

# Professional Practices at Daily Newspaper Notre Voie: Between Principles and Realities

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**Abstract**— *In this article, we immerse ourselves in the heart of a newsroom, in this case Notre Voie, ivorian daily news close to the opposition, in order to observe, understand and analyze the professional practices lead in that company and to know if they company with the rules and principles established by the profession of journalism and likely to promote professionalism. Among the main criteria adopted are the process of producing the information, the organization of the editorial staff and the working conditions of journalists. The results collected, through observation and interviews with the main actors of the newspaper (editor-in-chief, journalists) show that while the process of producing information is generally satisfactory, the management and working conditions of journalists, drivers of the production dynamic, are rather precarious and not able to guarantee optimal professional practice of the profession.*

**Keywords**— *Journalism, professional practices, Notre Voie, professionalism, management.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Very often perceived through the main prism of the information it disseminates, the press is not always scrutinized from within and apprehended in its organizational and managerial form, as an entity that is called upon to operate as a company with an obligation to achieve results, following rules and management principles essential to its viability and productivity. The accumulation of research devoted to journalism contrasts curiously with the lack of academic reflection on (...) media management. However, the recent changes in the media world, its complexity, greater than is usually believed, and its diversity, even though its companies share many points in common, make it necessary to reflect on the often atypical nature of its management (Deslandes, 2008). From this point of view, the hard news press is experiencing the beginnings of an institutional change that is reflected in particular in a process of managerial management of newsrooms and journalistic professional practices (Lardeau, 2011). It is in this context that we immerse ourselves in the heart of a newsroom, in this case Notre Voie, a daily newspaper close to the Ivorian opposition, to observe, understand and analyze the professional practices that lead to it in order to know if they comply with the rules of management of a company as well as the principles established by the profession of journalism and if they are finally likely to promote professionalism. Among the main criteria adopted are the process of producing information, the organization and animation of the editorial staff and the working conditions of journalists.

Journalistic writing is a technique and journalism is a profession. Collecting and verifying information, selecting and

prioritizing it, writing it effectively for readers, listeners, viewers or Internet users cannot be improvised. Nor does it deliver an easy-to-read copy on time and in the required format (Bège, 2007).

## II. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

From a methodological point of view, we favoured the qualitative approach; the goal is to describe the subject rather than measure it: it is a question of collecting the impressions, opinions and points of view of the journalists of Notre Voie on the professional practices within their editorial staff. To do this, in addition to the literature search, we opted for non-participant observation and semi-directive interviewing. Observation is a data collection technique that provides access to data that is not accessible through interviews or questionnaires (Chevalier, Stenger, 2018). It is frequently used to conduct a qualitative study and allows to collect verbal and especially non-verbal data. This technique proposes to the investigator to focus on the behavior of a person, rather than on his statements. During our research, we spent two weeks in the newspaper Notre Voie to simply observe what journalists do and what they say, the interactions between them, without intervening, understand the organization and layout of the different departments that make up the editorial office as well as the infrastructures (information tables, computers, etc.) that facilitate the accomplishment of tasks. These non-participating observation sessions made it possible to take handwritten notes using an observation grid divided into three themes (working methods, animation and management of writing, interactions and non-verbal expressions). Moreover, among the various possible forms of collection of oral information, the sociologist attaches particular importance to the semi-directive interview, also called a centered interview (Combesse, 2007) or "qualitative, in-depth interview". It is based on questions that are quite generally closed and open. It provides an opportunity to ask new questions if the interviewee raises an as yet unknown aspect. Unlike the questionnaire, the research interview establishes a special relationship between the researcher and the individual interviewed. It is used to test hypotheses and to bring out new ones. During our research, we interviewed 11 journalists including the editor-in-chief of *Notre Voie*. In the end, a content analysis was performed on the individual interviews. Non-participant observation enriched the evaluation.

