

# Interview mit Madhav Chinnappa, Ludovic Blecher und Ralf Bremer

*Das Gespräch fand am 26.03.2020 zwischen den Studienautoren Ingo Dachwitz und Alexander Fanta sowie den Google-Managern Madhav Chinnappa, Ludovic Blecher und Pressesprecher Ralf Bremer via Google Hangouts statt. Das Transkript wurde vor Veröffentlichung von Google autorisiert.*

**Interviewer:** Let us start with a quick introduction, then move on to questions.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** I've actually worked in the news industry my whole career. I started at Associated Press television. That was a startup that was created out of AP on the television side. I worked on all parts of the business there. I was acting Asian editor during things like the Hong Kong handover, the Afghan civil war. I ended up moving to the more business side of it. I moved for a year to M&A-role in a UK media company which I didn't really enjoy. Then I moved to BBC and ended up being head of development and rights. So I actually come from a television background. At the BBC, I was working on the relationship that the BBC had with news agencies and their partners like the EBU and Al Jazeera. I established a working relationship with Al Jazeera after 9/11 and things like that. My job was working with all the people that provided news to the BBC and also the people that the BBC provided news to. Increasingly, what was happening was that the digital teams were coming to me and asking me questions like "Can we do this?". So I got involved more on the digital side. What I was realizing then, is that the job was changing so much and that technology and digital are really important. And I didn't know anything about technology. I often joke that I'm the technically dumbest person at Google. But I wanted to learn. Because the changes that were happening, I thought, were so profound. The story that I used to say at the BBC was, if you're the editor of the 10 o'clock news, you never had to think about whether someone was watching it on a Sony television or a Panasonic. Whereas now you have to think about how this is going to look on Android or iOS, how is it going to look on this phone, how is it going to look on a tablet? It is just a much more complicated world that I wanted to go and learn about. Also, I used to deal a little bit with Google and Google was not the easiest company to deal with. I used to say two things to them. One is: "I don't think you quite get news", and two, "whenever you do something you're always doing it with the New York Times or the Washington Post". And I got called up nine years ago and somebody said: "Hey, you know these problems that you're talking about – we're trying to work on them. Would you like to come and work here?" Which I thought was offering me a job. I was so wrong. I had to go through all the Google interviews. It was crazy. But the career I've had at Google has been, I was the first person outside the US to work on what was called news product partnership and that was, at the time, just about Google News. We didn't have a lot of news products at the time. Then I worked on DNI and GNI. So everything that I have been doing has been on that cross between the technology and news. But very much from a news perspective because I'm a news person. I actually think that a lot of the friction that happened between Google and the news industry is cultural. They're two different cultures. But that's a little bit about me. I'll shut up and let Ludo talk. He's got a much more interesting background than me.

**Ludovic Blecher:** First, I would just say everything I do is with this journalist mindset. I'm a journalist who was always involved in digital transformation. Back in 1998, I was finishing journalism school. My dream was to be a reporter at Liberation, which is a French daily

