

A Pattern Language for Film Production

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Abstract: When the production of a film is abstracted from day-to-day business, one realizes that the same basic elements are reused over and over again. Nevertheless, the result is always different. This paper takes this finding as a reason to try and create a pattern language for the production of a telefilm. To do so the whole process of filmmaking is divided into more than 40 single patterns which are presented as a pattern map. There are patterns for roles and the products they use and create. To illustrate the pattern language and to prove that it might work, three patterns are written out in full: The Exposé, the Package and the role of the Line Producer. They were developed based on literature, empirical data extracted from expert interviews as well as practical experience of the author.

1 Introduction

Every film is unique. Nevertheless, the actions taken to create the individual product are always very similar. The same is true for the structures that are established. The roles of the filmmakers involved hardly vary, regardless of the artistic level or the quality of the final product.

For example, for each project an author develops a screenplay, a producer organizes the funding and a cameraman records the director's staging.

Depending on the production effort, the size of the team involved varies. The whole job is split up into a number of parts. Specialists are added or an additional assistant is engaged, but the key action roles remain the same. If the number of action roles to be assigned exceeds the number of people involved, several roles are assigned to one person. This does not mean they stop existing as distinguishable roles.

Every individual brings his or her personality into a function, but the team as a whole always carries out the same steps towards the finished film: Development of a concept, preproduction, production and exploitation. The documents they use are widely standardized as well. So when the production of a film is abstracted from day-to-day business, one soon realizes that the same basic elements are reused and recombined over and over again. Sounds like the ideal subject for a pattern language, doesn't it?

This text focuses on the production of a full-length feature film for German TV (here referred to as "telefilm") from the point of view of the production company. When producing a film, it is the task of the organization to provide a platform for creative activities that make the film unique and attractive. The pattern language presented here focuses on the organizational platform only without the artistic and aesthetic aspects.

2 Audience And Goals of This Pattern Language

What is the added value a pattern language on film production provides compared to traditional descriptions? Patterns document the solutions to recurrent problems in a way that is easily accessible to film professionals, domain experts, communication specialists and others interested in film production. A pattern language provides insight that allows the reader to create a unique solution, appropriate to their circumstances. The pattern language can provide selective knowledge to the reader and help to create a new film using other professionals' experience without overwhelming the reader with a mass of already known information. It shows how to get through all the gates that lead from an idea to a finished film.

3 Empirical Basis

The author has gathered experience about film production in a variety of roles since 1999. He completed his first feature film in the role of a producer together with fellow students of applied media science at the TU Ilmenau in 2002. After this he worked for major German TV and film production companies. He started as an assistant to the line producer and business affairs. In the following years he worked with the production manager of a TV series, and, in another company, assisted the managing director before switching to legal affairs. The latter position allowed him to work on his diploma essay in parallel. It featured a first version of the patterns included here.

The company serving as an example, as well as a number of other film production companies known to the author, is structured in a matrix-project-organization. This means that a producer supervises every project, i.e. the production of a telefilm, and is assisted by a number of specialists who are not assigned to a particular project but rather to a particular field applied to all projects in parallel, e.g. accounting or post production. These so-called "central services" are themselves headed by the line producer. Figure 1 gives a visual overview of this structure using a medium sized German film production company as an example. The supervisors of the single projects that take place in a company are divided into two parts because they are headed by only one of the managing producers.

The vast majority of film production companies in Germany are very small with only a handful of permanent employees. The depicted company, in relation to this, can be considered rather big. This leads to a more than average specialization of every employee and this again facilitates the identification of separate action roles. These roles and the products they generate while working on a telefilm are the focus of this pattern language. Figure 2 is a pattern map for the production of a telefilm.

