuchman (1980) take the process of story selection and reduce it into predictable categories which help us understand larger patterns about newswork. But there is also a more nuanced level to news decision-making. Each day, I saw journalists who brought fresh insight and new questions for discussion about the array of possible stories. The general themes of the stories may have been the same, from government ineptitude during the crisis to problems with the recovery, but the dynamics of the conversation were unpredictable from day to day. While I do not detail these conversations, my larger point is that journalists have more room to debate, discuss, ask new questions, and challenge how they might present each new story than perhaps has been granted to them in the past. The structure of daily production makes it difficult, however, to create a novel story with new information (as captured in ethnographies and elsewhere; see e.g. Carey, 1997[1986]).

Consider one example from the morning news meeting held on 15 January 2009. A number of stories were in the mix and this news meeting followed the routine of most morning meetings. At the beginning, the senior producer announced the time the staff had to fill with spot stories. The morning host began rattling off the day's news. He mentioned that he wanted to follow up the story he had seen in *The Wall Street Journal* that Bank of America (BOA) was slated to get more money from the government's Troubled Asset Relief Plan (TARP) and another story from the AP that BOA 'didn't understand how big the losses were'.

There was spirited discussion about BOA. The senior producer asked, 'What are we getting for our money? This is our investment?' Then the Washington editor noted, 'What's our stake in all of this?' Other editors continued the line of questioning, with one editor asking, 'What are we going to tell people to help them understand how much money we've poured into this thing?' They then decided to do two stories related to the issue – one on BOA, and the other on how it was not the only bank facing this trouble.

The story that ended up running on BOA only tangentially answered the editors' and producers' many questions. The two-minute story only featured a partner at a financial firm who explained that the money was 'primarily used to absorb losses'. The focus on 'What does it mean for us?' was not carried through because of structural constraints on reporting, from time to sources. But we do see agency at work: the editorial conversations between editors, producers, and journalists do illustrate that journalists are actively constructing their goals and ambitions for particular stories.

In both the case of the 100 days and the BOA story, we see the tensions at hand between structures and agents, with some of the ways in which agents try to intervene

with existing news structures. In the case of 100 days, we see journalists who can make the choice not to cover the story, but do not because of larger news norms. With the BOA story, we see journalists asking a myriad of significant questions that could shape a story, but, as we will see, the structures of newswork result in the production of different stories than editors and reporters often intend.

A closer look at reporting practices gives us a better understanding of the interplay between agency and structure – and what this means for news production. Although the deep structures of newswork (most significantly, time) and the structures of *Marketplace* influence newswork, the two examples I provide here still show agency. Notably, agency is not just creative work, but the capacity to purposively and reflexively consider action. In each case, Giddens' theoretical lens gives us a better look at the ways journalists consider how and what they are doing.

A reporter covering the change in GE bond ratings from AAA to AA, for example, was so constrained by news structures that he could not answer the very question he sought to uncover: just how the new AA ratings might impact ordinary consumers (field notes, 5 March 2009).

'I want to get into the credit angle,' the reporter told me. 'Most people don't know that GE has all these credit cards.' Then he said he wanted to explain what the bond rating meant so people would 'know how serious this all was'. Instead, he spent his four hours in the morning trying to track down a short clip of a GE executive talking about the bond rating and trying to find a source (an analyst) who could comment on the ratings drop. The two other aspects of the story never got reported. His story would be 1 minute, 35 seconds long. The reporter warned the editor before the editing process began: 'This piece suffers from time compression.' The editor agreed, noting: 'I am just wondering whether we are setting up a situation dealing with enough [material] for the analyst to run through the concerns.' The reporter commented: 'Well, we have five seconds [left].'

So, what happened to the reporter's hopes? As he explained to me, 'I just couldn't get into the second half about what it meant to investors. I ran out of time' (field notes, 5 March 2009).

Why did he look for the clip of the GE executive for so long? Deep structures of sourcing, perhaps, such a reliance on the powerful for information (Bennett, 2001). In addition, time constrained the reporter's agency to make the story as informative as he would have liked. He could have explained how GE is a huge credit lender, and the implications of the downgrade, but he did not. This is not solution-driven news (Bornstein, 2011), but the example does show the reporter actively considering the limits of his work – though notably he does not consider how the deep structures of sourcing practice have influenced his work.

Another example reflects how both Marketplacey structure and the deeper structures of newswork limited a journalist's ability to enrich a deadline story. The story was Marketplacey –designed to add some 'spice' to depressing recession news. The question was whether 'real women' would enjoy a movie that focused on carefree spending during a recession (field notes, 12 February 2009).

