

# Creativity and Integrity: Marketing the “In Development” Screenplay

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## ABSTRACT

**This study’s purpose was to explore the relationship between creativity and integrity in the ideation phase of feature filmmaking. Integrity refers to one’s self-defined ability to maintain authenticity and moral autonomy while preserving one’s sense of membership and loyalty to the team or organization. When team members choose elements for the screenplay’s story that they feel will attract the ideal audience, the dynamic tension between creativity and integrity is most apparent. The forces at play during this phase of work yielded the research question: In what ways and to what degree do screenwriters and/or studio executives feel their personal integrity is in alignment with the creative process of feature film development? Several concepts from the literature formed the design around which 23 active screenwriters and studio executives employed by the seven major and two of the minor U.S. motion picture studios were interviewed. The researcher’s Creative Integrity Alignment Model yielded the hypothesis that the more aligned participants’ individual integrity is with the creative process of feature film development, the more innovative they can be. From this hypothesis, anecdotal evidence was gathered from contributors to one of this year’s most successful films to discover the potential relationship between integrity alignment and a film’s performance in the marketplace.**  
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From our history of strolling minstrels, storytellers, and medieval morality plays, we have learned that the tellers of tales functioned not merely as entertainers, but also as carriers of information and ideas from community to community. Storytellers served to explain, order, and process the experiences of people. They provided descriptions of other times and places; illustrations of luck, fate, or mortality; imaginative journeys of exploration; and vehicles for the human experience (Jarvie, 1978). Eventually, new forms of storytelling emerged—vaudeville, burlesque, theatrical melodrama, and radio—and those we enjoy today, such as television and motion pictures.

As a contemporary teller of tales, the screenwriter works with others in the filmmaking community to create stories for filmgoing audiences around the world. The point at which the screenwriter (writer) begins this creative collaboration with others marks the beginning of the feature film development process (development process). One of the primary players in this effort is the studio executive (executive) representing the interests of the film studio: a corporate manager of the creative project overall and judge of its potential in the marketplace. The executive's employer finances this development process and the filming of the story as well as the marketing and distribution of the completed film. Together they work to develop the screenplay into its ultimate form as the film's roadmap for production.

When writing visual settings, character actions, and dialogue that lay the groundwork for the way the movie will be filmed on camera, the screenwriter is solitary in this endeavor. When the screenplay is finished, if it is a work-made-for-hire, the writer hands it in to the studio that funded the process. The executive chosen by the studio to oversee the script's progress will work with the writer to revise the screenplay to get it market-ready, a process we will refer to as the script's marketing phase. The writer and executive consider their choices based on four forces: his or her personal opinions and values (within which individual, group, family, and societal dynamics are working); the studio's mandate on the types of films it will produce; the studio's espoused values and values in action; and the perceived appetite of the public. Sometimes the writer and/or executive's and employer's choices and the forces that feed them are aligned, and sometimes not.

This research examines whether the writer and executive perform their self-defined "best creative work" during the script's marketing phase. One's best creative work is the integrated result of the individual's creative skills and traits, inextricably intertwined with a profound sense of authenticity or integrity in one's creative actions. The definition of integrity used in this research is from *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (2004): "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values, *incorruptibility*: an unimpaired condition, *soundness*; the quality or state of being complete or undivided, *completeness*." Separate from the marketing of the completed film for its release to the public, this "internal" marketing phase is a creative process commonly referred to in filmmaking as the "development process." This process involves ongoing guidance and feedback on the specifics and quality of the writer's story toward what the executive—and studio employer—thinks will ultimately result in a movie that sells tickets.

The primary research question is: In what ways and to what degree do screenwriters and/or studio executives feel their personal integrity is in alignment or out of alignment with the creative process of feature film development? As a preliminary case study, the results of the research question will be applied to one highly

successful film as an insight into the potential relationship between the integrity of a film's development phase and the film's performance in the marketplace.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of the literature review was to discover research on individual creativity and group and organizational innovation that would provide individual characteristics and environmental conditions that point to values—specifically integrity—common to those who are pursuing creative ideation for work. Likewise, research on feature film development or filmmaking in general may have provided patterns of values filmmakers and film executives find important. Research on values in action during individual, group, and/or organizational work may have pointed to integrity as it is defined in this research.

Although studies on creativity or innovation that indicated values essential to the professional creative individual or group were not found, many characteristics important to successful creativity and innovation cite behaviors and personality traits that can be attributed to underlying values rather than antecedent conditions or learned skills. Research into correlations between an individual's creativity and values have advanced the importance of bridges between the two fields of study (see Dollinger, Burke, & Gump, 2007; Kasof et al., 2007). On integrity and vocation, the research referred almost entirely to honesty of corporate officers' behaviors on behalf of the company in interactions with the outside world. Similarly, studies on films or filmmaking that outlined values common to those involved were not available in the scholarly literature. Research on film that touched upon values often centered around the effects of media on society.

### Creativity

Creativity is defined as “the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain” (Amabile et al., 1996, p. 1154). Possibly the most comprehensive explanation within social psychology for creative behavior has been advanced by Amabile, who argued that “creativity is best conceptualized not as a personality trait or a general ability but as a behavior resulting from particular constellations of personal values, cognitive abilities, and social environments” (Woodman & Schoenfeldt, 1989, p. 79).

The foundation for all creative work is expertise, which includes memory for factual knowledge, paradigms, aesthetic criteria, technical proficiency, and special talents in the target work domain (Amabile, 1997). For example, in the feature film development process, an executive's expertise might include an innate talent for identifying universal human themes; factual knowledge about the screenwriting form; familiarity with past films, literature, and current projects in the feature film development pipeline; and the technical skills required to design, execute, and interpret research for the purpose of its conversion into narrative.

Assuming one is motivated to perform an activity, performance will likely be acceptable if expertise is in place. However, even with expertise at an extraordinarily high level, one will not produce creative work without creative thinking skills, such as delaying closure, breaking away from existing scripts or formulas, and seeking new perspectives on existing problems. Amabile's

componential model and Woodman and Schoenfeldt's interactionist model emphasize cognitive traits as well, such as divergent thinking, verbal and ideational fluency, strategic problem-solving skills, and cognitive complexity—remembering large amounts of information, trial and error, an ability to concentrate efforts for long periods of time (Campbell, 1960), an ability to temporarily put aside stubborn problems or to abandon unproductive strategies (Simon, 1966)—as essential to the production of novel and useful ideas.