III. RESULTS

3.1. An organisation and production process in accordance with professional journalistic standards

The organization of a newsroom and the production of information obey standards that *Notre Voie* seems to respect. In a newspaper, the editorial board usually consists of the editor-in-chief and journalists. Some newspapers may include other people on the editorial board. At *Notre Voie*, as shown in the organizational chart below, the editorial staff is composed of a publication director, an editor-in-chief, a general secretary of the editorial staff, heads of departments and journalists. The director of the publication is the guarantor of the quality of the editorial line. The editor-in-chief leads the team of journalists on a daily basis and ensures the link with the management and other technical and administrative services. As for the editorial

secretary, under the authority of the editor-in-chief, he is responsible for the production of the newspaper, from the preparation of the editorial documents to the correction of the proofs. It ensures consistency, style and unity of the publication. He enlists the skills of the heads of the six (6) main departments of the newspaper: sport (1 journalist), politics (4 journalists), society (4 journalists), culture (1 journalist), economy (1 journalist), technical. The eleven (11) journalists interviewed all benefit from the status of professional journalist with regard to the criteria for awarding the professional journalist's card issued by the Joint Committee for the Allocation of the Identity Card of Professional Journalist and Communication Professional (CIJP).

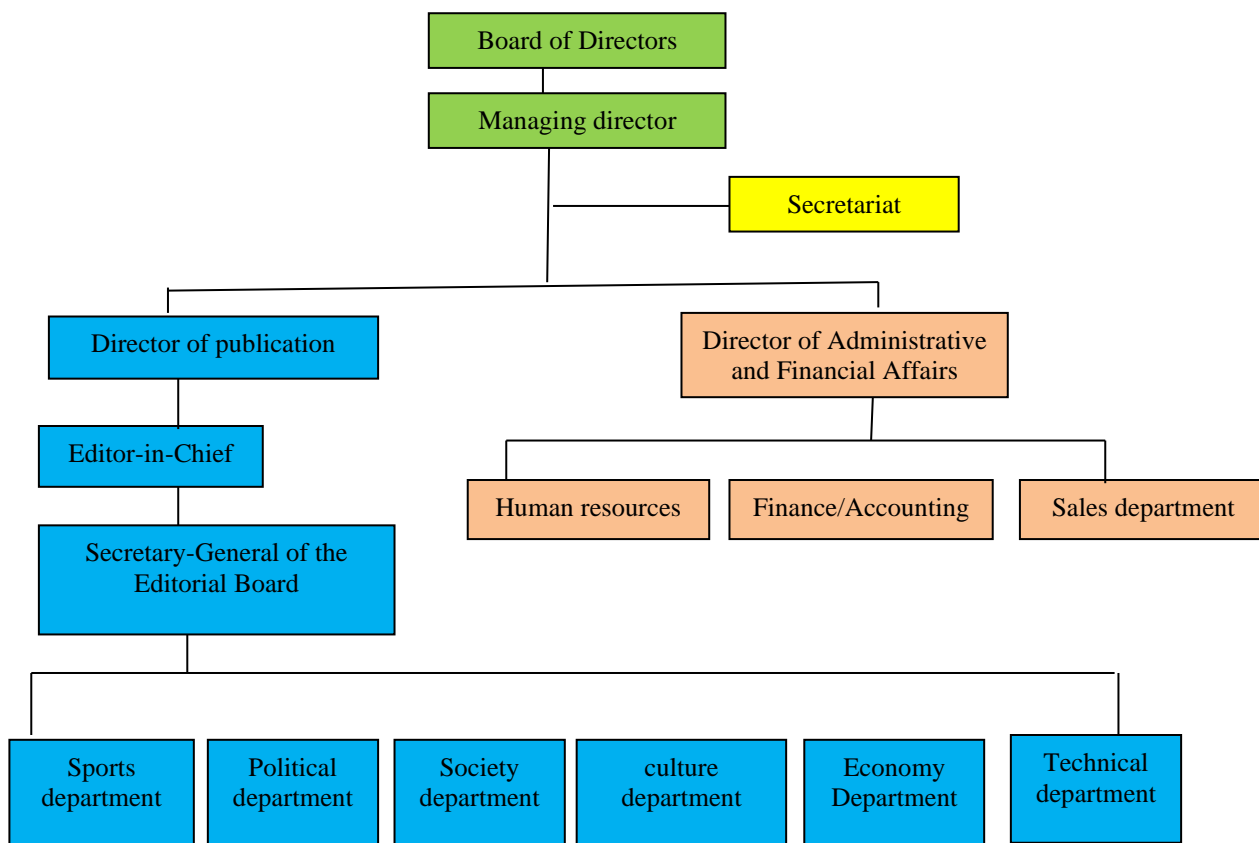


Figure 1: Organization chart of Notre Voie

Source : Notre Voie

The process of producing information within this newsroom, as described by the journalists, is as follows:

- First of all, we have an editorial conference at 11 am; the services meet and propose topics during the daily drafting conference led by the Secretary General.
- validation of subjects
- attribution of topics and reports mentioned on the scoreboard
- sorting and prioritization of information
- writing of the article
- submission of the article
- layout of articles from 5 p.m. and deadline at 10 p.m.
- correction before publication.

At *Notre Voie*, journalists arrive at work between 9:30 a.m. and 10 a.m. when there are editorial conferences and leave the company after handing over their articles to the secretary general of the editorial office.

In fact, these steps are consistent with the general process of making a journal: 1. choice of subjects. Journalists learn about current events thanks to dispatches given by news agencies. They then decide what information they will put in the newspaper. 2. The drafting of texts.

Generally, the first hours of the morning are not only devoted to prioritizing appointments in the agenda. Very quickly, the journalists divide the work of the day by assigning

to each one different events to be treated. Each professional then has his own program that alternates field work and writing articles that will appear in the pages of the journal (Spano, 2011). More than 80% of journalists' opinion on the compliance of editorial practices with professional standards is favourable. Nine (9) journalists interviewed (81.81%) out of 11 find them compliant and two (18.19%) not.

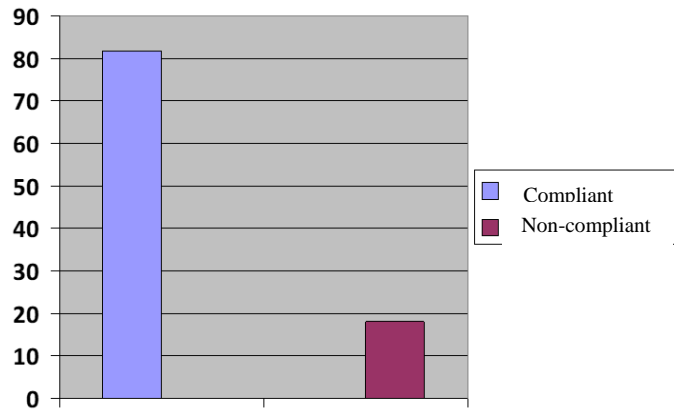


Figure 2: Histogram of journalists' opinions on the conformity of editorial practices with professional standards

Source : Our study

### 3.2. A limited managerial policy and working environment

On the managerial level, despite some achievements, the drafting of *Notre Voie* has many shortcomings. The newspaper certainly has internal regulations and a code of ethics and internal deontology but has not defined a job description for its employees, a tool that is necessary for a good understanding of the tasks to be performed.

The job description is a kind of identity card of a job within a company and aims to frame the functions of an employee, regardless of the nature of his employment contract or his status. It includes all the information necessary for the proper accomplishment of the mission entrusted to the employee. Delivered at the same time as the signing of the employment contract, during the annual evaluation interview or on the occasion of the setting of the employee's objectives, it has a triple objective:

- For the employee: it both gives a direction and frames his work by giving him specific missions and objectives.
- For the employer: it locks the perimeter of a position and allows him to evaluate his employee.
- For human resources: it makes it possible to target the profile of a candidate during a recruitment and to identify training needs (Hardy, 2019).

Asked if there is a system of evaluation within the editorial staff, 54% of journalists answered no while 45% think it exists. This contradiction could be explained by the lack of understanding of the very notion of evaluation by some respondents. On the other hand, when asked whether the newspaper often conducts market research to assess the expectations and needs of the readership, the editor-in-chief said no. This constitutes a managerial weakness insofar as the product of information is a commercial product like any other intended for consumption that should correspond to the taste of the reader-consumer.

With regard to the means of work, more than 72% of journalists believe that there are no appropriate tools or work materials for carrying out their activities. A fairly high rate that shows the precariousness of the working environment. These journalists add that they work with their own accessories (mobile phones, computers and others).