paper, and be in charge of digital transformation. [That was] for one reason. Everyone was looking at digital as a way to display more of what you were doing in print and I was looking at it as a new medium. In 1998, I wrote some research called “Liberation, which strategy for new media?”. Three years after, I was hired by Liberation. First as a reporter, then I joined the website of Liberation, always wearing two hats. One was doing the classical reporting, politics, I covered terrorism, Corsica. Also, any kind of stuff including technology and political and social affairs. But I was always coming with new ideas to create new narratives using online. And at the age of 29, I became the youngest editor in chief of Liberation, for one reason. I had wanted to leave the paper because I saw they were too low in achieving digital transformation. But then a new executive director of the paper was appointed. At the time the news room was voting for the guy, I voted against him. I had never met him before. He asked me to come to his place. I was with him the day after and he said: “Everyone says you have ideas for digital. You are going to be editor in chief and also in charge of digital.” I became both editor in chief and CDO. To make the long story short, we went through this transformation. I set up the first subscription model by 2010 for Liberation, together with someone coming from the music industry. So trust me, I know a lot about the decisions here, how to change the business and how to go through the massive complexity of dealing with change. And dealing with journalists, which is not easy even when you are a journalist. Dealing with business folks, you use words such as product. Because at the end of the day you have readers which are using the product. So I went through all that. I left Liberation because I was kind of-, I felt to be in silos. Between the newsroom on one side and the product folks on the other side. I had the opportunity to become a Nieman fellow, at the Nieman Foundation for journalism at Harvard. I spent one year at the MIT working at the Media Lab on new narratives and new formats for journalism. And at the business school [working] on monetization of news, focusing on subscription. It was 2012, we were not that many to work on subscription. My field was to create a toolkit for small and medium newspapers that wanted to set up a subscription model. Then back to France, Google and the French publishers reached an agreement. I was not part of the negotiation but they decided to setup a fund for innovation in France. Both the publishers and Google reached out to me and said: “You are a journalist, you know a lot about innovation, you know the publishers; can you think about a meaningful way to operate and push the transformation?” I set up the French fund, I was the director of it. Then I joined DNI to work with Madhav on a very big, and maybe the biggest effort ever done to stimulate journalism and new thinking in the practice of digital journalism in Europe. I am someone who doesn't really care about the medium or device, but about journalism. I think there are no good or bad forms of media [meaning: paper, mobile, TV, assistant]. I'm not the one that is saying that paper will disappear or mobile will take over everything. I'm a more of an and-person than an or-person, I see there are different ways to write a story and to earn the relationship with the audience. Everything I have done was with this idea of what it is to be in the publisher's shoes, when you have to deal with complexity, in a very, very complicated time in terms of economy that doesn't give you that much room to do something that is massively important, which is trying new things. So I've done that with this spirit. I'm still a board member of a newspaper in Lebanon, where I try to keep an eye on what is the complexity on a day to day to deal with economics and stuff. Now I'm in charge of a new program called GNI Innovation Challenges, which has the same spirit to stimulate innovation, but at a more global level. We implement code for projects in every region of the world.

**Interviewer:** How would you describe Google's European digital news initiative to a person that is not familiar with the matter.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** I'll take that [question] because I had to explain it to my family. The way that we used to explain DNI was that it was our initiative in Europe to try to help the overall news ecosystem across three pillars. We had product, training and research and

innovation. And the DNI fund was the innovation piece of it. But the two other pillars are as important in my view. Indulge me for a moment on the origin of DNI. I'm a comic book fan, so I like a good origin story. About five years ago, we had a number of publishing partners we've worked with come to us and say: "Look, these are very, very difficult times. The Internet has fundamentally changed the business models. Everybody has access to information, everyone is getting access to the advertisers and access to audiences. That has been very, very difficult. And we think you should do more. We don't really understand what you're doing." Google at the time responded, they were saying: "Well, we do lots of things, we do care about the ecosystem. Look, we've got search that gives you all this traffic. We've got ad tech that gets you all the help for revenue. You've got Trends and stuff that give data and everything." It was very much a product-oriented view of it. And there were lots and lots of products. But if you were a news publisher, you would look at all these things like: "Where's the story? It doesn't really make sense to me." So what we tried to do is create DNI to be a bit more coherent both internally and externally. And don't underestimate how important being coherent internally is as well. With a small group of publishers, we said: "Look, we really do care and I can go into why we care. Tell us what we should be working on." That's where the three pillars came from, because they said: "We really need help on certain product things. We really need help on the kind of tools and training that will help the journalists be the journalist for the 21st century." - A very different world from when I was in the newsroom. I'm that old, you can tell from my gray hair - "Also we need help in innovation. Everybody talks about it, but it's very difficult to do." So on the product side, we create a product Working Group. One of the challenges they were facing was mobile, video, monetization. So we ended up developing AMP around mobile. What they were saying was, "There are all these problems, everyone's moving to mobile, and all these platforms are coming to us asking you for different things." We looked at that, the smart techies looked at that, and said: "Well, that's because the mobile web is too slow. And that is not a problem Google can solve." That is why they came up with an open source initiative for the ecosystem to work together on. With video, people said "everyone's moving to video, but it's so complicated." So we worked on the YouTube Player for Publishers program, which allows news publishers to basically use the YouTube back-end at no serving cost and all the YouTube infrastructure. On monetization, there were two things. One was getting more serious around ad blocking. And the most recent stuff has been around Subscribe with Google. So again, there's a big product piece that was under DNI, that's also going forward with GNI. The tools and training, quite similar. And the Innovation Fund, the discussions about why we should do an Innovation Fund were really interesting. Actually, in some of the beginning conversations, there were editors and CEOs who said, "look, we really know we need to innovate. But it's very hard to innovate, when you have to do your day job all the time." That really resonated with me because often when I was working for a news company I felt like I was trying today to do the job that I did yesterday better, rather than think about what I needed for tomorrow/the future. A publisher said to us, "honestly, we need funding, to be able to have that bandwidth in that space to try innovation. Some may succeed and some will fail because that's the part of innovation." That's actually where the DNI fund came from.

