

From Vision to Knowledge Flow: How Transformational Leadership Fosters Knowledge Sharing in the Polish Film Industry

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Abstract: This study examines how transformational leadership fosters knowledge sharing in the Polish film industry, focusing on the mechanisms through which trust-based relationships, mentoring practices, and adaptive responses to disruption shape knowledge flows in film production teams. The research is grounded in the transformational leadership framework of Bass and Riggio (2006) and integrates Nonaka's (1994) distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge with project-based organization research and developmental network theory. The methodology comprises eleven semi-structured interviews with film producers selected through purposive sampling from the membership directory of the Krajowa Izba Producentów Audiowizualnych (KIPA), and analysed through three-stage grounded coding, yielding 221 first-order codes and 18 second-order categories. The findings show that transformational leadership in film production is enacted primarily through relational mechanisms — role modelling, reputational sanctioning, vision-based partner selection, and leader presence — which form the foundation for knowledge sharing in long-cycle creative projects. Mentoring operates predominantly outside formal pathways and relies on distributed developmental networks and situated learning, while leadership behaviours adapt to technological disruption and project-based uncertainty. The study contributes to transformational leadership theory by extending its application to project-based creative industries and to the knowledge sharing literature by clarifying the conditions under which trust and adaptive leadership facilitate knowledge exchange.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Transformational leadership, Trust, Mentoring, Project-based organization, Film industry, Creative industries

1. Introduction

Leadership remains a central construct in management and organizational research because it shapes employee attitudes, behaviours, and overall effectiveness (Hughes et al., 2018; Banks et al., 2016). In increasingly project-based and creative work, the leader's role extends beyond task coordination to the construction of shared meaning, the orchestration of knowledge flows, and the sustaining of trust under structural uncertainty (Sydow et al., 2004; Bechky, 2006). The way in which leadership behaviours produce these effects, and the contextual conditions that shape them, have therefore become central questions for contemporary research on leadership and knowledge management.

Within the leadership discourse, transformational leadership is contrasted with transactional leadership grounded in contingent rewards. Transformational leadership emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire, intellectually stimulate, and develop followers, generating outcomes that exceed routine performance (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978). Meta-analytic evidence confirms its positive effects on follower attitudes, innovation, and team performance (Banks et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2018), though critical scholarship has drawn attention to pseudo-transformational leadership and its dark-side manifestations (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Tourish, 2013). Recent empirical work continues to specify the mediating mechanisms through which transformational leadership translates into knowledge sharing behaviour, including perceived organizational support (Chen, Chang and Tian, 2024), organizational commitment (Amin and Sudarmiatin, 2024), and team communities of practice (Matsuo, 2025).

Transformational leadership also shapes knowledge processes, creativity, and innovation. It fosters both individual skill development and collective knowledge sharing, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors (Dong et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2018). This relationship is particularly salient in creative industries, where production depends on integrating tacit and explicit knowledge across specialized roles, and where leaders enact vision through long-term project cycles (Grabher, 2002; Manning, 2017). The Polish film industry offers an instructive setting that combines a project-based logic, craft traditions, and a fragmented institutional environment characterized by lottery-like state funding mechanisms, dense informal networks, and limited formal accountability.

This study addresses three research questions: (1) How do project leaders in the Polish film industry build and sustain trust-based relationships that enable knowledge sharing in long-cycle film projects? (2) Which mentoring practices and knowledge-sharing mechanisms transmit professional knowledge in the Polish film industry, given the absence of formal pathways into the profession? (3) How does transformational leadership shape knowledge sharing under conditions of technological disruption and project-based uncertainty? By integrating the

transformational leadership framework with knowledge sharing theory and project-based organization research, the paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of leadership in creative industries and offers empirically grounded insights into the mechanisms that connect vision, trust, and knowledge flow.

2. Transformational Leadership Definitions

This section reviews the conceptual foundations of transformational leadership theory, its operationalization through the Four I's model, and its relevance to the distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge that underpins the analysis of film production teams.

2.1 The Essence of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership refers to the ability of leaders to exert a lasting influence on the attitudes, values, and aspirations of followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). It is defined as a process of social influence in which leaders elevate followers beyond immediate self-interest, foster commitment to a shared vision, and stimulate higher-order needs for achievement and meaning at work. Unlike transactional leadership, it operates through the moral, emotional, and cognitive engagement of followers, producing outcomes that exceed formal organizational expectations (Bass and Riggio, 2006). The construct has been extensively validated across organizational settings and remains one of the most influential leadership theories in contemporary management research.

