

Introduction

Speech by Weje Sandén, Editor-in-Chief, *Veckans Affärer* (Sweden), held at the opening of the Second Conference on Innovation Journalism, Stanford University, Apr 4 2005.

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Visiting Silicon Valley is always a special feeling. It's enough just to spend a few days here meeting people to go home filled with new ideas. During the latter half of the 1990s when I reported on the high-tech industry for *Veckans Affärer*, I had the privilege of coming here two or three times a year.

This time five years have passed since I was here last – in the spring of 2000.

Then, optimism and confidence in the future were almost limitless. And I was here to write an article on the many Swedes who sought success in Silicon Valley.

The article, entitled “Silicon Vikings”, was published just a few weeks before the bubble burst.

We are all well aware of what happened next.

There were many victims of the fallout – including the media. The business and technology media were criticized for not having seen through the coming bubble, but instead having helped make it larger.

Our business was hurt, too. Both readers and advertisers disappeared and a large number of magazines and newspapers were shut down. Those of us who remained were forced to implement cost cutting measures and downsizing.

It is only now that we are seeing a recovery. But it is at far lower levels, and with tighter budgets and smaller editorial departments.

I mention this because I don't think a conference on Innovation Journalism would have attracted very many participants if it had been held five years ago – or even earlier, for that matter. There was neither the interest nor the need.

Today the situation is different. The burst bubble has given us cause to consider whether the traditional method of reporting, with its more or less watertight bulkheads between business, technology and science journalism, is really adequate.

Or do we need more cross-over journalism, or, as Innovation Journalism is considered to be, an aggregation of business, technology, science, and political journalism?

In “The Concept of Innovation Journalism” David Nordfors writes:

“if the IT innovation systems had been investigated by qualified innovation journalists with a systematic approach, the changes would have been greater and the players within the new economy would have been forced to moderate their behavior, perhaps decreasing the serious consequences.”

I am inclined to agree. Not because I think we could have avoided the bubble – the forces behind it were too great – but hopefully some of the obvious mistakes could have been avoided.

But this is not the only reason why a discussion about Innovation Journalism is both important and necessary.

The primary reason is of course how society is developing today. I believe most of us would agree that innovation is today the primary driving force behind economic growth.

Globalization and the demand for faster, more relevant information are making us face new challenges in understanding and explaining how innovations work, and how technology, business, politics and research interact.

Globalization in particular makes this task even more complex. Previously, there were the new and old worlds, that is, North America and Europe versus the rest.

Today we must also – in a completely different, and shall we say egalitarian way, take into account what is happening in China, India, Korea and other Asian nations.

An example: Previously the race was primarily between Ericsson, Nokia Siemens and Alatel on the one hand and Cisco, Lucent and Motorola on the other. Today Korean Samsung and LG and Chinese Huawei, ZTE and a number of other asian network and telecom manufacturer are also making their presence felt. They are playing in the same league.

The fact that this year, for the first time, there were more Chinese than American exhibitors at Cebit, the world’s largest IT trade show in Hanover, Germany, of course shows us that something has happened.

For this reason I have also supported the idea of the Swedish Innovation Journalism Fellowship Program from the very beginning.

Today it is more important than ever to invest in journalistic education, research and methodology. And I hope that the Swedish Government Agency for Innovation Systems, Vinnova, which supports the Swedish Innovation Journalism Fellowship

Program, will also continue with this, after the agency benefited greatly last week when the Swedish government allocated new money to research and development.

This Fellowship Program is an important project which benefits not only our own profession – but also, more importantly, the people we write for – the general public.

I am of course especially pleased that two of this spring's six fellowship winners come from my own publication, *Veckans Affärer*: Birgitta Forsberg, Innovation Journalism Fellow with the *San Francisco Chronicle* and Niklas Johansson at Fast Company.

I am convinced that the experiences, new knowledge, and networks of contacts they will acquire during their stay at American editorial departments will both benefit their professional development as individuals and also contribute to our own journalistic development at *Veckans Affärer* and thereby further reinforce its position as Sweden's largest business weekly.