Creative thinking depends to some extent on personality characteristics, the discovery of which those of particularly creative people have formed the basis of many studies. For this review, the research of Amabile (1997), Barron and Harrington (1981), and Woodman and Schoenfeldt (1989) provide traits that can be organized into three key themes: independence of judgment, openness of experience, and patience. Traits associated with independence of judgment include: self-discipline, autonomy, internal locus of control, absence of conformity or a relative lack of concern for social approval, narcissism, self-esteem, ability to accommodate conflicting traits in one's self concept, dogmatism, and the secure sense of self as creative. Around an openness of experience, personality traits include: orientation toward risk, broad interests, attraction to complexity, intuition, and a high valuation of aesthetic qualities of experience. Traits associated with patience within the process include: tolerance for ambiguity, perseverance in the face of frustration, and ability to delay gratification.

In the feature film development process, a writer's creative skills and personality traits might include an ability to break out of a preconceived judgment of how to solve a problem with a story's plot, tolerance for ambiguity while continuing to flesh out a story without knowledge of the film's ending, and the ability to deviate from strict formulas for approaching a genre.

## **Innovation**

Innovation has been defined as "the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization" (Amabile et al., 1996, p. 1154). In this view, creativity by individuals in teams is the starting point for innovation, though it is not a sufficient condition to ensure it. Amabile (1988, 1997) proposed four broad organizational factors that impact innovation: organizational motivation to innovate, encouragement of creativity, resources, and management practices.

Vital elements of an organization's innovation orientation are a value placed on creativity and innovation in general and, in contrast to the desire to maintain the status quo, a company's offensive strategy toward its future (Amabile, 1988, 1997). Additionally, a sense of pride in the organization's members, enthusiasm about what they are capable of doing, and work that provides a clear sense of how they are impacting others' lives, both inside and outside the organization, are important to organizational innovation (Amabile, 1997).

The encouragement of creativity in an organization involves fair, supportive evaluation of new ideas (Cummings, 1965; Kanter, 1983). The expectation of threatening, highly critical evaluation has been shown to undermine creativity in laboratory studies (Amabile, 1979; Amabile, Goldfarb, & Brackfield, 1990). Torrance (1961) outlined specific factors that significantly affect the production of ideas or functioning of creative thinking abilities in children. Of these factors, rewarding creative thinking by treating questions and creative ideas with respect was found to be important.

Amabile's work around intrinsic motivation (1983) stressed its importance to creativity. However, reward and recognition of creativity that could be perceived as a "bonus," confirmation of one's competence, or a pathway to do more interesting future work are valuable extrinsic motivators and indicators of the degree that an organization supports innovation (Amabile et al., 1996; Amabile, Phillips, & Collins, 1994; Hennessey, Amabile, & Martinage, 1989). Collaborative idea flow across an organization has been shown to be important to encourage innovation (Amabile et al., 1996) and increase the probability of creative idea generation from exposure to other potentially relevant ideas (Osborn, 1963; Parnes & Noller, 1972). Constructive challenging of ideas and shared commitment to a project are likely to yield increases in intrinsic motivation, given that two of the primary features of intrinsic motivation are a positive sense of challenge in the work and a focus on the work itself (Amabile, Hill, et al., 1994; Harter, 1978; White, 1959). Additionally, some co-worker interaction may actually provide further motivation to these employees by stimulating wider interests, adding complexity, or introducing some competitive pressure to enhance the novelty, usefulness, or number of their contributions relative to their co-workers (Cummings & Oldham, 1997).

Organizations can provide creative people and their teams with a multitude of resources to support their work: sufficient time for producing novel work, people with necessary expertise, sufficient funds, material resources, systems and processes necessary for work, relevant information, and the availability of training (Amabile, 1997). Time to explore alternative possibilities for the outcome on a project directly correlates with the creativity of task outcomes (Conti, Coon, & Amabile, 1993; Parnes, 1961; Ruscio, Whitney, & Amabile, 1995; Whitney et al., 1995). Thus, excessive workload pressure would be expected to undermine creativity, especially if it is perceived as imposed externally as a means of control (Amabile, 1993). Paradoxically, time pressure that is perceived as a necessary concomitant of an important, urgent project may add to the perception of challenge in the work that positively correlates with intrinsic motivation and creativity (Amabile, 1988).

In the area of managerial practices, several researchers have concluded that creativity is fostered when individuals and teams have relatively high autonomy in the day-to-day conduct of the work and a sense of ownership and control over their own work and their own ideas (for example, Bailyn, 1985; King & West, 1985; Paolillo & Brown, 1978; Pelz & Andrews, 1966; West, 1986). Individuals produce work that is more creative when they perceive choice in how to go about accomplishing the work (Amabile & Gitomer, 1984). Directly related to support of innovation is the design of "complex jobs" (Cummings & Oldham, 1997, p. 27), such as those of the feature film writer and executive. These jobs have a substantial impact on the lives of other people, inside or outside the company, and allow employees to see the significance of and exercise responsibility for an entire piece of work. Participative management and decision making have been shown to have a positive impact on innovation (Allen, Lee, & Tushman, 1980; Kanter, 1983; Kimberley & Evanisko, 1981; Monge, Cozzens, & Contractor, 1992; Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbeck, 1973). When supervisors are supportive, they show concern for employees' feelings and needs, encourage them to voice their own concerns, provide positive and informational feedback, and facilitate skill development among employees (Cummings & Oldham, 1997). These actions promote employees' feelings of self-determination and personal initiative at work, allowing them to consider, develop, and ultimately contribute outcomes that

are more creative. Project supervision is likely to foster creativity when it is marked by goal clarity (Bailyn, 1985), good communication between the supervisor and the work group (Kimberley, 1981; Kimberley & Evanisko, 1981), feedback, and enthusiastic support for the work of individuals as well as the entire group (Delbecq & Mills, 1985; Orpen, 1990). Managers who have the ability to form effective work groups that are composed of “individuals who trust and communicate well with each other, challenge each others’ ideas in constructive ways, are mutually supportive, and are committed to the work they are doing” (Amabile, 1997, p. 54) will help foster creativity. Team member diversity and mutual openness to ideas may expose individuals to a greater variety of unusual ideas, which has been demonstrated to affect creative thinking positively (Parnes & Noller, 1972; Torrance, 1961).

## Feature Film Development

The feature film business, which is known by insiders as “the business” or “the industry,” is made up of profit-minded corporations, which, like many others in manufacturing, invest millions of dollars launching new products for public consumption. It is an open marketplace where buyers and sellers get together and exchange goods or services. The average budget for a film distributed out of a major film studio in 2007 was \$71.5 million (Studio System, 2008). And “because this is more a business than an art gallery, no one spends \$80 million on a piece of art without expecting a return to recoup all costs and to make a profit in order to make more films” (Iglesias, 2001, p. 150).

