

THE LARS MOLLER MODEL

- *The Investigative Synopsis*
- *Explore the World of Sources*
- *Research Strategy and Plan of Action*

The Investigative Synopsis

WHAT IS YOUR BASIC HYPOTHESIS?

- * What do you want to tell?
 - What is your hypothesis and angle - expressed as a claim in a few words?
 - Narrow it down:
 - What is the maximum story - expressed as a claim?
 - What is the minimum story?
- * Which specific stories could be a possible outcome?
 - Assess the feasibility of the stories?
- * Why do you want to tell it?
 - What is your motive - personally and politically?
 - For whom is the story important?
 - Do you want to
 - explain the public on causes and consequences?
 - describe an unrecognized part of real life?
 - reveal secrets, presenting new knowledge?
 - predict or forecast a situation?
 - convince the audience of your own understanding?

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS IN THIS CASE?

- * List your knowledge:
 1. What do I know - and 2. What do I presume?
- * Base-building - which basic knowledge must I find?
 - How is it supposed to be?
 - according to laws and regulations?
 - according to norms and common practice?
 - What is your own conception of the problem?
 - History
 - Statistics
 - What are the ethical considerations?
- * State the topic as a series of important questions.
- * Initiate a list of information that needs verification and confirmation.
 - Who can verify or confirm?

Explore the World of Sources

Make The WHO-IS-WHO Analysis of the Stakeholders

WHO IS:

1. directly affected by the problem?
2. directly involved in the problem?
3. directly involved in the dealing with the problem?
4. indirectly affected by the problem?
5. not involved, but aware of the problem?
6. inspecting the problem on behalf of the public?

WHO MIGHT BE:

1. affected by the problem in future?
2. involved in the solution of the problem?
3. influential on decisions concerning the problem?
4. final decision makers?

WHO HAS BEEN:

1. affected by this or similar problems?
2. part of negotiations and decisions?
3. influential on decisions?
4. dealing with similar problems?
5. researching the problem scientifically?
6. commenting on this or similar problems previously?

WHO REPRESENTS:

1. directly affected and involved persons and groups?
2. persons and groups affected by or involved in similar problems?
3. persons and groups likely to affected or involved?

WHO HAS FIRST HAND KNOWLEDGE ON:

1. personal experience with the problem?
2. scientific research or surveys of the problem?
3. decisions?
4. rules and practices in the field?
5. similar problems?

WHO KNOWS:

1. about the causes and background?
2. consequences?
3. decision-makers in the field?

WHO WILL GAIN:

1. if the problem is exposed in public?
2. if the problem is solved?
3. by status quo?

WHO WILL LOOSE:

1. if the problem is exposed in public?

2. if the problem is solved?
3. by status quo?

WHO EARNS?
WHO LOOSES?
WHO PAYS?

- always FOLLOW THE MONEY!

WHO CARES ANYWAY?

- remember your audience...
- How can the audience use the information?
- Who are the target audience?
- What shall the target audience do - if anything?

Who can help you and who are your enemies?

- * Who are against the publishing of the story?
 - internal in your own news organisation?
 - external amongst the stakeholders?
- * Who might turn on you as enemies on this?
 - what are the dangers?
 - how can you protect yourself?
- * Who could be your allied in obtaining information?
 - do you need an inside informer - and how to find?

Make a mind map to get more sources

You may also make a mind map on sources. The mind map is a useful tool for journalists to develop our ideas and to find sources for our stories. You can always call on your colleagues to help brainstorming and record it on any piece of paper.

Assess the reliability of the sources

Ask yourself if the sources are:

- real (as existing, not pretending to be)?
- close to the events (in time and space)?
- primary sources (opposite secondary sources)?
- having open or hidden motives (also experts)?
- blinded by opinion, prejudice, interests, fear, personal repression or the like

Research Strategy and Plan of Action

ORGANIZE YOUR SOURCES

List oral sources - in order of priority.

- * Define sources as background, sources for quotation and key sources.
- * Define sources as primary or secondary sources.
- * List sources according to their
 - Human interest/personal experience
 - partisanship
 - independent expert knowledge.
- * Estimate all sources as possible allies, neutral or hostile to your work.
- * How - and when - will you get access to them?
- * Are there any legal or ethical problems involved?
- * How can you protect sources who need protection?

List written sources

- * Define sources as background documents and key documents
- * Define sources as direct accessible or difficult accessible
- * Which sources could be downloaded or examined via Internet?
- * How will you get access to the difficult accessible?
- * Are there any legal or ethical problems involved?

List locations for reportage and observations

- * Are the locations accessible? How will you get access?
- * Can you get photos (print media), clean sound (radio) or live-pictures (tv).
- * Are there any legal or ethical problems involved?

HOW TO ORGANISE AND ANALYSE THE INFORMATION?

- * Considerations on filing and evaluation paper notes, computer files, cross references
- * Considerations processing the information, including CAR-methods
- * Do you need help from experts to analyze and assess the findings?
- * Do you need a coach to guide you to analyze and assess the findings?

HOW CAN THE STORY BE PRESENTED?

- * Should the story be presented as news, as in depth-feature, e.g. the model of The Wall Street Journal Guide, as a narrative story model or other model?
 - can you illustrate the key story with documented cases?
 - when will you invite the graphic department, the photographer and the web-editor in the presentation?
 - is it relevant to organize the presentation as a case study on how you did the investigation?
- * Should it be published as one major article or program?
- * Could it be presented as a well prepared series of articles, web-publications or programs?
 - Could it be published continuously before the full research is terminated?
 - Is the story suitable for campaign journalism?
 - Do you need a logo for the series/campaign?
 - Will it give more impact to share the story and co-publish with another medium, e.g. a TV station or a specialized magazine?
- * Should your media run editorials on the problem?