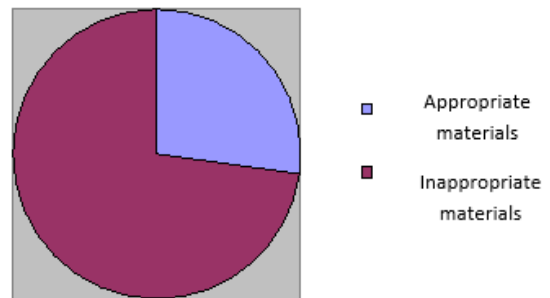


Figure 3: Pie chart showing journalists' views on the availability or absence of appropriate materials to perform their tasks

Source : Our study

Seven (7) journalists on the eleven (11) are paid in accordance with the interprofessional collective agreement. Among them, 10 say they cannot live decently on their salary. This represents a very high proportion and shows the potential impact that this situation may affect the motivation of the officers.

TABLE 1: Proportion of journalists paid at accordance with the interprofessional agreement

Journalists' responses	Number of journalists	% proportion
Yes	7	63,63
No	4	36,36
Total	11	100%

Source : Our study

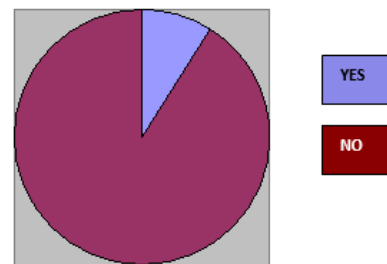


Figure 4: Pie chart showing the proportion of journalists who manage or fail to have a decent life with their salary level.

Source : Our study

This malaise has also often deported to the field of the claim with work stoppages observed within this editorial office, as illustrated in the following article of *Alerte Info*.

Employees of "Notre Voie", a daily close to Gbagbo's party, on strike to demand "five months of salary arrears".

Staff of the Ivorian daily "Notre Voie", a newspaper close to the party of former President Laurent Gbagbo, began a three-day strike on Wednesday to demand "five months of salary arrears", according to employees. "We demand five months of salary arrears" and even "more" for some agents whose "leave has not been paid", told *Alerte Info* an employee. The monthly payroll being of the order of 15 million FCFA,

the management should release more than 75 million FCFA to satisfy the staff estimated at sixty people including forty journalists, according to an internal source. "If payments are not made, the newspaper will not appear until Friday," said an employee reached by phone (Alerte Info, 2016).

In terms of socio-health conditions, ten out of eleven journalists (90.90%) benefit from medical insurance. They (the 11 journalists of the editorial staff) are all declared to the National Social Security Fund (CNPS) but their employer does not regularly pay the contributions due to the social service provider. Only 22% of the contribution rate is paid to the CNPS. This does not guarantee the vast majority of workers the social benefits provided by this establishment. At *Notre Voie*, the majority of journalists interviewed, nearly 67%, do not benefit from continuous training. This constitutes a managerial weakness on the part of the editors, when we know the importance of continuous training in the performance of the company, as Ouattara (2009) demonstrates in a study devoted to continuous education in Côte d'Ivoire.

Companies in the chemical, agri-food, trade, transport and communications sectors are

allocating larger budgets to skills development. This translates into a preponderance of the profitability of continuing training in these sectors. The estimation of panel data by fixed effects and by the dynamic panel method of Arellano and Bond, highlights the positive effect of continuing training on value added with a greater effect of the investments of the previous year. We therefore support the need to take into account the medium-term effects in the evaluation of training performance and to promote any policy that aims to encourage companies to invest in human capacity building.

The other important finding revealed by the study is the lack of a career profile of journalists within the daily newspaper *Notre Voie*. In this regard, the editor-in-chief said that before 2010, the newspaper had a flexible career plan, slipping over the years, but the economic crisis that the company is going through has called into question this managerial policy. When asked whether they ultimately benefit from a conducive work environment, two out of 11 journalists (18%) said yes, while nine (82%) said the opposite. This observation summarizes the workers' morale, demotivated: "No adequate means, financial means are seriously lacking, workers accumulate many wage arrears," they deplore.