There are seven major U.S. film studios: 20th Century Fox, Columbia Pictures, MGM, Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, and Warner Bros. Their primary responsibility is to finance and distribute feature films that actors, writers, directors, and producers—whose companies are called “production companies”—want to create. In order for studios to finance their films, these individuals must collaborate effectively with the studio during the entire lifecycle of the film or from the point at which the studio invests money in the project to the end: in development; through production; through distribution and “theatrical” release of the completed film; and in other markets, such as international theatrical release, domestic broadcast, global television broadcasts, home entertainment forums (free and pay television, DVD, pay-per-view, video-on-demand), mobile, and airline versions.

There are also smaller studios, known as “mini-majors,” that, in general, finance their own productions and thus are often able to develop their own ideas with minimal input from a major studio. A major studio often provides them distribution services (film print reproduction, sales to exhibitors, and marketing) in preparation for release of the finished film to the public. Mini-majors include companies such as Dreamworks, Lionsgate, Lucasfilm Ltd., Marvel Studios, Miramax, Newmarket, Overture Films, Rogue Pictures, United Artists, and The Weinstein Company.

As of October 2008, Studio System, Inc. listed 2904 projects currently in active development at the major studios, which is an average of 414.85 projects per studio. In 2007, major studios marketed and distributed 97 films, or an average of 13.86 titles per studio. Therefore, using the average number of titles released each year per studio and the average number of scripts in active development per studio, roughly 3.34% of scripts that are in active development at major studios

are being made into films and released annually, and even less if finished films that were purchased outright for distribution, and not developed in house are taken into consideration. [As a comparison, the same calculation was made for films in active development in 2004 (2304) and released in 2003 (123) by the seven major studios, which resulted in 5.34% of scripts making it to the screen annually. Interestingly, the number of scripts in active development was higher in 2008 than in 2004 (2904 vs. 2304), but the number of projects released in 2008 is 20.67% lower than in 2003 (3.34% vs. 5.34%) showing what may continue to be a widening gap between the number of screenplays in development and those that make it to the screen.]

A studio executive must articulate the project's marketability on an ongoing basis to senior management. Eventually, after some period of development, the project is presented to the studio's president of production, who will then examine the film's potential for "greenlight" by analyzing an estimated budget and attached or potential "talent" (that is, "stars" or a director). If the film's budget exceeds a certain level, perhaps over \$50 million as an example, then the president traditionally must pitch the project to the corporate chairperson of the board, who then has to get the approval of the parent company. This is the process of "greenlighting" a film, an often long and laborious challenge to initiate production and through which many projects do not come to fruition. In the best-case scenario, two years from the time the writer is secured until the film is released to the public would be considered accelerated. More often than not, the average time it takes from inception to completion of a feature film project is closer to four to five years.

***The Studio Executive.*** At the time of this research, the average size of the creative team at a major studio was eight development executives. Based on a relatively recent estimate, the average job span of a studio executive in one place is five years (Field, 1989). The strongest executives are known to be passionate about film, have a good story sense, and have the ability to read and perform expert evaluations of screenplays for their quality and execution. On a day-to-day basis, an executive is expected to know how to structure negotiations, attract talent to projects, and move projects as far forward toward production and release as possible. Additionally, they must maintain relationships with creative community members, have knowledge of projects in development at other studios, and keep abreast of public sentiment and trends that affect the marketability of current and future projects.

A conservative estimate of the incoming submissions for each major studio to consider for potential films is about 3500 per year, which is an average of 67 submissions per week, including "material" such as scripts, treatments, and novels. "Writing samples" from writers whom a studio may consider hiring in the future for their original ideas or for rewrites of other writers' material constitute approximately 1000 more screenplays per year for each studio, for a total of 4500 submissions. Not included in this yearly estimate are verbal "pitches" for potential film ideas to which executives listen and consider for purchase. Therefore, an executive may read an average of 11 submissions per week at an average of 150 pages in length—given that screenplays average 125 pages, manuscripts average 300 pages, and treatments average 20 pages in length. At an approximate rate of one minute per page for the various types of material, executives spend about two hours on each piece of material. Time with a script may be more when detailed notes are to be provided to the writer, or less when the

executive stops short of reading the entire script for any number of reasons. All told, executives spend some 20 or more hours outside of normal business hours in any given week reading and evaluating material for feature films. Moreover, based on the yearly estimated average that each major studio maintains a development slate of about 415 projects out of 3500 submissions, only about 12% of the material an executive team reads progresses into active development.

***The Screenwriter.*** Screenwriters spearhead the new product development process in feature films. They are independent contractors who sell their ideas and experiences to the studios and then to the public. A film project often originates through a screenwriter, another member of the creative team (actor, director, or producer), or a studio executive. A writer can independently generate a project or be hired by someone else to write a project either (1) from his or her own original idea, which may be in the form of a verbal pitch, a treatment for a screenplay, or a completed screenplay (a.k.a. “spec script”); (2) a concept for a remake of another film; or (3) an idea for an adaptation of another form of media, which may include short stories, books, comic books, and historical/biographical data. Occasionally, two (or more) writers will work together on a project or projects as permanent or temporary partners.

Screenwriters have described the double-edged sword of having a project in development. On the one hand, writers want to be paid to write; on the other hand, what one ends up writing during the development process may have little relationship to the script one wanted to write. In general, if the screenwriter sold an original idea or piece of material, it is now the property of the buyer for the term specified and the writer has neither legal rights to prevent it from being changed nor control over how it will be marketed, unless that has been specifically negotiated into the contract. A writer is paid for a specific number of “drafts” of the screenplay. If the buyer is dissatisfied, that person or company will hire another writer to work with the material. The goal of the new writer is not only to be paid for the work, but also to be credited for that work onscreen, which requires changes to at least 50% of the existing material for at least partial credit. Receiving credit is important to raise one’s status and pay as a writer and is sometimes considered a primary motivator once the process has begun.

Although empirical studies were not available on the development process and/or screenwriters’ experiences within it, data from interviews and personal memoirs revealed four consistent themes in writers’ descriptions of their challenges: (1) collaboration, as in sharing their ideas with progressively more people during the process and creating “by committee”; (2) expendability, based on frequent accounts of the industry’s lack of respect for and the studios’ spontaneous replacement of writers for any number of reasons; (3) impact, as in the ideas writers intend to express to the public and how those ideas are subsequently experienced by others; and (4) integrity, in terms of how writers reconcile themselves personally to the discrepancies between their intentions going into the development process and the work they eventually produce.