Recent reviews confirm that transformational leadership is associated with innovation, knowledge sharing, employee creativity, and organizational commitment (Banks et al., 2016; Hoch et al., 2018). Its effects are contingent on contextual factors such as task complexity, the temporal structure of work, and the institutional environment (Oreg and Berson, 2019). In project-based organizations and creative industries, temporal compression of work, recurring team formation and dissolution, and reliance on tacit knowledge create distinctive conditions under which transformational behaviours acquire specific operational meaning (Sydow et al., 2004; Bechky, 2006; Keegan and Den Hartog, 2004). Bai (2025) further demonstrates that the effect of transformational leadership on career growth is mediated by self-efficacy and psychological capital, suggesting that follower-level mechanisms are integral to understanding how transformational behaviours generate lasting outcomes.

2.2 The Core Dimensions: The “Four I’s” Model

Bass’s operationalization of transformational leadership identifies four dimensions — idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass and Riggio, 2006). These dimensions co-occur and mutually reinforce one another in practice (Banks et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2025).

Idealized influence refers to the leader’s ability to serve as a role model. Leaders demonstrating this dimension are perceived as credible, ethical, and consistent in their actions, fostering trust and identification (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Brown and Treviño, 2006). Only leaders whose values align with the collective good can sustain idealized influence over time (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). In project-based organizations, where formal hierarchies are flattened, idealized influence is built and tested in micro-interactions that signal the leader’s commitment and willingness to absorb personal cost on behalf of the collective. Inspirational motivation refers to articulating a compelling vision and communicating it in ways that energize followers. Transformational leaders foster optimism, enthusiasm, and shared purpose (Bass and Riggio, 2006). It operates through self-concept-based mechanisms in which followers identify their aspirations with the collective project (Shamir et al., 1993; Tan et al., 2025). In creative industries, where projects span years and meaning is tied to artistic significance, inspirational motivation is enacted through the selection of partners, themes, and collaborations that embody the leader’s vision in concrete practice.

Intellectual stimulation involves encouraging followers to question assumptions, explore new perspectives, and engage in creative problem-solving (Bass and Riggio, 2006). It is especially consequential during technological or market disruption, when established routines no longer suffice (Christensen, 1997; Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2017). The diffusion of artificial intelligence, virtual production, and sustainable practices has made intellectual stimulation a central leadership task in contemporary film production (McKinsey & Company, 2025). Individualized consideration refers to the leader’s attentiveness to the developmental needs of each follower. Leaders enacting this dimension function as mentors and coaches, providing tailored feedback and emotional support (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Kram, 1985). It is closely linked to psychological safety, in which followers feel free to voice concerns and admit uncertainty without fear (Edmondson, 1999).

2.3 Explicit and Tacit Knowledge on the Film set

The distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge was developed most influentially by Nonaka (1994; Nonaka et al., 2000), who proposed the SECI model to describe how knowledge is created and converted across these two forms. Explicit knowledge is codifiable, transferable through documents and procedures, and independent of the person who possesses it. Tacit knowledge is embodied, context-dependent, and acquired through experience and participation in practice (Polanyi, 1966; Brown and Duguid, 2001). Film production relies heavily on tacit knowledge in creative activities, craftsmanship, and non-verbal communication. A cinematographer senses the rhythm of a shot, an actor conveys what is not in the script, a director negotiates atmosphere through gestures. This embodied competence is acquired through apprenticeship-like engagement and situated participation, not classroom instruction (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Alony et al., 2007). At the same time, production generates substantial explicit knowledge — budgets, schedules, contracts, technical specifications — that must be coordinated across specialized departments under tight temporal constraints (Bechky, 2006). This distinction is especially significant in project-based teams with network structures, characteristic of the film industry. Tacit knowledge becomes a distinguishing factor among professionals, determining effectiveness in non-standard situations and facilitating coordination under creative ambiguity (Manning, 2017).