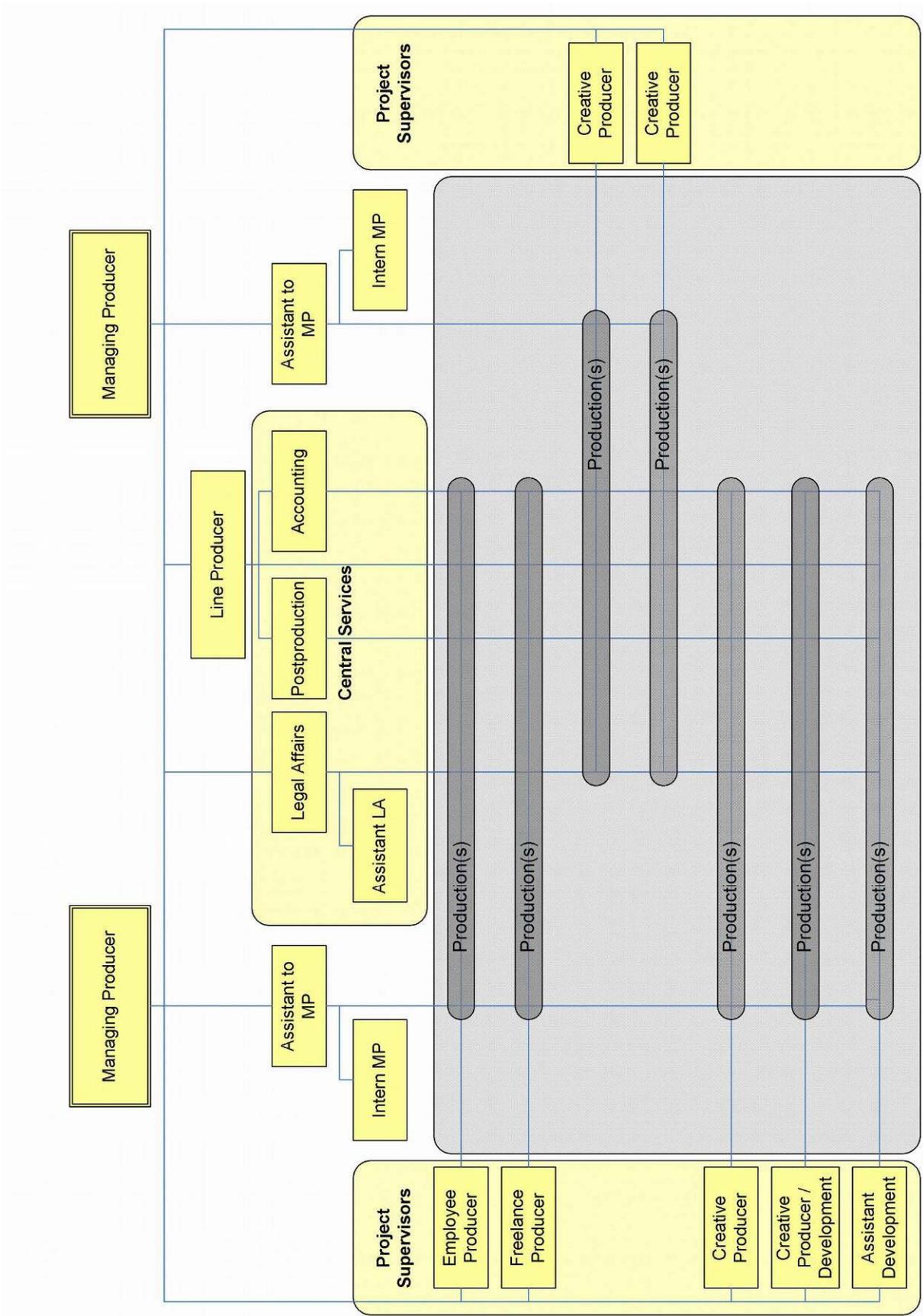


Fig. 1: Structure chart of a film production company

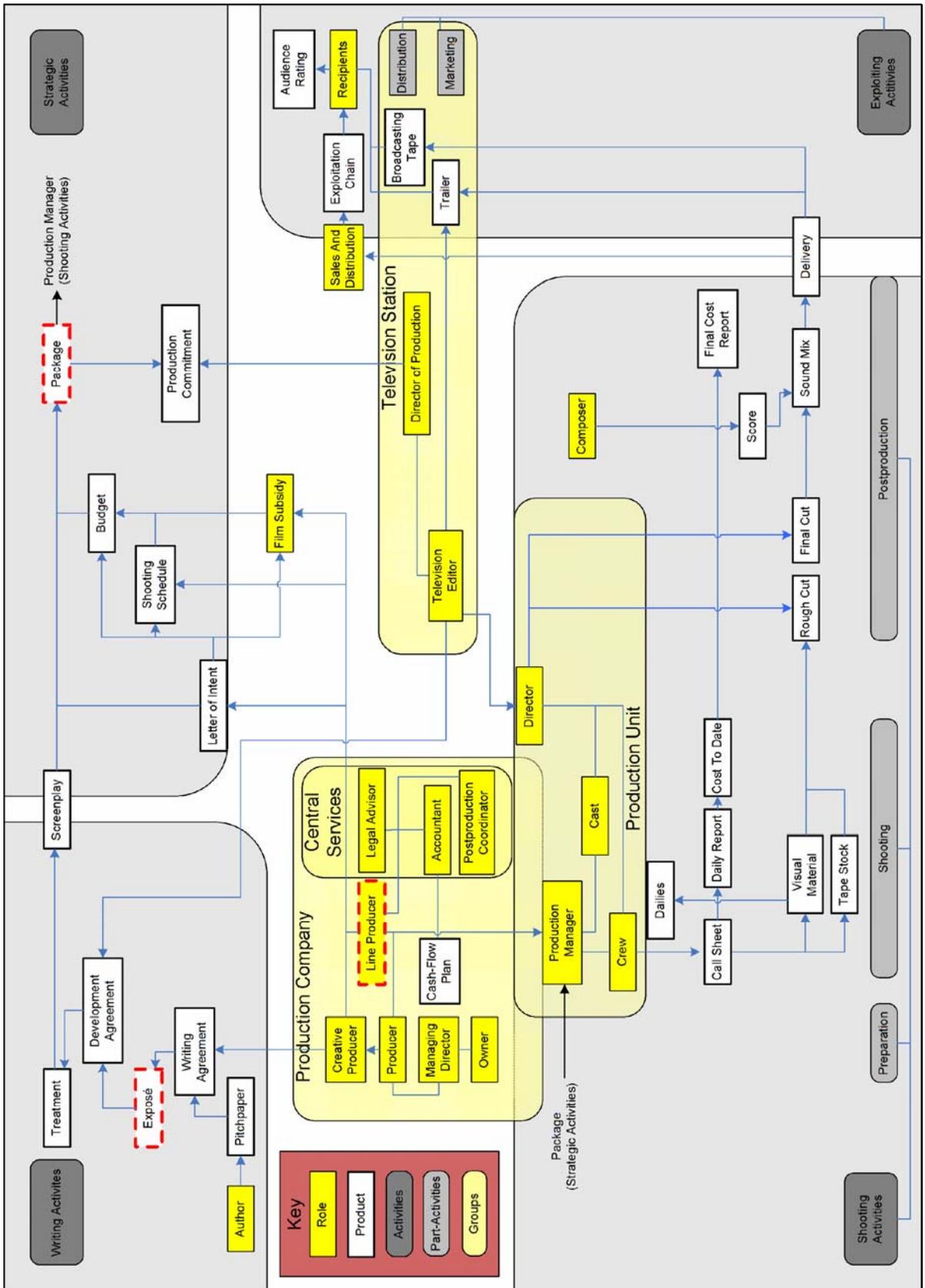


Fig. 2: Pattern map for telefilm production

4 The Patterns

In Fig. 2 a film project starts in the top left corner with an Author writing down an idea. Together with a Production Company this idea grows to a screenplay. In the Strategic Activities the funds and other resources are gathered to be able to start the Shooting Activities that convert the script to a film. Together with numerous attachments this film is given to the TV Station that finally broadcasts the film. Production Company and TV Station are positioned in the middle because they cannot be limited to a single field of activity.