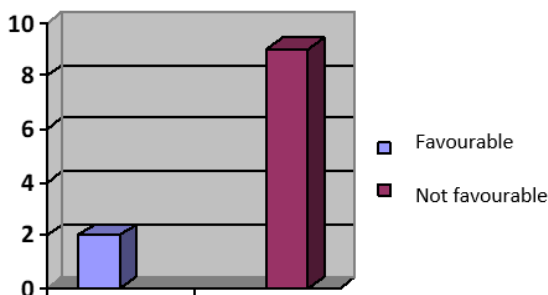


Figure 5: Histogram on journalists' views on the working environment  
Source: Our study

### 3.3. Observation report

The hours of presence of journalists at the service are not fixed. They change according to their schedule and availability. Most journalists come to the editorial board in the afternoons, precisely from 12 noon or even 1 p.m., after having gone to search for information or have done news reports. The department heads always hold small meetings with their respective teams before drawing up the general menu of the issue to be published the next day. Journalists work from Sunday to Thursday. This makes a total of 5 days in the week instead of 6 (Sunday to Friday) generally for Ivorian dailies. The newspaper appears four times a week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Journalists have two days off, Friday and Saturday. In addition to the large newsroom, there are two respective offices for the editor-in-chief and the general secretary of the editorial office.

At *Notre Voie* journalists have a higher education level (BAC +) in the fields of communication or journalism. At the financial level, Refondation S.A., the newspaper's publisher, is going through a serious economic crisis due to the vertiginous drop in sales and printing figures. In the 2000s, this newspaper produced more than fifty thousand copies per day (50,000/day). Today, it struggles to make 2000 copies. In terms of equipment and production equipment, before the post-election crisis of 2010-2011, *Notre Voie* had its own printing-house with a large press which, in addition to its own edition, was used to publish other local newspapers. This was an important source of revenue for the company. It was a financial windfall that paid all the staff properly. But since the crisis, when the company was looted and its production equipment was ransacked, the newspaper has been experiencing serious difficulties and has been unable to make ends meet. As a result, many journalists were fired. The only service vehicle is currently down, which makes it difficult for journalists to travel for the reports to which *Notre Voie* is invited. Each journalist has his own computer. The editorial office has a bulletin board for information about the menu and the reports, an Internet connection via the Wifi network and a subscription to the Canal+ package (French national general interest television channel with toll) to allow journalists to follow the news. In addition to its 11 headquarters journalists, the newspaper collaborates with 12 regional correspondents based in the country. These correspondents are mostly teachers, accustomed to writing.

The process of producing the article is as follows : the journalist writes his report from the most important to the least important elements, according to the model of the inverted pyramid. Once the article is written, the journalist gives it to his head of department. The latter checks the conformity of the article with journalistic writing standards and whether it does not contain elements that may be considered to be contrary to the rules of ethics and ethics or likely to constitute a press offence. Once this stage has been completed, the department manager schedules the article for the next day's or future days, depending on the interest of the subject and the space available in the newspaper. After this step, the article arrives at the IT department for editing, then passes into the hands of

the general secretary of the editorial office or the editor-in-chief for a final opinion before publication.

#### IV. DISCUSSION : CHANGE PARADIGM OR PERISH

The results of this study have proven that while on the editorial level the professional practices at daily newspaper *Notre Voie* comply with the required standards, the entire work environment necessary for optimal productivity of the company is on the other hand failing: low or unpaid wages, non-existent or insufficient production equipment. Thus, like most Ivorian media, especially those of the press, *Notre Voie* continues to operate in traditional mode, focusing on the production of information to the detriment of all other factors (human and socio-economic) that make the company successful and its product viable with the consumer, when the current challenges, caused by the intrusion of digital technology into the media ecosystem, invite them to be more innovative and creative, from a managerial perspective, conditions that are *sine qua non* for their survival in an increasingly competitive environment and informational inflation. Indeed, the incessant upheavals in the world of the press no longer offer a comfort zone to entrepreneurs in the sector and invite a paradigm shift in order to better face the challenges that now punctuate the daily lives of developers. This situation requires from them managerial qualities peculiar to any commercial enterprise: motivation of the staff, innovation, anticipation, creativity, better knowledge of the market and accessibility (cost, availability) to the customer-consumer of the product of the information.

