

Building a sustainable media with solutions and constructive journalism



Creating an editorial cultural shift



In the face of numerous challenges affecting the media industry in Europe, like in the rest of the world, news organisations are responding to growing calls and imperatives to do journalism differently. Both news consumers and reporting staff are eager to find more solutions-oriented stories to better reflect what is happening in the world and address the growing anxiety of the public, who turns away from solely problem-oriented coverage.

Among engagement and editorial approaches gaining traction, two concepts have come to prominence: *constructive journalism** and *solutions journalism***.

* (*)Constructive journalism strives to give a nuanced picture of reality without overdoing the focus on all the things that don't work, the conflicts, the negativity and the stuff that creates unnecessary fear." In addition, it is "reporting on progress, possibilities and hope when it is there." It focuses on a) applying an **angle** to the reporting that not only exposes the problem but also looks for possible solutions, b) a **view** that presents a more balanced picture than the prevailing narratives in most coverage by the media, and c) taking on a role that engages and facilitates debate with people in a specific community.

* (*) Solutions Journalism is rigorous and evidenced based reporting on responses to social problems. To count as solutions journalism a piece of reporting needs to a) primarily focus on explaining **how a response to a social problem functions**. In order to do so, b) **presenting evidence of effectiveness** is key, whether based on qualitative or quantitative data, or a combination of the two. The reporting ought to c) **identify insights** about what makes a response work, or the teachable lessons that could help someone replicate a response in another context. Lastly, and fundamentally, d) it maintains a critical lens on how the response is rolled out by **uncovering limitations**.

This resource outlines strategies newsroom leaders implemented to disseminate these editorial approaches across their media organisations and achieve culture change. The following transformation factors are elaborated on in the narrative below:

- Consistent and well socialized definition of constructive and/or solutions journalism
- Incorporation in editorial strategic plan at organizational and team levels
- Endorsement of constructive journalism by leadership teams
- Coordination by a champion, an individual in charge of rolling out a strategy
- Regular training for staff on constructive journalism practices
- Production of internal resources to help staff focus their work according to constructive pillars and newsroom priorities
- Clear goals and metrics for production of content
- Identification of what to stop-doing or reduce in workload to accommodate the shift
- Opportunities to discuss, provide feedback on constructive content
- Distinct constructive focus during editorial meetings to explore opportunities to produce stories
- Internal recognition and celebration of produced content, highlighting public response and impact
- Utilization of the [Solutions Journalism Self-Assessment and Goal-setting tool](#) to set a benchmark from which to evolve



These kinds of changes at an organisational level are an **important prelude to deeper considerations around generating revenue, which will be the theme of this upcoming series titled “Building a sustainable media with solutions and constructive journalism,”**. Making money to support this work requires an ability to prioritise and sustain it through recognition of its value, adapted editorial workflows and tracking.

Examples cited in this resource are from Scandinavia, where the [Constructive Institute](#) organized a discovery tour during a week in October 2024 for journalists and editors from the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, as part of the SoJo Europe* project.

*SoJo Europe project is a multi-programme and EU funded initiative led by a consortium of four journalism support organisations ([Transitions](#), [SEENPM](#), [Journalismfund Europe](#), [Constructive Institute](#)).

Large Scale Editorial Realignments

[The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation \(NRK\)](#), and the Swedish national public television broadcaster (SVT) have for years worked with the Constructive Institute to deepen their editorial focus on constructive journalism, through concerted and organisation-wide strategies.

In contrast to trends across Europe where trust in the media has been in steady decline, both countries have seen those levels remain strong. Their populations are also more inclined to financially support media organisations compared to elsewhere. In Norway, 55% of people polled for the [2024 Reuters Digital News Report](#) trusted news in general, with 40% paying for news. While lower, [data points for Sweden](#) show a healthy 40% and 31%, on those respective data-points.

Yet, the shift towards constructive journalism occurred at a time when the public increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with coverage that overwhelmingly focused on what was not working in the world.

Broadcasters’ embrace of this editorial approach could not have happened without clear, intentional and sustained support at the highest echelons of leadership. In both organizations, directors ensured that strategic plans included the production of solutions journalism as a key priority for the newsrooms.