The action roles and products in Fig. 2 each stand for a pattern. Activities, sub-activities and groups are not considered to hold patterns because they would only summarize the patterns they contain. In the following, pattern names are formatted in SMALL CAPS.

Based on literature, interviews with film experts and the author's experience, three patterns were chosen from the drafted pattern language and written out in full (red borders in Fig. 2): The EXPOSÉ, one of the products of the Writing Activities, the PACKAGE, which is the product that summarizes the Strategic Activities and establishes the basis for the creation of a telefilm and the LINE PRODUCER, a role at the center of the Strategic Activities of the Production Company.

4.1 Exposé

Name	EXPOSÉ (product)
Synonyms	Summary, Synopsis
Context	<p>An AUTHOR, PRODUCER, CREATIVE PRODUCER and a TV EDITOR collaborate to achieve a finished SCREENPLAY. After creating a PITCHPAPER, they need a more detailed product that is suitable to share with potential customers.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <pre> graph LR A[Pitchpaper] --> B[Exposé] B --> C[Treatment] C --> D[Screenplay] </pre> </div> <p>Fig. 3: Sequence of the documents created during the Writing Activities</p>
Problem	<p>How can you excite somebody about a story that is not written yet?</p> <p>How can a Production Company give a potential investor an idea of the plot, the essential ingredients and the special features of a story in a succinct way that does not require too much time or effort to create and understand?</p>
Forces	<p>Only a fraction of the scripts submitted to a TV Station will actually make it all the way to a finished film. Theoretically, one could always offer a finished screenplay to the TV Station for selection. This would have the benefit that the responsible people at the TV Station would only need to invest very little of their own creativity to imagine the finished product. The investor would know precisely what he is engaging in and could make his decision for or against a project with relatively little uncertainty. But this approach has serious disadvantages:</p> <p>First, creating a finished SCREENPLAY takes a long time (sometimes years). This creates the risk that several independent PRODUCERS develop a story on the same topic. It</p>

is not in the TV Station's interest to produce two identical films. Therefore a selection process would still be necessary and most projects would be rejected. Since the AUTHOR is still paid, the cost of writing a rejected SCREENPLAY is a sunk cost for the Production Company.

Second, every TV Station tends to add characteristic attributes to a film. For this reason, the TV EDITOR joins the Writing Activities and exerts influence on the creation of the final SCREENPLAY. Usually it is the belief of the TV Station that the requirements of the TV Station cannot be met without the collaboration of the TV EDITOR.

As the responsible people at the TV Station consider multiple EXPOSÉS at a time, the EXPOSÉ has to be short and tense in order not to fail for formal reasons. This shortness introduces the danger of misunderstandings which must be resolved without exceeding the limits of an EXPOSÉ. On the other hand, the EXPOSÉ has to be detailed enough to work as a basis for a decision. An EXPOSÉ that stops at brief description of the basic features of a story without creating a vision in the reader's mind will hardly convince a potential buyer. A PITCHPAPER, being only a page or two, is often too short to be a sufficient basis for the TV EDITOR to decide whether to get seriously involved with the development of a story or not.

Solution

Summarize the story. Provide an overview of the creative concept that is capable of convincing a potential customer.

Create a short summary to give an impression of the atmosphere of a film. Limit this to only a few pages that gives the reader an idea of the plot, the essential ingredients and the special features of a story.