The reporter began by pulling up the trailer for the movie on IMDB.com and slicing a sound clip. Then, noticing the time, which was about 10 a.m. EST, she said 'Crap, I

have to call people!' She began looking through her long list of contacts for entertainment sources: movie columnists, box office specialists, agents. Her first two calls were to other journalists, prompting her to note, 'It's not that good to have other journalists in the piece, but they're easy to get a hold of.' She started calling industry experts, including a marketing executive and a media executive. The reporter asked all of them the same question: 'Would women come to see this movie?' She all recorded the interviews in an empty soundbooth.

She let me watch as she spliced together the story using electronic editing software, working with the engineer to get the perfect sound clip from the movie. By 12 noon PST she was ready to record her two-minute script.

The story did little more than simply provide different points of view on the possible outcome of the movie. It did not, for example, reach out to real women, though it could have simply by going across the street to the mall near the office. Instead, it was easier to ask the question to sources who would reliably answer the phone and be within quick and easy access to a soundbooth. The story itself was Marketplacey – a quirky, fun, different take on the economy. This dictated the angle that she would take, and kept her focused on a single question for all of her interviews. Her sourcing was limited, as she acknowledged. In this instance, both time and expectations of the *Marketplace* mold dictated action. We can see from this example the purposeful intentions (and reflexive knowledge) that the reporter has about her limited source choices. But she doesn't do anything about it, perhaps showing the influence of deep structures on newswork.

In all of these examples, from the first 100 days to the shopping movie story, we see the complex dynamics between structure and agency. Giddens' work helps us to see agency enacted as *intentions* and *reflexivity* of journalists. And Giddens also helps us see the impact of structure on these agents, with structure providing a strong set of rules and norms that guide and influence action. The effect on news is that journalists do fall subject to the 'stopwatch' culture that Schlesinger (1978) observed.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that structure always creates some sort of negative impact on news production (e.g. time constraining a more explanatory story). First, structure enables news production by providing the rules and resources for action. Without these rules and resources, agents would have little guidance about how to go about actually producing and creating news. Additionally, structures often pave the way for new practices inside newsrooms. Consider, for example, the role of internal meetings – a routine practice that may generate new structures with new rules for agents to follow. These meetings illustrate a recursive relationship between structures and agents as agents work within the structures to think about new ways of doing things.

However, I did find these truly generative instances harder to spot, in part because I wasn't sure what scale to measure 'generative' or 'recursive' by. Were feature meetings evidence of these? Or were more substantial discussions about newsroom policy closer to impacting true structural change that would impact daily decision-making? The case below illustrates the latter, which I think may be more significant.

Every two weeks, the newsroom meets with the executive producer. At this meeting, the executive producer mandated that journalists avoid having their stories sound

like the recession was more dire than it was. Though initially top-down, the result was a generative conversation. The production assistant wrote up suggestions from staff across the organizational hierarchy about ways to avoid giving an overly negative portrait of the economy (field notes, 18 March 2009). The executive producer then summarized this conversation in an email advising staff to avoid over-emphasizing links to history, such as comparing this recession to the Great Depression, among other things (email, 25 March 2009). Notably, daily newsroom pressure was absent from this process.

These internal discussions, which came out of a newsroom routine, did seem to have an impact on the way stories were considered. At one news meeting, when an editor pitched a story about failures in the car industry in Japan as the 'worst thing to happen to Japan since 1945' (field notes, 3 April 2009), nearly every person present at the morning meeting warned him about the 'tone' being 'too much'. The meeting with the executive producer that generated this response created new modalities for action. In this instance, structure (the meeting) enabled agency (room to create new rules about what was appropriate), which in turn reinforced structure (the modified news norms) in precisely the kind of unfolding duality Giddens discussed.

The structure of feature stories also demonstrates how structure can influence agency in a way that enables richer news production (notably off the clock). At *Marketplace*, feature stories are developed each Friday at 11 a.m., when all the editors meet in a conference room to decide on the future agenda. While I did not see reporters cover a major feature story (as most involved travel), I did observe journalists discussing the feature stories, both as they edited them and as they decided which stories would make it into the show.

A piece about Mexican women in a plant recycling e-waste aptly illustrated the way journalists worked within structures to craft a piece that had the distinctive Marketplacey sound. The senior producer, off deadline, had time in the afternoon to listen to the 7-minute piece (which was a minute too long).