## **Integrity**

Integrity pertains to how those involved in the feature film development process—specifically, screenwriters and studio executives—maintain their own sense of authenticity as individuals and as professionals and in what ways the



process supports it. Discussing individual integrity requires a discussion of values in general, which are defined by Hultman (2003) to be “beliefs about what’s important in life, and represent preferred ways of meeting our needs . . . [that] once embraced . . . become our criteria for making decisions and setting priorities” (p. 3). Rokeach (1973) distinguished between terminal values and instrumental values. Terminal values motivate an individual to move from one’s current self-image toward a personal vision, an idealized self-image of who that person wants to become. Instrumental values are preferred modes of behavior that define how a person plans to fulfill those terminal values. Instrumental values focus on competence, which has to do with abilities, and integrity, which has to do with character. In order to preserve and enhance self-image, one must perceive oneself as both capable and authentic. Rokeach maintained that the ultimate purpose of one’s value system is to preserve and enhance one’s self-conception or self-esteem. In an organizational setting, a strong sense of self-esteem is crucial to nourish the individual person and the processes in which he or she participates. This suggests that if the collective self-esteem of a project’s participants is low, then the project’s outcome will be negatively affected, as will the overall health of the organization.

Competence and integrity values have both a personal and a social dimension, from which Hultman (2002) distinguished four subcategories:

1. Personal competence concerns one’s need to view oneself and be viewed by others as being skilled, knowledgeable, and capable.
2. Social competence concerns one’s need to view oneself and be viewed by others as making a difference.
3. Personal integrity concerns one’s need to view oneself and be viewed by others as being ethical and moral.
4. Social integrity concerns one’s need to be accepted by others.

One’s values associated with integrity seek equilibrium with those associated with competence to maintain positive self-esteem. Personal competence in this forum refers to writers’ and executives’ individual mastery of the skills for the creative process of feature film development. Personal integrity refers to writers’ and executives’ individual self-respect while working on the script. Social competence refers to participants’ sense of greater contribution to the team, process, and world at large. Finally, social integrity refers to writers’ and executives’ sense of acceptance and belonging as members of the team. In this study’s research design, this model was used to categorize characteristics from the creativity and innovation research that applied most directly to the requirements of the feature film development process and will be described in detail in the Method section.

In an organizational setting, the definition of integrity used in this research does not imply a one-dimensional version of uncompromising self-righteousness. Integrity requires the willingness to stay open to outside influences, to negotiate and compromise with others, and to maintain conviction and commitment to oneself. Additionally, integrity involves not only principles and policies, but also a pervasive sense of social context and a sense of moral courage that manifests itself as standing up for others as well as oneself. Therefore, integrity includes both one’s sense of membership and loyalty as well as one’s sense of moral autonomy (Solomon, 1992). The organization—or studio in this

case—that commands one’s loyalty must be compatible with one’s own values. When a person willingly joins an organization’s efforts, agrees to act on its behalf and in its interests, and agrees with its aims and values, obedience and loyalty are encompassed by one’s sense of integrity (Solomon, 1992). Individuals must often face internal conflicts when trying to reconcile their personal and professional sensibilities. According to Solomon (1992):

The problem of integrity in corporate life is the fact that, because we inevitably wear at least two hats and answer to a number of very different and sometimes contradictory demands and principles, that wholesome image of a unified life is often an impossible illusion, not even an ideal.

It is an illusion to think that a busy life in business could be entirely trouble-free, of course, and so is the idea that integrity is a magical preventative, inoculation against ethical dilemmas. But a sense of one’s own integrity is what allows us to navigate those treacherous waters, and though integrity does not guarantee success, there can be no success without it. (p. 170)

Srivastva and associates (1988) described integrity in a way that expands the boundaries of how it has traditionally been defined in organizational settings:

Integrity represents the pinnacle of human development and is a concept describing the highest form of human intelligence. Integrity is not so much a character trait as a sophisticated state of processing experience in the world that encompasses moral judgment, creativity, and intuitive capability, as well as rational-analytic powers. A consistent theme in the literature describes integrity in an organizational setting as the pivotal life sustaining property of organizational existence . . . because organizations are fundamentally relational entities and all relationships that are worthy of anyone’s continued investment are based on integrity. . . . The executive mind is impotent without power, power is dangerous without vision, and neither is lasting nor significant in any broad human sense without the force of integrity. (pp. 27–28)

Integrity of thoughts and deeds or simple honesty in one’s dealings with others is only part of what is involved in establishing integrity in organizations. “Misrepresentations, convenient omissions, well-timed disclosures, and other acts of manipulation often constitute the actions required for an executive to maintain an empowered course in the service of the whole” (Culbert & McDonough, 1988, p. 224). Recognizing that truth telling may not always equal integrity, Culbert and McDonough developed the concept of *alignment* in which doing for oneself, doing for others, and doing for the organization are as interrelated as possible. It entails an active desire to produce win-win-win outcomes and often requires self-sacrifice for the needs of the organization and the needs of others. This self-sacrifice could possibly be pursued to the neglect of one’s own self-interest, although compromise must contain an explicit desire to reach alignment between personal integrity and others’ integrity (Srivastva & associates, 1988). This concept of alignment served as the basis of measurement used in this study to map writers’ and executives’ experiences in feature film development.

## METHOD

From my previous experiences in the development process, the assumption was that some strain on participants’ ability to uphold a sense of integrity in their

work would be apparent. This tension could stem from misalignment between what a participant's logic dictates in order to be competent at developing ideas for films and what deeper directives guide the person's work. The former was to be examined through elements of personal competence and social competence and the latter was to be examined through elements of personal integrity and social integrity, as framed by Hultman (2002). From the Creative Integrity Alignment levels found in the primary sample, a limited case study was initiated to begin a discussion as to how a recent, successful film's development process performed against similar criteria.

## Research Design

Hultman's 2002 model served as the framework within which the characteristics found to be supports to creativity and innovation were then embedded. Those relevant values that emerged from theories on individual creativity (for example, Amabile 1983a, 1983b; Woodman & Schoenfeldt, 1989; Torrance, 1961; Barron & Harrington, 1981) were placed in the personal competence category (items a through f) or the personal integrity category (items g through o) for analysis and include (a) cognitive complexity, (b) divergent thinking, (c) ideational fluency, (d) frame-breaking approaches, (e) perceptual openness, (f) strategic and problem-solving skills, (g) ability to delay gratification, (h) confidence, (i) dogmatism, (j) internal locus of control, (k) intrinsic motivation, (l) intuition, (m) nonconformity and independence, (n) an orientation toward risk, and (o) tolerance for ambiguity.

Similarly, those relevant values that emerged from theories on organizational innovation (for example, Amabile, 1988, 1997; Cummings & Oldham, 1997) were placed in the social competence category (items a through f) or the social integrity category (items g through p) for analysis and include (a) clear goal and common strategy; (b) feedback about performance; (c) freedom to do the work; (d) available resources; (e) responsibility for a whole, identifiable work; (f) sense of impact on others' lives; (g) collaborative idea flow and participative leadership; (h) diversity valued and safety to be different; (i) encouragement to take risks; (j) fair, supportive evaluation of new ideas; (k) open advocacy of beliefs; (l) open communication; (m) pride and enthusiasm in collective efforts; (n) rewards and recognition for creative work; (o) safety to challenge; and (p) trust and consistency between word and deed.