**Ludovic Blecher:** If I may, I would summarize with three key words. I would say collaboration, solutions, stimulation. I would say it's first of all about collaboration, training to understand each other better. When you start, you take people, publishers and Google, tech and product person, at the same table. They speak about their issue, you try having this conversation, it leads to collaboration, and then you see what can be the solutions. When we are the product solution, we try to come up with it. And it should be in the most open approach possible, like AMP, open source. They had an issue with how you can speed things up, how things are displayed on mobile. When we can have a solution, we try to have it. Collaboration can lead to solution. But beyond collaboration and discussion, as Madhav

explained, the day-to-day operations are killing all your bandwidth. So it goes to stimulation. We came up with this idea of saying, “we will try to give you time and come up with a kind of initiative that would be a forcing function for you to just to step back from the daily operation and think about something. For trying new things you would not have the bandwidth or the funding, sometime, to do.” In some ways, the application process to the DNI fund became more important than the funding itself, because this was the stimulation, anyone to have the opportunity to come with idea and move forward with it, whether it was selected or not.

**Interviewer:** As you say, the DNI fund was funding innovation - what was your working definition of what media innovation actually means? And can you say a bit about in terms of the projects you saw, what worked and what didn't?

**Ludovic Blecher:** I will tell you about definition first and then I give you the rest. We had a lot of conversation with Madhav and there are two things we decided not to define. The first one was innovation. And the second one was quality. Who are we to define that? So we were thinking about original journalism. Of course, the aim at the end of the day is to produce quality and to defend journalism. And we have the patience, the soul and everything for that. And innovation. How would you define innovation? It depends on your starting point. It depends on your own starting point. In the media landscape, innovation is not the same for a small player as it is for a legacy player with hundreds of years of history and it is different depending on the country. So we asked people to explain to us why their project is innovative and to give us indicators to help us assess the level of innovation depending on their starting point.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** We did this in the craziest way possible. Because we didn't define innovation and we didn't even define what news was. We wanted people to do that. That was intentional, because we didn't want to be restrictive. We wanted to be as open as possible, and let people come to us. I think that's important, at least from my perspective, and I need to give huge kudos to Ludo who set up the process with the project team and the jury, letting all the people and experts actually look at this through the whole way. A process was designed without having an outcome in mind. What we're trying to do is stimulate but we didn't know what that would look like. The process was designed to try to do that intentionally.

**Interviewer:** And how did that work out? What would you say after three years of funding?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** Go for it Ludo. I'll let you speak for once.