> 'Come here for a listen,' she beckoned, as other editors joined her. They worked together to figure out where to make cuts. 'It's too much of [the reporter's] voice,' she said at one point. 'The tape's hot' (or, much louder than another part of the tape), said one of the other editors, referring to a particular passage. 'We need more sound from the factory . . . I wonder if she has any?' the senior producer mused. The team came up with a list of recommendations for the reporter. (field notes, 16 April 2009)

In this case, we can see how feature news production routines can serve as structures that enable agency, allowing journalists the space to think about what it might take to make a better story. Here, that meant more dialogue from the workers, more sounds of scrap metal, and more sounds of Mexico. In other respects, however, they are still tied to the deep structures of newswork (the elements and structure of a story), and the structures of *Marketplace* to orient their work – structure enabling agency creating and recreating structure. Nonetheless, despite the role of structure, we do get a portrait of journalists as more purposeful agents in newswork than might previously have been portrayed in past literature.

Agents changing/creating structure

Agents can change the larger structures of newswork, though perhaps this is now most noticeable in cases of technological change, as other scholars have observed. Although *Marketplace* was not going through a major transition to web-first during my research, it was nonetheless making small strides to become more web-savvy (Usher, 2011). Instances of technological change give agents latitude to create new structures in the newsrooms because there are no pre-existing rules about how to make use of new technology, though new rules will be influenced by existing structures.

Journalists actively participated in the creation of the Scratchpad blog, a new structure in the newsroom, which would be run by Scott Jagow (previously a morning host). The blog's resources came from a Corporation of Public Broadcasting[4] grant to fund web-based economics coverage. The blog began in March 2009, and there were many conversations across newsroom hierarchy about the blog's orientation. For example:

> 'You're out there tweeting, talking to people, getting comments . . . let us know how we're doing,' a senior producer said at the news meeting on 30 April 2009, reflecting the Jagow's ability to use the blog to reach listeners in a new way.

> The senior producer, along with other editors and reporters, began suggesting possible content for the blog that simply could not work in audio format.

> Some possible targets for that particular day included talking about how the Bush administration might benefit from Chrysler's restructuring.

> 'But do [your blogging] in a way that isn't just words,' Ryssdal told Jagow, suggesting he take advantage of the online platform.

Jagow did not rely on routine sources for his blog, nor was he constrained by the typical forces of scheduling. Jagow was also free, with newsroom guidance, to take on a new, strident tone. In his post that day, he wrote, 'Remember that $4 billion of OUR MONEY the Bush Administration lent to Chrysler . . . well here's what we get' and illustrated the story with a donut.[5] Scratchpad helped extend the traditional structure of *Marketplace* by creating a new forum for audience interaction via a participatory blog. In essence, Scratchpad was a new version of storytelling for *Marketplace*. Though the blog's 'sound' has its origins in a Marketplacey structure, Jagow was able to go beyond the usual modes and means of newsgathering to tell stories in a different way.

Another online innovation showcased agents shaping structure. Senior editor Paddy Hirsch began doing what he called 'Whiteboards' to explain economic crisis terms in easily understandable ways. Whiteboards are simple web videos that involve Hirsch drawing pictures or words on a whiteboard to explain, for example, how derivatives or credit agencies work.[6]

The core structure of newsgathering inside *Marketplace* didn't change. But Hirsch, through his videos, changed the way *Marketplace* thought about presenting data to the public. He was, in turn, changing the structure of what it meant to be Marketplacey. Hirsch established new routines to create his content, working with different tools,

researching his work differently to account for multimedia production, and preparing for his on-camera role, among other things. The videos were so popular with *Marketplace* listeners that *Marketplace* even considered creating a contest for users to create their own videos. It is easiest to point to these examples as agency influencing structure because the rules and the routines of the web may be much more flexible. In these situations, agents (working within organizations) may find more wiggle room to invent, improvise, and insert their own individual preferences.

However, conversations about *Marketplace*'s organizational identity also show how journalists can influence structure. One can see their reflections as simply repeating what it means to be Marketplacey, but Giddens lends some support to a more encouraging theory of agency. To Giddens, people are continuously reflexive – they monitor their actions and, when they have the time to do so, they 'elaborate discursively' (1979: 4) on the reasons why they do the things they do. And one can see journalists doing so as agents determine what it means to be Marketplacey.

Journalists were often quite vocal about what they did and did not want to be as *Marketplace* journalists. The managing editor put it this way:

> The question we have every day is if this is a business story, what makes it a *Marketplace* story? That has become more difficult as the economy has become everyone's front page story. . . . what point do we want to bring out that will add to the conversation? What point will we bring out that will be thought-provoking? The big story is going to get told one way or another. What can we do differently? (personal communication, 30 March 2009)

Clearly, he was aware of the homogeneity of mainstream news, and had an understanding of the larger structures in place for business news. However, he was also aware of the capacity for *Marketplace* journalists to set their own particular set of boundaries and goals for what the show would cover.

Other journalists shared this view and recognized the limitations of *Marketplace* as a news source within the ecology of business news. However, they also saw their work as essential to developing *Marketplace*'s larger identity as a news organization.