This collection of relevant values forms the first dimension of inquiry: to determine which of the key values mentioned above emerged for all participants in the first sample within each of the four categories. By compiling the overall numbers of responses associated with these values, the five values with the greatest number of responses in each category were to be noted for further analysis. In the event that values other than those listed above were found to be of greater significance (that is, higher numbers of responses) in the course of data collection, they would then supersede those above in the presentation of the results.

The second dimension of inquiry was to determine the alignment of integrity between individuals in the first sample—both writers and executives as separate groups and in aggregate—and the development process. To see oneself and be seen by others as a person of skill and character in personal and social settings is essential to self-esteem. However, it is also essential that the systems and processes inside organizations support an individual's self-esteem, which has

an overarching impact on organizational health. Therefore, the four-quadrant model designed by Hultman (2002) was expanded to include criteria for measurement of values that participants *recognize in self* (*x*-axis) and that they perceived to be *recognized by process* (*y*-axis) that would result in a scattergram of the degree to which the top five values in each quadrant were present for writers and executives.

The third dimension of inquiry was designed to learn more about the degree to which the top 20 values discovered in the first dimension are reflected in the development process for one of 2008's year's most critically and commercially successful films. Anecdotal evidence was collected about two periods of development for "Film X": one at "Studio A" that was not successful, in that it did not yield a script that received a greenlight, and a second period at "Studio B" which did yield the script that was ultimately used to make the film. From interview results, the levels at which creative integrity values were present was determined for both the successful and unsuccessful development processes. A final measure revealed whether or not participants felt these levels played a part in the outcome of each process.

## Participants

Participants in this research project included screenwriters and studio executives actively involved in studio-based film development. Screenwriters included those individuals who, writing solo or in partnership, have been credited with a minimum of one domestically released film of any budget or genre developed in and distributed by a major studio and/or a mini-major studio. The criteria for selection of executives included those individuals who, regardless of title or tenure, were currently employed by a major or mini-major film studio. They must also have significantly participated in the development of at least one domestically released film at their current or former employer, in which they were recognized as instrumental to the successful completion of the development process. Bias was mitigated by forming a Board of Directors to solicit participants who had been identified as not having any previous personal or professional relationship—other than possibly the briefest interaction—with me. Additionally, every effort was made to compile a balanced sample group based on the following criteria: (1) years in practice, (2) title (if an executive), (3) gender, and (4) affiliation with the major studio entities in the film industry.

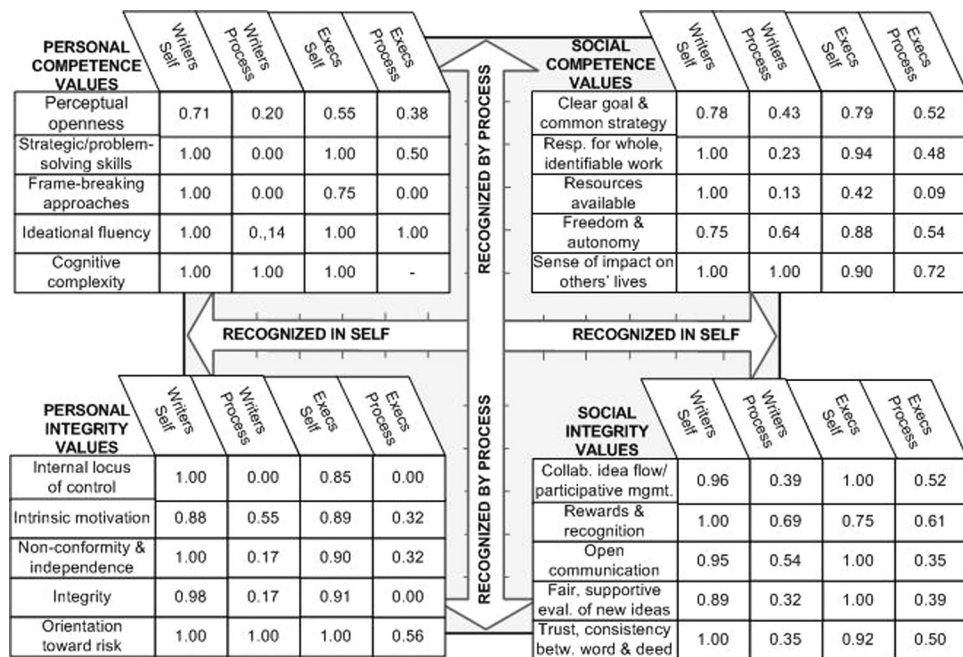
In the first sample, 23 participants located in the Los Angeles area were chosen, enrolled, and interviewed (and audio-recorded) in person using a 21-question protocol. Data were compiled from these 23 participants, who included 15 studio executives (six female, nine male) and 8 writers (one female, seven male) ranging in age between 25 and 55 years. Executives in the sample represented all seven of the major studios and four mini-majors. Collectively, all of the writers in the sample had films produced, either credited or uncredited, by the seven major studios as well as by at least two of the mini-majors represented in this study. Values within each quadrant that garnered the greatest number of comments overall were identified and each participant comment was determined to belong to either *writer* and/or *executive* ("execs"), to be *positive* (present) and/or *negative* (not present), and to point to individual *self* and/or development *process*.

In the second sample, participants were selected for their participation in the development process of a film (Film X) that was one of the five highest grossing films released in 2008, and that was praised for its quality. Although it would

have been desirable to secure interviews with a complete sample of all screenwriters and executives who contributed to both periods of development, only two executives out of about 12 potential participants were available for this first exploration. They were interviewed by telephone using a 19-question protocol asking participants to rate on a 1–5 scale the degree to which the design and execution of the development process for Film X upheld values found essential to creativity and innovation by the first sample. The one value that emerged in the first sample, *integrity*, was not used in the protocol for the second sample because it has not been cited in the scholarly literature as an essential element for creativity and/or innovation beyond the findings of this study; thus, the protocol was comprised of 19 questions rather than 20, derived from the top 20 values that emerged from the first study. The final interview question was regarding whether or not their ratings had a direct relationship with the movie’s marketability and ultimate success and, if so, how.

## RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between creativity, integrity, and success in the feature film development process. Values that support creative ideation were placed within four categories—personal competence, social competence, personal integrity, and social integrity—within which key values were identified in interviews as important to all participants. To determine alignment of writers and executives from the first sample with each other, each participant group’s responses about each of the top five values within a values category/quadrant were tabled (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Research results: Top five values in four categories that support creativity and innovation among screenwriters and studio executives in the development process.