3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design, selected to capture the situated meanings and practices through which leaders in the Polish film industry enact transformational leadership and orchestrate knowledge sharing. Participants were selected through purposive sampling using the membership directory of the Krajowa Izba Producentów Audiowizualnych (KIPA), the principal professional association representing audiovisual producers in Poland, as the sampling frame. This approach ensured that all participants were active, professionally recognized producers operating within the established institutional structure of the Polish film industry. Table 1 presents an overview of the eleven participants, with pseudonymous codes (P01–P11) used throughout the paper to preserve confidentiality.

Table 1: Overview of interview participants

Code	Professional role	Industry domain	Professional focus
P01	Line Producer	Poland	Author cinema, academic research
P02	Producer	Poland	Independent film, AI-enabled production
P03	Producer	Poland	Author cinema, international workshops
P04	Producer	Poland	International co-productions
P05	Producer	Poland	Cinema-art, festival films
P06	Producer	Poland	Co-productions, virtual production, AI
P07	Line Producer	Poland	International co-productions
P08	Line Producer	Poland	Sustainable production
P09	Executive Producer	Poland	International co-productions
P10	Producer	Poland	Author cinema, international development
P11	Producer	Poland	Post-production, industry advocacy

Source: Own elaboration.

Data collection comprised eleven semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between July 2024 and May 2025. All participants had a minimum of ten years of professional experience in domestic and international projects. Interviews lasted 45–90 minutes, were recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol (Table 2) addressed trust-building, reputation, mentoring, technological change, and uncertainty.

Table 2: Interview protocol

No.	Interview question
1	How do you build trust-based relationships with collaborators in the early development phase of a film project?
2	How is professional reputation built, maintained, and lost in the Polish film industry?
3	How did you learn your profession — who were your mentors, what role did formal education play?
4	How do you support the development of younger crew members or junior collaborators?
5	How are technological changes (AI, virtual production, post-production tools) affecting your work and the way knowledge is shared?
6	What practices help you sustain a long-cycle film project under conditions of uncertainty?
7	What are the most common breakdowns of trust or collaboration you have experienced, and what did you learn from them?

Source: Own elaboration.

Data analysis followed the three-stage grounded coding procedure (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Open coding generated 221 first-order gerund-based codes, preserving in vivo expressions where possible. Axial coding consolidated them into 18 second-order categories aligned with the four dimensions of transformational leadership and with knowledge sharing processes. Selective coding integrated the categories within the Strauss–Corbin paradigm model linking causal conditions, contexts, strategies, and consequences. Trustworthiness was supported through verbatim quotation, negative case analysis including pseudo-transformational leadership behaviours, and reflexive memo-writing throughout the coding process.

4. Results

This section presents the empirical findings organized around the three research questions. The analysis links the 18 second-order categories generated through axial coding (presented in Table 3 below) with the four dimensions of transformational leadership and with knowledge sharing processes. The presentation here is descriptive and stays close to the participants' own accounts; the theoretical interpretation of these findings is developed in the subsequent Discussion section.

4.1 Overview of Axial Coding Categories

Table 3 presents the complete mapping of axial coding output. Eighteen second-order categories are organized within the four dimensions of transformational leadership (II, IM, IS, IC) and within knowledge sharing (KS), each linked to one of the three research questions, with the number of first-order codes (N) and the set of participants in whose accounts the category emerged. The categories cumulatively encompass 203 first-order codes from the corpus of 221, while the remaining 18 codes appear across multiple categories, reflecting the multidimensional character of the underlying phenomena.

Table 3: Axial coding categories — second-order categories across Four I's and KS

Cat.	Dim.	Second-order category	RQ	N	Participants
II-1	II	Role modelling and ethical exemplarity	RQ1	9	P04, P08–P11
II-2	II	Reputational capital and informal sanctioning	RQ1	9	P02, P04, P07, P11
II-3	II	Pseudo-transformational leadership / trust violations	RQ1	14	P02, P04, P06–P07, P09, P11
II-4	II	Collective agency and industry-level institutional work	RQ3	8	P01, P03, P05–P06, P11
IM-1	IM	Vision-based partner selection in project ecosystems	RQ1	17	P03–P06, P09–P10
IM-2	IM	Purpose-driven leadership and identity-based motivation	RQ1	12	P01–P02, P04–P05, P08, P11
IM-3	IM	Resilience and ambiguity tolerance under uncertainty	RQ3	11	P02–P03, P05, P07, P09–P11