For example, along with a focus on developing content to reach 20-40 year olds and creating impact around stories that engage

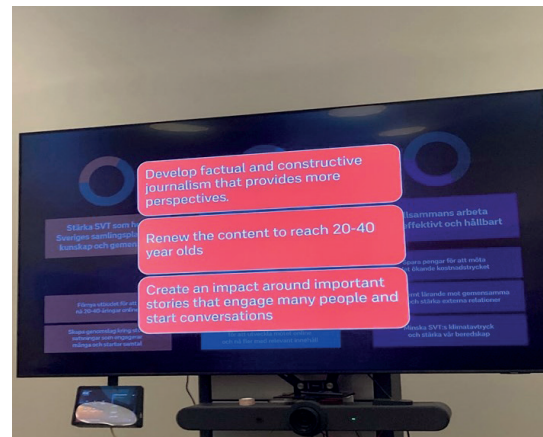


Photo: Strategic priorities of SVT, as outlined by Mark Cummins

their public, SVT stated developing “factual and constructive journalism that provides more perspectives” as a goal for their work.

As outlined by Mark Cummins, Managing Editor of SVT News Jämtland, a region of Sweden, the organisation employed several methods to bring everyone on the same page.





This included:

Giving a detailed and consistent definition, to avoid any confusion and anticipated blowback based on a misunderstanding of the approach. Bridging the gap between constructive and solutions journalism, SVT states: “Our constructive journalism describes the solution to a problem that affects many. The solution must be verifiable.”

Organizing workshops helped socialise the concepts and approaches in the minds of a large and fragmented workforce spread in regional bureaus across the country. These sessions were also spaces where individuals could voice reservations, issues, and misunderstandings.

Allowing newsrooms and teams to retain a high degree of autonomy for implementing this innovative approach to the work.

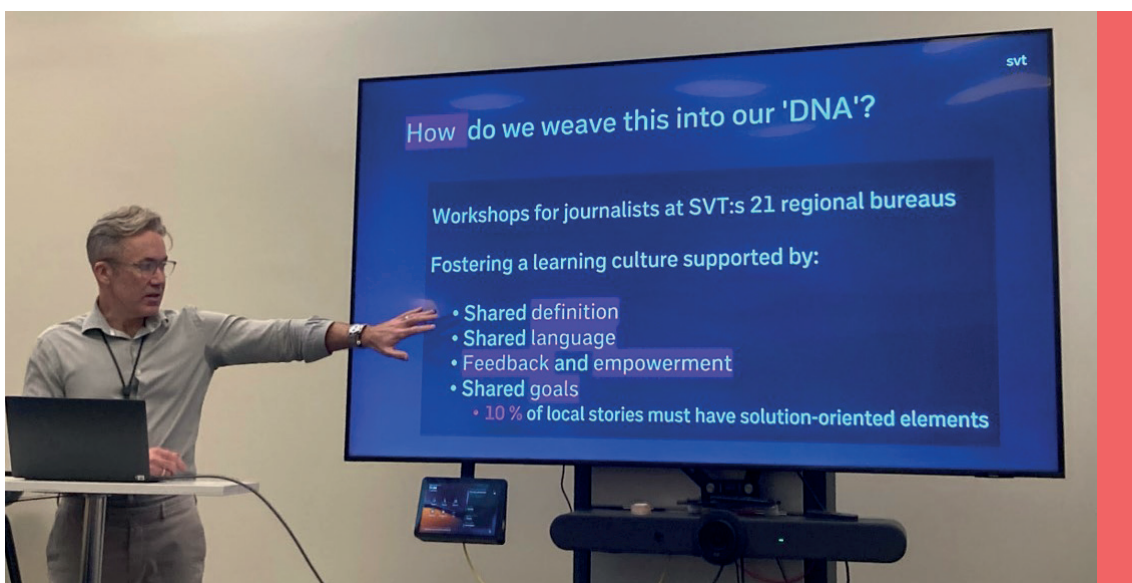
Setting goals for how much constructive journalism each of the bureaus produced. The initial target was set at 10% of the content. Editors were in charge of determining the content that met their criteria and keeping track of progress.

NRK appointed a Constructive Editor for a period of two years who acted as a form of czar across the organization to ensure the uptake and ongoing production of constructive journalism.