**Ludovic Blecher:** It would be kind of odd to have just one outcome and one analysis. Because we saw many things, and many trends. So first, some surprises. So what surprised me first is [that] the best idea, the most disruptive is not necessarily the best outcome. Real innovation lies with execution and implementation and iteration. You can have an idea that is excellent, [but] if you don't implement it the right way, if you don't listen to the way people are using it, if you're not shifting, iterating, it can end up not being the right path. In the way we designed the process, we gave the flexibility to people to kind of shift and pivot. The second thing that really surprised me was – at the beginning, we were a bit shy because we wanted to make very clear that it was not about Google products, and it was not about us, that we are giving room to innovators. We said: “Of course you own the IP. You don't have to apply with Google products. And guess what, we're not going to speak about your project at all.” And actually, the innovators came to us and said: “But we want to share, we want to learn from users – can you help us with that?” So this idea came from the ecosystem, to go into more collaboration. We saw after round two and three that the number of collaborative approaches in some way became the new disruption. It was fantastic to see this news ecosystem coming together with different publishers, that were sometimes competitors, with academics and publishers. There are many examples I can mention with startups and publishers, and so forth and so on, that came together to try to solve big things. And that also

wanted to share the learning within the industry, so everyone can grow together. To me, that was the most important learning of this initiative.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** The learning I have from the beginning stage, we were – and this was my fault – we were very conscious that at that point, people would be very sceptical about why we were doing this. So we said, look, this is not a PR exercise. Of course you own the IP. The worry [among publishers] was, this was either a PR exercise or some kind of fishing exercise for IP. So we said: No, no, it is absolutely crystal clear, it is all your IP, it has got nothing to do with Google. You don't have to do anything with Google. And it's not a PR exercise. You don't need to talk about it, we're going to default to projects [being] confidential. As soon I said that, the feedback was people wanted to talk about it. We did it for those reasons. And we iterated through the rounds. We changed that as people did that. Also, we became more focussed via themes. I think the thing that has been really interesting to me has been a cultural change. This is the learning for me - it is that, yes, they were working on technological product innovation projects. Brilliant. But the really interesting learning for me is how that process created a cultural change within some of these organizations. And I'll give you one of my favourite examples. And it's with a local publisher in the UK, called Archant. They had a really good CTO, and she came with a project around voice and using their archive and some really clever things about monetization. She told me the story afterwards, it turns out she had taken this project to her board. And they had said no. Then she went to the DNI fund. We said yes. She went back to her board and said: Look, Google and the jury, and all the people in the jury think this is a good idea. They went and did it. She said it actually helped change the culture within the company. All of a sudden there was this light bulb that went off. They ended up restructuring some of the way in which they work in the company. One good thing is that she got more power, she's able to do more stuff. For me, those are the stories that are brilliant. Because projects are fantastic, not to do them down. But it is when that innovation project is bringing lasting change that it does what we've tried to do through DNI, GNI, which is help move the industry on.

**Interviewer:** I have another kind of definition question for you. Would you say that the DNI fund was or the GNI generally is philanthropy? How would you position it on the axis between a commercial activity and a philanthropic altruistic activity?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** I guess I put it somewhere in the middle. Because it's a bunch of different things, but I think we should understand the reason. It goes back to [the question]: “Why does Google do this stuff?” Why does Google cares about journalism? In my view there are two reasons for this. One, there is a values-based reason. Google is a company that is about trying to give access to information, to make information universally accessible. A huge part, and it's hugely important to that mission, is - if there is a degradation of the quality of information that is out there, what we do - trying to connect users with quality information - will become more difficult. So there's a values perspective on that. Including, that we think that – and we've been clear about this, Sundar [Pichai] has been clear about this - from a values perspective, we share a lot of the same values as the news industry about how an informed citizen makes for a better society. But there also are business reasons behind this. Google is an ecosystem company. The way that it makes money is through the ecosystems it operates in. So it thrives when the ecosystems thrives. That's why, when you look at our businesses, especially the ones that relate to news, they're all revenue share-based. Our ad tech: revenue share-based. YouTube: revenue share-based. Play: revenue share-based. With the vast majority going to the publisher, the creator, the YouTuber. Therefore we're incentivized to help the ecosystem, and in this case, the news ecosystem, to thrive. That's why it's a bit of both. But also, I would say, going to the point that Ludo made earlier, which is about collaboration and dialogue. Publishers were asking us for that. And we have always tried to design things based on feedback. One of the things that I've seen culturally change is the company, in the time that I've been here. When I was at the BBC complaining about