Screenwriters recognized 95% of the essential values as present within themselves and perceived that the development process recognizes only 52% of those same values. Studio executives recognized 86% of the essential values as present within themselves and perceived that the development process recognizes only 53% of those same values. Finally, to determine alignment of participants with the development process, the averages above were combined to show that all participants recognized 90.5% of the essential values as present within themselves and perceived that the development process recognizes only 52.5% of those same values.

In the second sample, participants indicated that the process that did not result in a usable script for Film X at Studio A ranked at 2.56 on a scale of 5.00. For the second development process at Studio B, which resulted in the script that was shot on film and released, participants ranked it 4.83 on a 5-point scale. However, the aggregated rankings of processes at Studio A and Studio B do not offer the most striking results. Instead, participants' descriptions of why specific values were ranked high or low provided more salient insights into patterns that may pave the way for new research.

For 10 out of 19 values, participants ranked the design and execution of the development process of Film X while at Studio A below 3.00. However, for the same process at Studio A, participants ranked several values at 4.00 or 5.00, such as intrinsic motivation, freedom and autonomy, resources, and responsibility for a whole, identifiable piece of work. Participants noted that the high rankings for these values, which are associated with higher levels of creativity and innovation in the scholarly literature, were detriments to the process at Studio A where they were overemphasized, and other values were underemphasized.

Participants ranked values supported within the development process of Film X at Studio B at 5.00 in 17 out of 19 questions. Two values were ranked lower for how they were designed into and executed within the development process: resources (2.50) and freedom and autonomy (4.50). Interesting is that certain values were ranked at 5.00—such as responsibility for a whole, identifiable piece of work; absence of conformity/independence of judgment; and internal locus of control—even though they would seem to be in direct conflict with lack of resources and less freedom and autonomy in how to approach the work. Explanations from participants that help clarify the reasons behind these apparent contradictions in Film X's development processes at Studio A and Studio B will be presented in the Discussion section.

The five conclusions reached in the initial research and subsequent case study were:

1. Twenty key values to the development process were identified.
2. Screenwriters and studio executives were primarily aligned with each other.
3. Values found essential to individual participants were generally not supported by the development process.
4. A model created to explore values alignment between self and process was useful.
5. Anecdotal evidence showed that high rankings for creative integrity values in the development process may be connected to a film's critical and commercial success.

## Twenty Key Values to Development Process Identified

Twenty values with the greatest number of responses across the first sample were identified as essential to participants' work in the development process. Nineteen out of 20 values that received the most responses were clearly identified in the prevailing theories on creativity and innovation. Participants identified one value not previously illuminated in creativity research: defined as "incorruptibility," "soundness," and "completeness" (Merriam-Webster, 2004). The subjects of authenticity, true passion, and integrity in an individual with regard to the development process emerged in more than 100 comments from first-sample participants during the interviews.

Pointing to the definition of integrity as incorruptibility and a firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values, participants made comments often related to refusing work that is outside of one's integrity and standing up for one's own opinions. For example, one writer spoke of a request to develop a concept with great commercial potential that the writer was not passionate about: "The request seems so simple and yet it was completely out of my craft. I would try to do it and I couldn't do it. I seriously couldn't do it."

Another writer offered advice about having passion for the idea:

Know the heart of the thing and not just so you can shape everything around it, but so at some point you can just say, this is where I get off, this is where we're talking about two different movies and if [they] want to make this other movie, Godspeed, goodbye. You have that option. If you have an idea that you think could sell, and it doesn't move you, you shouldn't be writing it [because] you don't know what to protect. I saved all my money 'cause I never wanted to take a project that I feel that way about.

Similarly, an executive said,

Just because we are making [that genre of] movies, I can't force myself to make those when it's not me. They can give it to anyone else they want, but I don't think I should spend three years of my life making a movie I don't like. It's not my genre, not where I am inherently.

On standing up for one's opinions and staying true to oneself, an executive said,

I have to have faith in myself. . . . It's a subjective, creative process and if you don't throw out your own ideas and stand up for your own opinions, then what are you doing here? And if someone doesn't like your opinions, you go elsewhere and work for someone else who gets it. . . . You're only as good as your word . . . your opinions.

On the definition of integrity as completeness, the quality or state of being complete or undivided, comments often related to "staying true to yourself" without sacrificing the needs of others, seeking balance between the needs of the project and one's own values, and choosing those with whom to work. For example, an executive remarked,

I truly believe I have gotten to where I am because I stayed true to myself . . . I haven't stolen anyone's idea. I have been true to myself. I haven't shot down anyone else's project. . . . I have maintained my integrity. I rely on my instincts, on my taste.

On finding a balance between the needs of the project and one's own values, an executive said,

I try to be as authentic as possible. I have to adhere to the code—personally, I may not like a certain thing in a movie, but I know that some things are integral. I must hold my own moral parameters back sometimes, but you can see my personality there for sure in the process. I'm only developing things that I like.

## **Screenwriters and Studio Executives Aligned with Each Other**

Screenwriters and studio executives as separate participant groups were largely in agreement with each other. Their percentages of responses that indicated the recognition of these values within themselves and the support of these same values within the development process showed a similar pattern for 17 out of 20 values. Although the average percentages among values related to *process* were within 1% of each other (52% for writers and 53% for executives), the overall averages for the *self* category, related to one's self-esteem, averaged 95% for writers and somewhat lower for executives at 86%.

Given the common perception in the business and the literature that screenwriters feel they are consistently denigrated by others in the industry and their values suppressed, it is significant that the percentages show alignment between two populations whose disagreements are sometimes legendary. The results of this research show that studio executives recognize the importance of those values found to be essential by both populations and also that they, as a group, feel to a greater degree than screenwriters that they do not measure up to their own criteria.

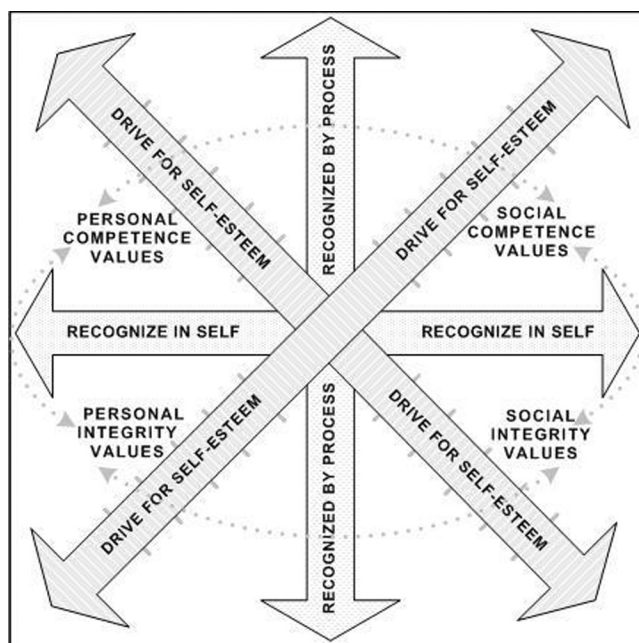
## **Participants' Essential Values Not Supported by Development Process**

Participants did not feel that the development process supports the values they deemed to be essential in their work. Specifically, all participants recognized 90.5% of the essential values outlined in this study as present within them and perceived that the development process recognizes and supports 52.5% of those same values.