- * How can you involve the audience?
 - in terms of presenting the information with different entries such as sidebars, fact boxes, human interest stories?
 - in terms of sharing documentation with the audience (e.g. printed in full or on a web-page)
 - in terms of letting the audience in on your process of investigation
 - in terms of informing the audience on the editorial policy on the matter
 - in terms of inviting the readers to participate, on a web-page, blog, Facebook or Twitter
- * What does the audience need to know?
 - and what is nice to know?
- * Depending on how you choose to present the story, you may need additional research:
 - more sources, but which?
 - a narrative presentation calls for more details – where to find them and whom to ask?

HOW MUCH TIME AND MANPOWER DOES IT TAKE?

- * How much time do you need?
 - Estimate working hours.
 - Estimate the need period of time.
- * Considerations on cooperation
 - individual research,
 - need for team work (and the roles of the team members)
 - the need for photographers/graphic designers/camera crew - and how early in the process?
 - assistance from colleagues
 - involvement of specialist from outside the media organisation
 - cooperation with colleagues from other media

MAKE YOUR RESEARCH STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION

- * Write up all the above answers as a research strategy
 - List the task in chronological order of studies, interview, observations, analysis.
 - Make an estimated time schedule for the research.
 - Allow time for processing and analysing.
 - Estimate need for and timing of editorial involvement, such as stages of cooperation, consultation with the media's lawyers, go/no-go meetings, coaching, revision

MORE ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS

During the process of research you need to assess and analyze:

- * Considerations on the information gathered:
 - information that turns an assumption into a fact
 - information as pieces that fit the puzzle - or doesn't fit
 - information as gap-closing, solving a conflict in the material
 - information that raise new questions
 - information that still needs confirmation
- * Preparation of the final key interviews:
 - update list of questions to ask
 - list key questions that calls for confirmation
 - make a plan for the interview

- how to keep control?
- define roles and venue of interview
- when and how will you get the appointments?

- * Return to the investigative synopsis - and adjust it
 - Re-adjust the plan of action, including organisation of sources
 - Re-consider the presentation
- * How will you follow up after publishing?
 - what are the reactions you can expect?
 - how can you secure to get an impact at all?

MAKE A SAFETY PLAN

It should be needless to say that most important precondition for the safety of an investigative reporter is true and justified revelations, verified and confirmed by two or three independent sources.

Even so, it can be dangerous to reveal malpractice of powerful sources. Investigative reporters need to develop the safety strategies and secure communication strategies that are relevant to their investigation and the country the report in.

In fragile democracies and conflict zones investigative reporters are often seen as supporting different factions and are treated accordingly. By exposing corruption or other malpractice on one side, the investigative journalist is seen as a supporter for the other side.

A strategy for secure communication includes considerations of how to store your findings, how to communicate with sources, with whom to discuss your findings. In many cases journalists should be cautious when using phone and internet based communication.

Many international media organizations have developed guides for safety and security that may be adapted to local realities.

Risk assessment and contingency plan

It is crucial to make a risk assessment of any exposure of a powerful sources' malpractice, and of any controversial information, you may publish.

You need to assess what the exposed sources have to loose? And it they may believe that they can stop the story by stopping you – in any way?

Such risk assessment allows you to prioritize the dangers you put yourself into – in terms of the clues you choose to follow during the research, and eventually in terms of the revelations you choose to publish.

A journalist at risk needs to develop a contingency plan, in case sources get hostile. The plan may list several crisis scenarios and the actions to be taken. Such preparation allows you and your editor to keep the head cold and act rationally in if risks come to close to reality.

It is your decision

Have you been intimidated or threatened you need take a look at the bigger picture, which includes the safety of you, your family and your sources. You need the support of your editor and your family, but the decision to continue your investigation after being targeted is yours alone.

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Cooperation for safety

Investigative reporters and their media can protect themselves through cooperation. When reporters investigate powerful sources' corrupt or criminal actions, threats are made, often followed by attacks and in worst cases a reporter is killed in the process of revealing information that may ruin the lives of the culprits.

In such cases, the investigative journalist and the editor may agree to share the information with other media – in order to protect themselves. The saying "You can stop a journalist, but you can't kill the story" is only true, if journalist shares the story with others. To let the culprits know this will serve as a protection for the investigative journalists.

In some cases, the investigative reporter may share the entire investigation with other media – and they may even cooperate during research and share information for their protection.

In other cases, the investigative medium co-publishes the story with other non-competing media, e.g. a print medium co-publishes with broadcast media, a national paper co-publishes with local media, or a magazine co-publishes with news media.

Cooperation – a win-win situation

Co-publishing gives an immediate protection and it may result in more impact of the story, which will provide even more protection.

It is rare for competing media to share investigations or to co-publish. However, once the story breaks, the competing media should have the decency to follow up on each other's stories – with new angles, new revelations, as the competing news media they are.

The next worst response for an investigative reporter is silence from other media – no response. If competing media silence their competitors' scoop, the result may be that the authorities will take no action; that the public will not be aware; that the story has no impact.

And this is a dangerous situation for the investigative reporter, because now he or she is left in the dark – only to await the response from culprits whom they have exposed.

It should be an ethical rule for the media to follow-up on each other's investigations – to let any culprit source know that they never can kill the story by attacking the reporter.