While I was observing a senior editor, she explained to me, 'We're not moving the markets. It's silly to think that we are. We're telling people what's going on, but we aren't the big guns that are going to be affecting stock prices' (field notes, 2 April 2009). *Marketplace*, then, unlike CNBC or the *Wall Street Journal* does not see itself as having to compete for the financial insider crowd. *Marketplace*, instead, is trying to reach out to a more general audience.[7]

In each comment, we see further evidence of how agency and structure exist in a duality. In addition, these statements suggest the purposeful, reflexive monitoring of agents within structures (of *Marketplace*), to use Giddens' terms. The identity of the newsroom may be both imposed by people but at the same time *generative* of the way people think about the work they do. Similarly, we see the agency of journalists (in relationship to larger structures of newswork) working to expand and reshape *Marketplace* when they rethink the online product. Newswork may be constrained by structures, but the relationship between individuals and organizations is also more nuanced, as Giddens helps demonstrate.

Conclusion

By employing thick description, I have tried to show the dynamic nature of newswork as journalists respond to and engage with the pressures of news production. Reese points out the value of looking at media production from this vantage point, claiming that, if content is a social construction, then to 'understand its special quality, it is essential to understand its "constructing"' (2007: 31). The thick description has additional merit because it captures the daily working routines in a radio newsroom.

What we can learn from this dive into *Marketplace* is that the traditional structures that ethnographers have argued constrain newswork do, in fact, play a role in limiting the kind of news we might ideally like to see from news outlets. Time, specifically, plays a huge role in broadcast news. And traditional patterns of sourcing matter too. Specific organizational norms constrain and pattern the sound and shape of stories. But what we also learn is something different: as we reflect on how journalists go about their days, we see that journalists are not entirely unconscious of the limitations of their work – though they don't actually seem to do anything about this when reporting breaking news. Rather, they are, for people moving in a fast-paced world, more purposive and reflexive than past ethnographies have elucidated.

And, in fact, in the absence of daily time pressures, structures like biweekly meetings about news coverage, for instance, may even enable changes in norms and practices. After being at a number of news organizations, I do not think these types of meetings are uncommon, though they vary in frequency. As other scholars have observed, journalists have the most latitude to create new norms with the introduction of new technology. But, in this case, we see how new rules are influenced by the larger understanding of structures: what it means to be Marketplacey.

But, as Giddens helps us to see, these new structures emerge from pre-existing norms. This essay also provides some greater insight into the potentially recursive pattern of organizational identity. I began this article with how *Marketplace* defined its goals and mission and ended it with journalists meditating on what it meant to be *Marketplace*. The structure is mediated through agents, who in turn reflect, create, and reproduce structure.

Ultimately, this article argues that agency is much more present than previously accounted for in much of the past literature on organizational practice – even when structure constrains action. We need to remember that journalists are purposive actors even when constraints exist, and this does not mean they lack agency or are factory-like, in part because agency, according to Giddens, does not have to be defined by output – but by intention. In addition to this ethnographic work, a content analysis would further address how structures influence newsgathering, and help us develop a broader portrait of these news-gathering challenges. Certainly, we might wish journalists move beyond existing structures that limit ideal news generation, and scholars and journalists should continue to ponder how and whether this is possible. If we make the normative assessment that news could, in fact, be improved, then news organizations need to find some way to give agents more power than to just reflect upon their structures, but to actually act to make newsgathering different. And academics can continue to point to the ways that the deep structures of newswork may hinder quality newswork. The process of critique can be generative and recursive, reflecting a Giddens-esque dynamic.

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Notes

1   Steensen (2009) provides an excellent overview of ethnographic work on innovation and autonomy in his 2009 article.
2   See, for example, Garcia Aviles et al. (2004); Lawson-Borders (2006); Meier (2007); Phillips (2010); Thurman and Lupton (2008); and Thurman and Myllylahti (2009).
3   The duration of this time was proscribed by my agreement for access with the organization. Nevertheless, I was given an inside view into the processes of newswork that provided ample opportunities to test the theories presented by prior scholars.
4   US public broadcasting umbrella agency and funding mechanism.
5   http://www.publicradio.org/columns/*Marketplace*/scratchpad/2009/04/
6   http://*Marketplace*.publicradio.org/collections/coll_display.php?coll_id=20216
7   There should be some caution here: in the USA the regular public radio audience has college degrees, and most people I spoke with at *Marketplace* described their audience as 'informed' and 'educated', or as a senior editor put it 'knowledgeable and interested in the world around them' (19 March 2009, interviews) – if not about business news. This audience, then, to some degree already may know the big news of the day.

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