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THE STRUCTURAL AND PERSONAL EFFECTS OF THE SWIFT TRUST FILM ENVIRONMENT.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigated New Zealand film production workers' experiences of the 'swift trust' environment within the Auckland film and television industry. Previous research has identified swift trust between workers as a crucial mechanism for organising work within project based organisations. This research explored the ways in which working in a swift trust environment affects the personal and social identity of film workers.

Semi structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with seven female and four male film production workers. Respondents had all worked successfully within the industry for over ten years and understood both the rewards and drawbacks of freelance film work.

Respondents all identified swift trust as a key mechanism for facilitating the organisation of work within their industry. Clear cultural norms ensured workplace behaviours which supported cognitive, relational and motive-based trust mechanisms and facilitated collaboration, creativity and collective problem solving.

The swift trust environment was experienced by respondents as personally validating. It had given them a strong sense of individual and social identity as well as a clear sense of individual and collective purpose. However, all had experienced breakdowns in trust. Respondents recounted early difficulties coping with the extremes of working in an intense, high trust environment followed by the rejection of unemployment. Effects could be substantial and anxiety, depression and burnout was observed during the early years of careers.

All respondents had also experienced the breakdown of trust at an organisational level with several suggesting that cultural norms around trust mean that interpersonal conflicts are poorly handled and constructive performance appraisals seldom given within the industry.

Over time interviewees developed a range of personal and industry focussed coping skills which enabled them to experience a high level of psychological safety and satisfaction from their work. These skills included a rapid ability to judge the trustworthiness of others; development of multiple social identities to soften the transition between work and unemployment and developing work related boundaries. Respondents believed these skills enabled them to thrive in project based freelance work environment and had added to their lives outside the industry.

The thesis concludes with suggestions for increasing swift trust by improving performance and relational conflict management skills within the industry. It also suggests that the high trust environment of the film industry is highly rewarding for workers and would benefit more traditional organisations.

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