Cat.	Dim.	Second-order category	RQ	N	Participants
IS-1	IS	Technology-driven shifts and disruptive innovation	RQ3	13	P02–P03, P06, P08, P11
IS-2	IS	Creative autonomy and cognitive alignment	RQ1	15	P02–P04, P07, P09
IS-3	IS	Boundary spanning and cross-system knowledge translation	RQ3	12	P06–P07, P09, P11
IS-4	IS	Managerial multi-competence and entrepreneurial expertise	RQ2	16	P03–P04, P06, P09–P11
IC-1	IC	Dyadic mentoring and master–apprentice transfer	RQ2	13	P01–P04, P06–P07, P10
IC-2	IC	Leader presence and psychological safety	RQ1	13	P05–P07, P10–P11
IC-3	IC	Distributed mentoring and developmental network theory	RQ2	10	P01, P03, P05–P06, P10
IC-4	IC	Structural exclusion and barriers to professional entry	RQ2	12	P01–P02, P05–P08, P10
KS-1	KS	Tacit knowledge transfer through situated learning	RQ2	7	P01, P03, P10
KS-2	KS	Knowledge codification and formal training mechanisms	RQ2	4	P01, P08–P09, P11
KS-3	KS	Network-based knowledge exchange and social capital	RQ2	8	P01–P02, P04–P05, P07
		TOTAL (18 categories across Four I's + KS)		203	11 (P01–P11)

Source: Own elaboration based on grounded analysis of 11 in-depth interviews (P01–P11). N denotes the number of first-order codes consolidated into each category. Dim.: II — Idealized Influence; IM — Inspirational Motivation; IS — Intellectual Stimulation; IC — Individualized Consideration; KS — Knowledge Sharing.

4.2 Trust-based Relationships as the Foundation of Transformational Leadership

The findings indicate that in the Polish film industry, transformational leadership is enacted primarily through the construction and maintenance of trust-based relationships across long-cycle projects. Four mechanisms emerged as central in the participants' accounts: role modelling through ethical exemplarity, reputational sanctioning, vision-based partner selection, and leader presence.

Role modelling is enacted through costly personal choices that demonstrate ethical commitment. Producers defer their own compensation until a project becomes profitable, take personal financial responsibility for errors in their team, and dissolve the symbolic distance between leadership and crew:

"In the first instance I pay people — I cashed in my own savings, I borrowed privately from my parents in order to have money for them to survive" (P11). "It is a relationship. And in a relationship, you must feel safe — it is respect, awareness, transparency" (P10).

Reputational mechanisms function as an informal sanctioning system in the absence of effective formal accountability. Participants described a dense network of mutual warnings, reference checks involving three to four contacts, and a shared informal list of debtors and unreliable partners. Vision-based partner selection emerged as the dominant mechanism in the early development phase. Rather than choosing collaborators on the basis of past acquaintance or commercial success, producers select partners through resonance with the artistic vision of the script:

"I select partners through the text, not through the fact that they are excellent" (P10). "What matters most is whether we want to make the same film" (P03).

Negative cases, however, reveal the fragility of these mechanisms. Six participants described severe trust violations — a co-producer in the United States releasing the film without rights, a Kazakh partner premiering the project at a festival without informing the Polish co-producer, a German lead producer pressuring the team into unfavourable terms, and post-production debts exceeding 900 days. These cases occurred in project ecosystems characterized by asymmetries of finance, jurisdiction, and language, and reveal the structural conditions under which leadership-based trust becomes vulnerable to capture.

4.3 Mentoring and Knowledge-sharing Mechanisms in the Absence of Formal Pathways

Participants consistently reported that formal education does not prepare them for the realities of the profession. One producer expressed this with striking directness:

"I would like to say it was the Film School in Łódź, but that is not true. The Film School taught me nothing about being a producer" (P10).

In the absence of effective formal pathways, professional knowledge is transmitted through three interlocking mechanisms: dyadic master–apprentice mentoring, distributed developmental networks, and tacit knowledge transfer through situated learning. Classical mentoring relationships were named imaginatively and gratefully — a director-producer who took in a young assistant, a master producer whose decisions could be observed at close range, an institutional gatekeeper who agreed to speak with a newcomer:

"Observing her and assisting in her work, I acquired a certain kind of competence and realized this was the space I wanted to inhabit" (P10). "You learn what questions to ask, not the knowledge itself, because each film takes about five years" (P10).