As a reminder, in April 1990, the liberalisation of the political public space favored the emergence of the Ivorian media landscape with the creation of many titles that disappeared from the market only some time after their publication, lack of a rigorous managerial approach and innovative and innovative professional practices. The real challenge for media promoters is to learn from past failures and to be able to invent a viable business model.

In fact, nowadays, the media entrepreneur must necessarily act as a real manager, like a real conductor who knows how to distribute the roles and give the right cadence to allow each member of the team to give the best of himself in order to improving the group's productivity. The role of manager requires many qualities (ability to listen, patient, anticipation, sense of fairness, tolerance, ethics, etc.) and involves planning, organization, management and control activities (...). The role of management is to move away from immediacy, from the effects of fashion, to relativize the positions acquired so that the company can maintain its competitive advantage. The manager must be able to understand the levers of influence of strategic management that are at his disposal (Deslandes, 2008).

In addition, to survive in a media ecosystem that is heavily marked by competition and information technology, media entrepreneurs must innovate and persevere with boldness and creativity. In this area, mooks, magazine contraction and books, are cutting-edge. They are generally presented as very thick books, with long articles, exclusive reports and good quality paper. For the promoters of this media format, the

press must regain its value, and free itself from the gangue advertising and marketing to revive journalism. [...] We must restore the exchange value between newspapers and their readers» [Beccaria & de Saint-Exupéry, 2013]. In the West, several publications have adopted the model of mooks: generalists (*6 Mois, Feuilleton*), futurists (*Usbek & Rica, We demain*, themes (*Crimes et Châtiments* on Miscellaneous Facts, *Rukh* on the Arab World, *Macrocosome* on Sciences), engaged mooks (*Ravages, Cassandre*), staggered (*Schnock, Charles, Le Tigre*), literary (*Alibi sur le polar, Le Believer*), unclassifiable (*Tango, Le Majeur*), (*Telerama, 27 September 2012*).

Note that to the editorial singularity is added an economic model that differs from the traditional press titles with a staggered periodicity (many are quarterly), a bookshop sale (thus circumventing the traditional difficulties of the distribution network), a relatively high price (from 15 to 30 euros), with no reduced VAT rate (2.1% is the rate that applies to the paper press) and an income structure without advertising revenue! (...). Moreover, these media must now consider themselves as a «global media», which means being present on all media (tablet, telephone, television, computer, paper), with content adapted according to audiences, readers, consumption times (Le Floch & Sonnac, 2013).

In the same quest for innovation, other paths are to be explored. In-house by developing new products, through title supplements, original formats, enriched content, change of layout to be more attractive and offer a better quality service. Externally through acquisitions, alliances, offers of services (e-commerce, addresses of restaurants, shops...) and the development of partnerships to the example of the American groups that for a long time, in order to distribute the risks related to the uncertainties of the sector, have expanded into e-commerce and online services through partnerships (Smyrniaios, 2009). There is also the possibility of creating economic interest groups (EIGs) like the one that linked in 2011 in France *L'Equipe* and *Aujourd'hui, Le Figaro, Les Échos* et *Libération* in order to pool the sale of their content on the Internet.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In order to understand the professional practices within the editorial board of the daily *Notre Voie*, our study has identified difficulties related to the precarious working conditions of journalists, due to a managerial deficit that highlights, in truth, the anachronistic management of most press promoters, more focused on the production of information (technical/editorial function) than on the totality of the functions of the company which, according to Henry Fayol, fall into six main categories (Meier, 2017) :

- technical function: operation, production, processing
- commercial function: purchase, sale, transaction
- Financial function: capital research and management;
- security function: protection of assets and persons, risk management
- accounting function: inventory, balance sheet, cost price
- administrative function: provision, organization, command, control.

Failure to take all these parameters into account or their partial implementation may lead to a lack of competitiveness on the part of the company. This is the case with *Notre Voie*, which, although it has professional practices that comply with current journalistic information production standards, puts the other essential functions of the company on hold. All things that led to the demotivation of personnel, the main production force. A situation that challenges all media entrepreneurs and invites a radical paradigm shift, including the adoption of innovative management practices, if Ivorian press companies want to survive and succeed in the new media ecosystem that is constantly changing, marked by the growth of the Internet and eclectic consumers of information products.

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