## **Model Created to Explore Values Alignment across Two New Dimensions**

The model created to explore alignment of integrity between an individual or group of individuals and a process was shown to be a useful measurement tool to gain a greater understanding of the forces surrounding individual values. A visual representation of this model, called the Creative Integrity Alignment Model, is found in Figure 2. This model expands previous models and differentiates this research study. Creating definitions for the axes in the quadrants defined by Hultman (2002) allowed the use of quantitative methods to plot the degree to which participants felt these values were recognized in themselves, with the added dimension of the degree to which they are recognized by the process through simultaneous collection of data, by the same criteria, and within the same model. The definition of the *process* axis has encouraging implications for future research because it can be scaled to other levels at which an individual may play a role: a team, a department, a division, and/or the company.





**Figure 2.** Creative Integrity Alignment Model.

The model could be summarized by this statement: In the drive for self-esteem, individuals in the creative process seek balance among, and alignment of, values that fall into four quadrants: personal competence, personal integrity, social competence, and social integrity. Personal values and social values have an inherent dynamic tension, as do competence values and integrity values. Each quadrant contains values that push and pull—personal versus social and competence versus integrity—against values in the other three quadrants.

To illustrate how the research would have shown an alternate view on the results without the added *process* dimension, responses along the self axis ranged from 42% to 100% affirming values in the competence categories and in the 75% to 100% range in the integrity categories. Although alignment is not apparent across all four quadrants, there is some alignment in terms of the degree to which participants recognize the necessary skills and integrity within themselves. However, there is a much greater degree of misalignment in the process category, which would have been undetected in the analysis if it had not been measured. Therefore, measurement of values supported by the work process in which innovation takes place is inherent to a thorough understanding of the important role values related to integrity play in innovation.

### **Anecdotal Evidence Showed Relationship Between Integrity and Success**

The purpose of gathering data on Film X was to begin to test the results of the first sample against some outcome. Film X was developed, produced, and funded by a mini-major studio and subsequently marketed and distributed by a major studio. This award-winning film grossed more than \$100M in its opening weekend and grossed over \$500M in theaters worldwide. Assuming innovation

was at its peak in the development process at Studio B given the performance of the released film, the goal was not to measure the level of innovation against the movie's grosses. After discovering in the first study's sample participants' overall feelings that they are not individually aligned with the general design and execution of the development process as it is practiced in the film industry, it was not the goal with the limited scope of the second sample to capture the same measures of alignment between self and process, or between writers and executives, although this is worthwhile future research. Instead, the intention was to gauge the degree to which the same values were supported within the development process of a single, successful film. So, while the Creative Integrity Alignment Model was not used in interviews with executives on Film X to look at individual and process alignment, both expected and unexpected results illustrate the degree to which essential values were supported in both a failed and a successful attempt at the same project. These differences provide us with important information about values surrounding innovation that are not entirely in concert with existing literature and that should be tested further.

The final question about the first development process was: "Do you think that the elements we've talked about and how you ranked them had a direct relationship with the film project's inability to get a greenlight?" The answer was "yes." For the second development process, the question was: "Given how successful Film X was, do you think the elements we've talked about and how you ranked them had a direct relationship with the movie's marketability and its ultimate success?" The answer was "absolutely." The section that follows will discuss how participants arrived at these answers.

## DISCUSSION

Participants in the first sample did not feel that the development process in general supported the values they deemed to be essential in their work. The percentages imply that although participants had a high degree of self-esteem, the film development process presented a significant challenge to their ability to maintain it. Given the emotional and time commitment these participants make to their professional lives, the evidence that the process does not reinforce their sense of self-worth, which is critical to overall organizational health, is notable. Compromised self-esteem in the work environment leads to a highly diminished sense of satisfaction among employees; in the case of feature film development, these particular employees have a far-reaching impact on society through their ideas and actions. Awareness of this challenge may encourage the studios to discover ways to bring forward values that participants care about in the process and ensure their harmony with the company's values and vision.

In an effort to reach a hypothesis on the relationship between creativity and integrity in the feature film development process, the following actions represent the chain of findings that led to its formulation:

1. Values of creativity and innovation that relate to values known to affect self-esteem and performance were selected and tested for validity in this context.
2. Values found to be essential were measured for their alignment as they are recognized by individuals in themselves and in the process.

3. Misalignment was found between the self and process categories; therefore, integrity in the work is compromised.
4. Compromised integrity in the work does not support individual creativity and group innovation.

This exploration of the relationship between integrity and creativity yielded the following hypothesis: The more aligned participants' integrity is with the creative process of feature film development, the more innovative they can be.

The goal of the interviews about Film X was to learn how integrity was upheld and/or challenged by the design and execution of the development process for one highly successful film. The chosen film allowed for deeper discovery because it had two development processes at two different studios with markedly different results, through which the rankings of personal and social competence values and personal and social integrity values could be compared.

In the process at Studio A, from very loose constraints and lack of vision emerged untethered efforts, some of which may have been executed at high levels individually, but that ultimately failed to deliver a script for filming. The process at Studio B featured very tight constraints from which clear expectations were set around mutual effort for mutual gain over individual expression. Three major tenets of innovation research, as described in the Literature Review, are available resources; freedom and autonomy; and being given responsibility for whole, identifiable pieces of the work. Five well-known characteristics essential to individual creativity are frame-breaking approaches, internal locus of control, intrinsic motivation, perceptual openness, and ideational fluency. Why, then, would the rankings of all of these values for Studio A, where the process failed, be high or even higher than the rankings of those at Studio B, where the process succeeded?