When dyadic mentoring is unavailable, participants substitute distributed developmental networks: international training programmes such as EAVE, ACE, and Inside Pictures; the producers' guild; and informal peer learning across festivals. This substitution is partial and reveals a structural problem: the system reproduces existing inequalities. Several participants reported difficulty entering the profession without family connections, geographic proximity to Warsaw, or class capital. Others described the persistence of a "caste" mentality inherited from the socialist-era film units, which paradoxically continues to restrict access to mentoring opportunities.

4.4 Adaptive Responses to Technological Disruption and Project-based Uncertainty

The third dimension of the findings concerns how transformational leadership adapts to two simultaneous pressures: the technological disruption of artificial intelligence and virtual production, and the chronic uncertainty inherent in project-based creative work. Participants described concrete experiments with AI-enabled production — deep-fake reconstructions of veteran artists, virtual production using LED screens, AI-assisted research replacing assistant director functions, and sustainable production protocols implemented with Netflix:

"We scanned masks, scanned facial expressions, we fed the model" (P02). "Instead of paying a second AD fifty thousand złoty, I can pay one hundred fifty dollars for an AI licence that gives me six variants in thirty seconds" (P06).

Participants engaged primarily in post-production work, however, framed the same technologies through a markedly different lens — as a threat to professional employment and to the integrity of established craft knowledge:

"AI will eliminate us from work. It is the first technology that will not give us as many jobs in compensation" (P11).

Project-based uncertainty represents a parallel adaptive challenge. Participants spoke of the recurring fear that "the phone will stop ringing" (P07), of the lottery-like character of cash-rebate allocations, and of the chronic difficulty of sustaining a long-term vision when each project takes five to seven years to complete. Collective agency at the industry level — producer guild advocacy, the institutional work that secured five million złoty annually for post-production funding, the standardization of intimacy coordination and sustainable production practices — emerged as a second-order response to these conditions.

5. Discussion

The findings presented above can be interpreted along three interrelated theoretical lines, each addressing one of the research questions and engaging with current debates in transformational leadership and knowledge sharing research.

5.1 Trust-based Relationships and the Relational Enactment of the Four I's

The first line of interpretation concerns the relational mechanisms through which transformational leadership operates. The findings show that role modelling, reputational sanctioning, vision-based partner selection, and leader presence constitute what Bass and Riggio (2006) describe as idealized influence and inspirational motivation, but in the project-based context they acquire specific operational forms not fully captured in the original framework. Costly personal choices — deferred compensation, personal financial responsibility, dissolution of symbolic hierarchy — align with the literature on ethical leadership (Brown and Treviño, 2006)

and with Bass and Steidlmeier's (1999) emphasis on authenticity as the boundary between transformational and pseudo-transformational leadership.

Recent empirical work continues to specify how transformational leadership translates into knowledge sharing through relational mediators: perceived organizational support (Chen, Chang and Tian, 2024), organizational commitment (Amin and Sudarmiatin, 2024), psychological safety (Khattak et al., 2025), and team communities of practice (Matsuo, 2025). The Polish film industry case adds a distinctive insight: in environments lacking formal accountability, relational trust acquires a sanctioning function as well as an enabling one, operating through dense reputational networks. This dual character of trust-based relationships is largely absent from dominant survey-based studies and represents a contribution of qualitative interpretive research to the field. The negative cases identified — trust violations in international co-productions, asymmetries of finance and jurisdiction — further illustrate the dark-side dynamics of pseudo-transformational leadership (Tourish, 2013) in project ecosystems where charismatic leaders hold disproportionate informal authority.

5.2 Mentoring and Knowledge Sharing as a Substitution for Absent Formal Pathways

The second line of interpretation concerns how knowledge is transmitted in the absence of effective formal pathways. The three mechanisms identified — dyadic master–apprentice mentoring, distributed developmental networks, and tacit knowledge transfer through situated learning — correspond closely with the situated learning framework (Lave and Wenger, 1991), the tacit knowledge transfer dynamics described by Nonaka (1994) and Alony et al. (2007), and the developmental network perspective developed by Higgins and Kram (2001). Recent work by Bai (2025) further demonstrates that the effect of transformational leadership on career growth is mediated by self-efficacy and psychological capital developed through informal channels, which aligns with the participants' accounts of learning “what questions to ask” rather than transferring codified knowledge.