Google, to Google people, it felt very much like a blackbox. I think we've spent a lot of effort and time trying to not be a black box, to listen to people, to understand things to communicate more, to communicate the way that we operate more. Look at the website, How News Works, and things like that. They are based on feedback from publishers. Publishers that say: "You need to be better at this, you need to be better at this." Also, going back to the point I made about culture: Google is a tech company. Technology has a culture, news people have a culture, and they are quite different. But news people like to talk to humans. So this is kind of a cultural thing, which is: Here, make the product. Let's see how it goes. Whereas news people want to go: Where does the product come from, what were you thinking, tell me more about that. I think that we have come a long way, including getting people like Ludo, like myself, like my boss Richard Gingras, who come from the news industry, to bring that kind of sense and balance to that discussion. So it's not just a purely technological discussion, we are thinking more broadly on that. But it's also about the opportunity and the ecosystems that we are involved in. And it's about the people that you work with as well.

**Ralf Bremer:** Let me just add one point. I think there's a third dimension. It's not just philanthropy or business. The third dimension is the social responsibility, doing the right thing, and not being ignorant to the things that are happening outside Google. We are seeing that movement outside our company, and we act in a way where we think it's the right thing to do. You can see it in the current crisis. But you can also see it when you look at our activities regarding environmental sustainability and climate change. And you can see it in the cultural space, you can see it on many social occasions and in our work with social organizations. I think that's part of Google's culture. So it is not either philanthropy or business. It's also about responsibility.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** People always ask me how it was to come from the BBC to Google, they're like, wow, that must be so different. And yeah, there is a lot of differences. But one of the things that I find amusing is the similarities. One of the similarities is, in the BBC speak, with the public service ethos. There is a public service ethos within Google. There's a third dimension beyond those two.

**Interviewer:** Let me ask about another dimension. In 2015, when the Digital News Initiative was first announced, Google was under a lot of pressure in Europe. Germany and Spain just introduced their forms of ancillary copyright. Italy had debated a web tax. Was it a coincidence or did the News Initiative correlate with this political situation that was tough for Google? It seems DNI was born under the wish to avoid tougher regulation.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** I would characterize it slightly differently. It's very easy sometimes to think there's a direct causal link. I think that the pressure and the things that were happening were a bit of a wake-up call to Google to go: "Wait a second, we seem to be very misunderstood here. Because we think we're doing all kinds of good stuff and then there's people saying these things. What's happening here?" And that's when we used this kind of trusted group, focus group with the founders of DNI to say: "Hold on a second, we feel that we're doing quite a lot, but we seem to be misunderstood. Can you help us do the things that you think we should be doing? Help us shape this in a better way." That is where DNI came from, it was talking to the publishers about: what are the right things and the ways that we should work within the ecosystem? What's good for the ecosystem? That is how I experienced it.

**Interviewer:** Before, you described the three pillars of DNI and how GNI is a larger thing now, how it has different pillars with a different emphasis. What would you say is the difference between DNI with the fund and the larger GNI initiative?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** That is one of the cultural things about technology companies, they like to experiment and iterate. So you always have to do something slightly different as you're moving forward. Whether it was product training or research and innovation. When you do something new, you don't stick with those, you make it something different. In terms of the

differences, there's one other difference: GNI is global. DNI was European. But the reality of what we understood is that if you look at two of the three pillars of DNI, they were actually global without it being explicit. The product stuff was global, because we do global products. The tools and training was global. Our News Lab team, they operate globally. The training stuff, the Reuters report that we are one of the funders of, that was global. So there was a natural evolution that way. The other thing that is different is a deep focus on the business sustainability elements of it. This means we've gone deeper in certain ways on the GNI. We have things like these labs program, whether that is a subscriptions lab, or ads, where we are taking a small group of people in different regions, going deep with them on a lab. And I think that is much more focused around business sustainability. That's a different approach that we just definitely didn't have under DNI.