Studio A hired several talented writers with proven abilities in the genre over a four-year period at a cost of millions of dollars. The executive was given considerable freedom and autonomy in supervising the development process throughout, with very little interference from other executives or senior studio management. At the direction of the executive in charge, countless ideas for the script were brainstormed, analyzed, written into the script, and rewritten; many meetings took place, some with the assistance of outside expert consultants and ideas contributed by other creative professionals; deep pride and interest in the development work was apparent; and the executive and development team had very high hopes for the success of this high-profile project. These values in action would likely appear to be positive contributors to innovation. What was missing that thwarted the effectiveness of these values was orientation toward risk, independence of judgment, and a clear goal. The executive did not take *personal* risk by choosing, with the help of the development team, a direction for the story, thus establishing a clear goal and creating the foundation on which to benefit from values such as ideational fluency and freedom and autonomy. But great business risk—in the form of wasted time and money against a time-bound contract—accompanied this lack of vision, which would have served as a guiding compass through the process. Being unable or unwilling to show independence of judgment, to stand for a foundational idea and thus against other ideas that would derail the project from its underlying creative core, was a detriment to the script's success. Ultimately, the contract term for the studio to finish the script expired and all of Studio A's investments were lost.

In contrast, the development process for Film X was again undertaken, but this time at Studio B and with a new team. While values supported in the process at Studio B ranked at 5 on a 5-point scale for 17 of the 19 measures, two were ranked lower: available resources, and freedom and autonomy. A participant in the second experience felt that “less money and strict timeline gave us an opportunity to be more creative and challenged.” These conditions contributed to a successful script, in accordance with Amabile’s (1988) research on the positive effects that pressure can have on intrinsic motivation. Freedom and autonomy were approached differently in the second development process for Film X: Expectations were set at the beginning that there would be hands-on collaboration between writers and executives from the first day of working together. In this case, individual independence of judgment outside the team and ability of participants to own complete pieces of work without interference were superseded by a deep desire to create something together that would have maximum impact on others. Differentiated from the first process for this same film, the second process was characterized by concrete goal clarity, intense collaboration and open communication of ideas and concerns, mutual accountability for the outcome, trust and—other than time—availability of key resources, the executives themselves, for support. A highly participative management team took as much responsibility for the successful writing of the script as the writers.

Although those interviewed in the second sample were executives, it bears noting here the two most frequently cited complaints from screenwriters are in the areas of resources—such as not being paid for each draft they are asked to do, being rushed through the writing process, not having a skilled executive guiding the process—and freedom and autonomy, such as when writers are hovered over and micromanaged. In this case, the new writers were expected and supported to succeed from the beginning of a rather accelerated development period to be undertaken alongside preparations for production before the new script was completed. They were retained throughout production as the script continued to evolve in response to production results, a level of ongoing collaboration between director and writers that is not customary on most films. Three more unusual traits characterizing the design of Studio B’s process from that at Studio A (and other development processes in general) have very interesting implications and should be looked into further. First, two scripts were written concurrently by different writers with the understanding that both drafts would be considered collectively to craft the best final script, a practice that is almost unheard of in the industry and that, even with the promise of credit and reward as these writers were given, would strike many as a situation that would create paralyzing competition. Second, executives on the team were solely dedicated to this one script, which for most executives would not be a choice, and they expected to receive onscreen credit for their producer-like efforts. Both of these factors point to the importance of reward and recognition, and trust, two other values essential to organizational innovation. Third, the director of the film had already been hired, and contributed equally to the script’s development while also supervising preproduction efforts, pointing to a strong guiding vision and indication of an imminent greenlight, the greatest reward for which a screenwriter can hope.

While clearly limited in scope, the findings from the Film X interviews provide evidence that the question is worth asking: Is a movie more successful when its internal marketing process is marked by integrity? The results provide

a springboard for a dialogue of interest to me, which is managing the tension between art and commerce.

## Limitations

The study's design was confined to only the development phase of major theatrical motion pictures generated from, and theatrically distributed out of, the United States. The sample was limited to screenwriters and studio executives and did not include interviews with other participant roles in the development process, such as directors, producers, and other non-studio development executives.

The limited sample size and composition may have affected the impact at the industry level of analysis as well as the selection process for particular values in terms of (1) what values garnered the greatest number of comments overall, (2) what values had the greatest number of comments among writers only, and (3) what values had the greatest number of comments among executives only. The first sample was not balanced between number of writers (35%) and number of executives (65%), nor was it balanced between males (56%) and females (44%). Interviews with all participants in the two development processes were not secured for the case study on Film X, nor were participants balanced between writers (0%) and executives (100%).

All comments from the first sample were aggregated into a single total number of comments to determine which values were essential. Therefore, if the number of comments associated with a particular value were analyzed separately by participant group, a different list of values might have emerged from executives than from writers. Because the differentiation of the groups' assessments of the values themselves was not the primary goal of this research, alignment of a common group of values and noting the contrast between participant groups *within* each value was chosen as the focus. It is important to qualify that in reference to all values, both participant groups had significant energy around each one. However, a more precise calculation could have been provided if the number of responses in each participant group had been divided by the total number of responses for that value and calculated for their balance before analyzing their overall impact. Similarly, the case study for Film X did not utilize the same measures as the first sample, namely in discovery of new values essential to the process outside of the top 20 selected by the first sample and also in measuring the contrast of the self versus process and writer versus executive dimensions.

Twenty values, as opposed to 25 or more out of about 150 possible choices, provided a clear picture of values participants found essential without clouding the results with excessive data. However, some other values that were not presented also had a significant number of comments associated with them and could have been incorporated into a larger analysis.

## Opportunities for Additional Research

Researchers interested in creativity, media studies, or organizational behavior could elaborate upon these findings in two ways. First, additional research could focus on expanding the findings from the proposed research question. Several methods for further exploration of the existing research question are (1) testing the expanded list of values using a survey data collection method; (2) adding more participants and/or participant roles in the development process; (3) exploring

different gender ratios; (4) using a different level of analysis (for example, group and organization); (5) applying the design to creative individuals and teams in other entertainment fields, such as television, marketing and advertising, animation, new media and online technology, and video games; (6) extending the model to other industries; and (7) using the Creative Integrity Alignment Model as a quantitative analysis tool.

In light of the promising outcome of the limited-scope case study conducted for this research, it would be interesting to expand the sample and more fully test the hypothesis against one or more outcomes, such as how individual and process integrity alignment—or particular constellations of results—affects the number, quality, or success of films that are released to the public. Integrity during the creative process infuses the screenplay with what could be correlated to a high quality of experience for filmgoers. An opportunity to improve the alignment between the development process and its participants would potentially improve the quality of films that are released.

From a marketing and economics perspective, correlating integrity upheld during the ideation phase of a product's development and its success in the marketplace is an interesting platform on which to design future research. Therefore, a possible next step would be to expand the sample size among members of a film's development team (and perhaps production and release marketing teams) and test the suggestions that emerged from the case study. Given the strength of market research in supporting film studios in their creative, purchasing, marketing, and distribution choices, this additional measure could provide crucial factors impacting a film's probability of critical and commercial success.

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