Similarly to the strategy at SVT, Ingrid Tinmannsvik, who occupied that role until the end of 2024, was in charge of reaching out internally to most desks of the organization to set up trainings, a strategy, goals, ongoing assistance and tracking of the work.

The latter involved using an [AI tool developed by the Constructive Institute](#) to determine how much of the content produced met the constructive pillars. In addition to reporting on the evolution of the practice, Ingrid acted as **a champion of the work**. In frequent communications with the whole organization using their internal chat platform she highlighted the constructive work produced by colleagues and shared some behind the scenes information about the reporting process or its impact in society.

Making constructive journalism an explicit objective for teams is another way to **enshrine the editorial practice in the minds of editors and reporters on a daily basis**. Questions such as how to make a piece more constructive or solutions-oriented arise regularly and help steer editorial choices.



*Photo: Mark Cummins explains SVT's strategy for infusing constructive journalism across the organisation



Transformation in local media

Many newsrooms in Denmark have also pursued a dedicated turn towards constructive journalism, with some organisations achieving remarkable success on a localised level.

[The Midtjyllands Avis](#), a publication based in Silkeborg in the middle of Denmark's central region of Midtjylland, undertook a transition towards this kind of journalism in 2021, under the leadership of Hans Krabbe, the Editor-in-chief.



After years working outside of the journalism industry, Krabbe came back to work at a local newspaper only to realize that media organizations were basically operating in the same way they had in the 1990s, according to him. "We cannot go on like this," Krabbe thought, "things needed to be done differently" because "the world and people had changed."

Once he arrived at the helm of Midtjylland Avis and with the Constructive Institute, having established some prominence, Krabbe, together with news editor Brian Holst, was able to pursue strategies and approaches he'd started testing previously. Pushing for new ways of doing journalism locally motivated most of the 28 staff working in the newsroom, but it also initially raised skepticism among mostly older journalists who were reluctant to change.

Eventually, though, the evolution inspired everyone. Krabbe remembers a distinct moment in late 2024 when one veteran journalist came to him of their own volition to discuss ideas for making a story more constructive. Whereas this person had, until then, been reluctant to embrace solution-oriented journalism, they now were seeking new angles for practicing their craft. After almost four years, this new mindset and editorial product was taking hold within the newsroom.

The transformation took place within an existing newspapers, reforming an old framework. In practice, Krabbe seeded and nurtured culture change day after day, flanked by his daily news director and managing editor, who had a tight collaboration to coordinate the editorial shift.

Their strategy was anchored in a hands-on review of the coverage published daily to identify gaps and opportunities to bring constructive angles.

Krabbe says he worked closely with individual journalists to coach and inspire them. "It's a hard process," he cautions, "you have to be prepared to put the work into it." It requires preparation, vision and perseverance. In some cases, reporters have to unlearn what they have been doing for decades.

With his team, Krabbe developed a visual diagram that appears on posters in the newsroom and that all journalists keep on their desk to remind them of ways to make their reporting more solutions-oriented. This includes getting reporters to focus on pathways to solutions, exploring an issue's local history, providing a broader perspective, engaging with the community and providing answers to their questions, exploring how others are treating a problem, etc...

* In 2020, French local media network [Médiacités](#) fostered solutions journalism in its newsroom by writing an editorial guide for its freelance journalists on how to produce solutions-oriented articles that uphold to their quality standards.

Like at NRK and SVT, Midtjylland Avis has set itself goals for sustaining its rate of production of constructive content, such as a monthly production of 50 pieces, which all journalists are required to contribute to.



The aim is also to produce less content but to make it more focused on the constructive pillars, which can take more time to develop.

The results demonstrate the positive effects this editorial approach has on the place-based society (explored in more depth in Resource 2, about the effects of constructive and solutions journalism on reader support). For instance, the nature of the online discussions have improved and people have noticed the qualitative shift,

whether they are local residents, politicians or other leaders in the local community. They say so to editors and journalists.

Interns they onboard and young reporters they recruit, the up and coming generation of journalists, mention the newsroom's commitment to constructive journalism as a factor for wanting to work there.

Krabbe himself says he has never been happier in his professional life than leading this newsroom transformation.