**Ludovic Blecher:** And we are learning. At some point, regarding funding for new projects, we say, should we just fund innovation for the sake of funding innovation? Or should we hear what the publishers have to say, what the ecosystem has to say, and then help them in the direction they're asking us to provide a support. The first Innovation Challenge we've done in Asia Pacific, we decided to have a specific theme with a specific focus. It was not just about innovation, but about how can you innovate through revenue coming from readers, donations, subscriptions, membership, churn reduction, and so forth and so on. That goes to what Madhav was saying: this is really about sustainability. In another market, in Latin America we wrote [in the call for project] about what the market wanted from us, and we went for a new news product. In America, the big thing was about local, so we made a call for local projects only. The current call in North America is focused on business sustainability, which is a permanent concern, and diversity, equity and inclusion. So we are listening.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** Under the fund, we actually iterated as we went along. We started very open, then we heard the feedback that actually monetization is the big challenge. And through DNI funds, through previous rounds, we focussed around that. With GNI, we very much did a similar version of that, which is listen to the industry about what's right for their region. And, you know, the APAC one is a really good example of that. Because when we went out to Asia, we were talking to publishers about the challenges that they are facing and how we could help on the innovation side. They were saying, look, we are not anywhere near around reader revenue. We see what's happening in the US and in Europe. But we really need some help in that way. And I was like, okay, that'll be the theme for APAC round one. I think that the dialogue to understand the challenges has gone into a much deeper level with GNI than we had with DNI.

**Ludovic Blecher:** We saw some similarities in terms of outcome. We started one year ago on a call for projects about reader revenue. Innovation takes time – that's one of the learnings as well – it takes time to implement. When I was still able to travel, about a month to go, I went back to Asia. I looked at the progress and I met with publishers. I was in Japan and I met with the person managing the project for Asahi Shimbun. Very legacy company, very powerful, with a very Japanese culture. What was interesting was to have him saying publicly the following, I'm going to read it to you: “We’ve learned, sharing ideas is better than hiding; once we share with others, including players in different industries, we became better and we came up with new interesting perspectives.” While going through the process, we were suggesting they come up with this new mindset, the structural change - “maybe when we grow if we share more on that.”

**Madhav Chinnappa:** For me, this is one of the really, really important learnings: The process can be almost as important [as the outcome]. And this process can lead to change that you wouldn't have expected. In the beginning days of the DNI fund, one of the things that I was absolutely petrified was that, frankly, we would disappoint more people than we would make happy just by the fact that we're not going to be able to say yes to everybody. But you know, thanks to Ludo and the project team, the process that people went through-, actually

even people who didn't get money have gone out of their way to thank me and Ludo because it helped them thinking. That was just beautiful to see, because there are a lot of difficulties in the overall news ecosystem. At the end of the day, I think we will get to a healthy sustainable news ecosystem if we're able to tap into a lot of people that are working on stuff. Let them have the space to innovate to build what they want the news ecosystem for the 21st century to be.

**Interviewer:** Could you reflect a bit on the role that you and Google are playing for the news industry in the crucial phase that it is in now. You just described the fund, the fellowships and the conferences Google hosts and sponsors and so forth. How does it feel playing such an important role for such an important industry in this crucial time?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** It is something that we take very seriously. I always use the word ecosystem. In the old days, when I started, it was a news industry, it was very verticalized. It is now an ecosystem with lots of different parts and lots of different players in that. And I think we try to take our role in that very seriously. We understand that we are quite a significant player. You know, you look at on the digital side, if you look at the traffic sources, and the 20 billion clicks a month that we send to publishers and all that stuff, 14 billion in revenue that our ad tech does. We understand that we are a significant player. Well, you know, with great power comes great responsibility. We take these responsibilities very seriously. But we also try to do it in a way that is based around dialogue and collaboration. So it's not like there are six people who sit in a darkened room at Google and say we need to do XYZ. We spend a lot of effort trying to talk to people directly, trying to go out there. This is why we have these conferences, to hear from people. This is why we try to do them in both structured ways and unstructured ways, right. We do this in an open, transparent, collaborative way. Ideally, you know, based on dialogue.