The Polish case, however, also illuminates a paradox: when individualized consideration is restricted to dyadic mentorship, it can paradoxically reproduce the structural exclusion that creative industries scholarship has long identified (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013). The persistence of a “caste” mentality inherited from the socialist-era film units, the difficulty of entering the profession without family connections or class capital, and the geographic concentration of opportunities in Warsaw all suggest that the effectiveness of transformational leadership in fostering knowledge sharing depends not only on individual leader behaviours but also on the existence of distributed institutional infrastructures — international training programmes, professional guilds, and peer learning networks — that can substitute for absent formal pathways.

5.3 Adaptive Resilience Under Disruption and Project-based Uncertainty

The third line of interpretation concerns how transformational leadership adapts to technological disruption and chronic project-based uncertainty. The intellectual stimulation dimension (Bass and Riggio, 2006) acquires renewed significance in the context of artificial intelligence, virtual production, and sustainable practices — confirming Christensen's (1997) classical analysis of disruptive innovation and Brynjolfsson and McAfee's (2017) account of the contemporary digital transformation. Recent industry analyses confirm that generative AI is reshaping film and television workflows unevenly across functional domains, with leadership playing a critical role in adoption and translation (McKinsey & Company, 2026).

The contrast identified in the present study — producers in development and physical production embracing AI as a creative and economic enabler, while producers focused on post-production framing it as a threat to professional employment — illustrates that intellectual stimulation is enacted differently across functional specializations within the producing role. This finding complements the longitudinal analysis of project failure and organizational learning in the U.S. film industry by Singh et al. (2025), which similarly demonstrates that responses to disruption are mediated by operational specialization and accumulated project experience. The structural uncertainty of project-based work, exemplified in participants' concerns about cash-rebate allocations and long project cycles (Bechky, 2006), requires what may be termed adaptive resilience: the capacity to sustain vision and trust across temporal compression, institutional fragility, and discontinuity of teams. The collective agency observed at the industry level — producer guild advocacy, institutional work securing post-production funding, standardization of intimacy and sustainable production practices — illustrates Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) concept of institutional work translated into the creative industries setting, and represents a second-order leadership response to chronic uncertainty.

6. Conclusions

This study examined how transformational leadership fosters knowledge sharing in the Polish film industry, drawing on eleven in-depth interviews with audiovisual producers selected through the KIPA membership directory and analysing the material through three-stage grounded coding that yielded 221 first-order codes and 18 second-order categories.

The study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it extends the Four I's model (Bass and Riggio, 2006) by demonstrating that in project-based creative work the four dimensions are jointly enacted through relational rather than purely behavioural mechanisms — a perspective that complements but is not reducible to variance-based mediation models (Chen, Chang and Tian, 2024; Matsuo, 2025). Second, it integrates the developmental network perspective (Higgins and Kram, 2001) with critical creative industries scholarship (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013), showing that individualized consideration in contexts without formal training infrastructure carries both enabling and exclusionary effects — a duality not adequately recognized in mainstream TFL research. Third, it reframes intellectual stimulation as a functionally differentiated dimension under disruption, opening a research agenda on how transformational behaviours vary across specializations within a single occupational role.

The study has several limitations. The sample of eleven interviews, while theoretically saturated, was drawn entirely from the KIPA membership and therefore underrepresents independent producers operating outside the formal institutional structure. The findings are situated in the Polish context and may not generalize directly to film industries operating under different funding regimes or labour regulations. Future research could compare the Polish case with other Central European film industries or with mature creative ecosystems such as the United Kingdom, France, or Germany, while longitudinal designs could trace how leadership practices evolve across the five-to-seven-year cycle of an individual film project.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that producers can strengthen team cohesion and knowledge transfer by investing in trust-building practices during early development, formalizing mentoring through industry guilds and developmental networks rather than relying solely on dyadic apprenticeship, and creating internal protocols for evaluating disruptive technologies that involve both creative and technical specializations. For policy-makers, the findings underscore the value of supporting distributed developmental infrastructures — international training programmes such as EAVE, ACE, and Inside Pictures, professional associations, and sector-specific funding mechanisms, particularly for post-production work that remains structurally underfunded.

Ethics declaration: All participants provided informed consent prior to the interviews. Pseudonymous codes (P01–P11) were assigned to protect confidentiality.

AI declaration: I didn't use an AI tool in the development of the paper.

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