This might now be a good time to ask the first question of the day:

Is it really possible to distinguish a specific discipline called Innovation Journalism, in the same way as we can distinguish business, technology, political and entertainment fields of journalism?

Some people say yes.

I must admit that I am not entirely convinced we can.

To me, Innovation Journalism has more to do instead with the difference between mediocre and excellent journalism: being able to ask the right questions and present the whole picture, not just parts of it.

In brief, having the right tools, methodology and knowledge to explain a development or course of events within its context. This holds true regardless of whether you are a business, technology or science journalist.

That is why this meeting place is so important. We have achieved a lot if we can get together around the concept of Innovation Journalism and join forces to bridge the barriers and cultural differences which exist between different fields of journalism in order to increase knowledge about and understanding of the innovation system.

Who knows – perhaps I will also become convinced that there is a definable discipline that can be labelled "Innovation Journalism".

At the same time, I would point out that there has been a major shift in attitude over the 25 years I have worked in journalism.

The walls between technology and business journalism are no longer as impenetrable as when I started. For over a decade I was the only Swedish business journalist who continually monitored the high-tech industry.

Otherwise, the Swedish business press did not concern itself with technology – it wasn't their field. The computer magazines were just as bad at writing about business.

Nor did my editors always understand me – but as long as I took care of my other (and of course more important) newsbeat, the forest industry, they let me have my way. Only after ten years, in 1992, was I allowed to devote all my time to information technology.

But even then the acceptance was not a hundred percent. When I became the first Swedish business journalist to get an exclusive interview with Bill Gates, my colleagues were more interested in what he was like as a person, than in what he had to say about the high-tech business.

This may sound strange to those of you who represent American media. But Sweden is a small country and it was only forty years ago that modern business journalism was introduced to Sweden, when my magazine *Veckans Affärer* was launched.

You have a far longer tradition in this field. That is why American magazines on both business and technology have been my most important source of knowledge and inspiration over the years.

Today attitudes are different, and this is reflected in journalism. To some extent we must thank the dot-com era and its repercussions for this development.

I can take my own magazine as an example. In conjunction with its fortieth anniversary, I have had cause to look back through previous editions. For a long time there was a special section on technology – and it was about technology.

Today we do not even discuss things in terms of technology any more. When we write, as in our latest issue's cover story on triple play, it is natural to address issues of both technology and business.

But there is much that can be improved and developed. One example is reportage on the players and stakeholders in the innovation system, a field which has received scant attention in the Swedish media.

Yet this ought to be an important subject, since Sweden invests more in R and D in relation to its GNP than any other nation, while at the same time, the results in terms of products and services that can be made commercial are mediocre, to say the least.

Why is this and what are the obstacles? That story has not yet been written.

But I can also see disturbing signs of a relapse into the old ways. The complexity of the subject and the expertise required have led people to start writing about the actual products again.

Or led journalists to hide behind analysts, and pretend they are objective, instead of explaining that those analysts are also players with their own interests, and daring to stand for their conclusions themselves.

As representatives of the European and American media we have a lot in common, but we are different as well. Thanks to this conference we have an opportunity to learn from each other.

One thing I am sure of – when I return to Stockholm at the end of this week I will be filled with new ideas and thoughts – as I always am after every visit here in Silicon Valley.

Thank You!

Weje Sandén is Editor-in-chief of Veckans Affärer, Sweden's largest business weekly. He joined Veckans Affärer in 1996 as Senior Editor in charge of Information Technology & Telecom and was appointed Editor-in-chief in 2001. Mr. Sandén has 25 years of experience as business journalist from Swedish newspapers and business magazines. Between 1979-1984 he worked at the daily Svenska Dagbladet as reporter and 1984-1995 at business weekly Affärsvärlden, as reporter and as Managing editor (1987–1992). 1995-96 Mr. Sandén served as Secretary of the Swedish Government's IT-Commission. He has also written several books about IT and its impact on businesses and society.

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