**Interviewer:** Some media scholars, such as Emily Bell, argue that it could be an issue for journalistic independence when a company that is subject to coverage is also a major provider of product infrastructure and at the same time funds media products, trains journalists. Another scholar, Efrat Nechushtai, conceptualized “infrastructural capture”, where a company becomes dominant for the distribution, for the monetization of news. Do you think that there is a threat, maybe even inadvertently, that Google could kind of capture media, arrest their autonomy?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** No. I believe in the power of journalism and the importance of independent journalism. Good journalists know what good journalism is. They're not going to be affected whether Google is their ad tech provider or whether someone else is. Journalists have had to deal with this from the beginning days. And it's evolved over time, if you look at the history of journalism. Modern journalism has always been about independence. I don't see that as a factor, because I believe in journalism.

**Ludovic Blecher:** Journalism is all about Chinese walls and church and state [separation], as they say in the US. This is something we have replicated in the way we were handling the DNI fund. We had Chinese walls. Everything that was discussed within the project team stayed within the project team, and couldn't be shared with anyone in product, in business, in marketing. I strongly believe, as a journalist, that the essence of journalism is the slogan of independence. You cannot kill that.

**Madhav Chinnappa:** Just to build on that, you know, just to be clear: On DNI, we made sure that our product people are away from the innovation stuff. Because we never want anybody to think we were using it to steal IP. We did a lot of Chinese walls. My team has signed actual contracts that said, you will not be talking with your other colleagues about this. This was over and above their regular employment contract.

**Interviewer:** But wouldn't you agree that Google's brand among journalists profited from the News Initiative?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** I don't know. You tell me.



**Interviewer:** The Reuters Institute figures indicate that Google is the most popular of the tech companies among media organizations. But I guess the larger question is the infrastructural dimension. The Chinese wall is a concept from the era of classical advertising. But now Google not only is the intermediate for the advertiser, but it also drives traffic, it does monetization via subscriptions. And it helps to sustain journalism in other ways. Don't you think that there is an issue with having such a dominant effect on industry, even if that is not purposefully misused?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** Going back to the Reuters stuff, when you dig into the data around things like traffic, you realize when you look at the search traffic, in almost fifty percent of that traffic where Google is the source, it is what they call direct. It is people searching "BBC" because they're too lazy to put it "BBC.com". On the search dominance thing, from a news perspective, you always have to look one step below that. The other point about whether we're the most liked one - I think we are there not based on, "hey, everyone's nice there". We're based on our actions and the positive impact that those actions have. It's not just because we have a nice conference, and everyone's like, "hey, isn't this fun?" Journalists and publishers are way too sceptical to do that. It's actually, publishers value the things that we have been doing. And they value it, not just because "hey, it's great". It's because they've helped build that. This is the collaborative dialogue about everything that we're doing. That is useful for the overall piece. In terms of the influence bit, I will come back to that the journalists are always going to be sceptical.

**Interviewer:** Madhav, you mentioned the internal separation of units. Like product people, they don't interfere with the DNI fund, for example. Are there other steps, other measures that that you've taken to prevent any forms of unwanted influence?

**Madhav Chinnappa:** From the DNI fund perspective, probably the most obvious one was the Council. It was a Council of twelve people. Three of them were from Google and nine of them weren't from Google. And it was a simple majority to take decisions. Even if there was a deadlock, the person who broke the deadlock was the chair who was a non-Google person. So we definitely tried to make sure-. We were very, very conscious that people would perceive this in a certain way. So we tried to build it in a way that demonstrated the way that we wanted it to be done. The innovation fund was completely independent from the product working group. We said very specifically, if you are on our product working group, you cannot be on the innovation fund. Because we want to keep those two things completely separate. They have a very different purpose behind it. On the middle pillar of tools and training-, please feel free to talk to Reuters about whether we put any conditions upon them, which we didn't. Because that was about research which had to be independent. This goes slightly circular, back to the first round when we said we're going to default to not talking about your projects. That was done because we knew that people would think oh, they're just doing this for PR.

**Interviewer:** GNI was scheduled to run for three years until the end of 2021. So what will happen after the three years, what will happen after 2021?

**Ludovic Blecher:** Innovation takes time. We still have a lot to do. Let's discuss that in six months or one year because I don't have the answer yet. We need to do the right thing.