The EXPOSÉ is a sales product. It has to touch the reader on an emotional level and create a vision of the finished film in his head. With the help of that vision, the AUTHOR or PRODUCER sells a story to a TV Station. The EXPOSÉ has to convince the people in charge at the TV Station to realize the film. The EXPOSÉ makes it possible to give a rough estimate of the production effort giving some assurance to the potential contractor that the intended budget is invested well. Especially for telefilms, the EXPOSÉ often replaces the PITCHPAPER in the Writing Activities.

The EXPOSÉ has the function of convincing the TV EDITOR to develop a script and sign a DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT. The PRODUCER pays for the development of an EXPOSÉ by an AUTHOR. The EXPOSÉ must be charged with emotion to stimulate the reader. The length of an EXPOSÉ is between three and a maximum of 15 pages. The average is five to ten pages.

In writing an EXPOSÉ, the AUTHOR gives an overview of the project in a few pages of continuous text. The EXPOSÉ is written in prose. Since dialogues, if at all, are only included for illustration, he can rush through the plot, change the perspective or anticipate the ending. The EXPOSÉ tells the genre and format of a story. The AUTHOR drafts the main characters and their relationships with each other, and describes the main conflict, the plotline and the temporal context of the story. Unlike the finished film, he has the option to start his text with a description of the characters involved to direct the reader's imagination.

Consequences

Since the development of an EXPOSÉ takes less time, writing one before a full SCREENPLAY minimizes the danger that a similar idea is developed elsewhere. For the Production Company the biggest advantage of an EXPOSÉ compared to a SCREENPLAY is that a lot less time and financial effort is required for its creation. In case of rejection the PRODUCER's sunk costs of an abandoned script idea are a lot lower.

The shortness of the EXPOSÉ does indeed require the creativity of the reader to visualize the finished film. Especially in the case of the TV EDITOR this is exactly what he wants. Entering the Writing Activities at the point of the Exposé is the right moment for him to add his own ideas to the project and see them be transformed into a film tailor-made for his station.

An EXPOSÉ does not change the fact that a TV Station can only choose a few ideas to get involved in. But a good Exposé increases the author's chances to be within those few.

Examples

After their last successful cooperation Frank, PRODUCER in his own Production Company, wants to offer a story for a telefilm to the TV Station ProSieben. After chatting with his contact at ProSieben, Barbara, who is the TV EDITOR in charge of telefilms, he comes to the conclusion that the best thing would be to develop a comedy. So he assigns his CREATIVE PRODUCER Paul to brainstorm about possible topics and to find an appropriate AUTHOR to develop a story. Among other ideas, Paul comes up with the issue of Turkish integration in Germany. He invites the experienced AUTHOR Adnan to talk about the idea. Adnan loves the idea and convinces Paul that the cooperation with him has promise. So Paul contracts him to write an EXPOSÉ that incorporates their conversation. Two weeks later, Adnan sends in the EXPOSÉ and they meet to discuss it.

A couple of months and revisions later Paul and Frank decide that the time has come to present the story to the TV Station. They get an appointment with Barbara. She reads the EXPOSÉ, shows interest in the project and gives some substantial comments about the characters and the ending. Before she passes it on within the TV Station for further consideration she wants her comments to be incorporated. Paul discusses Barbara's comments with Adnan and convinces him to rewrite his text according to Barbara's comments.

Paul passes the revised version of the EXPOSÉ on to Barbara. She presents it in the next editorial meeting and the TV Station decides to close a DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT with Paul's Production Company. Based on that Frank assigns Adnan to develop the next product in the Writing Activities: The TREATMENT.

Related Patterns

In contrast to the more detailed TREATMENT with scenes presented in the correct chronological order, the EXPOSÉ is not divided into scenes. The LEGAL ADVISOR of the Production Company and the AUTHOR fix the terms of their cooperation on the EXPOSÉ in a WRITING AGREEMENT. If the EXPOSÉ is accepted by the TV Station, the parties enter a DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT with the Production Company.

The concrete Preparation of the Shooting Activities does not start before the SCREENPLAY is written and approved. A BUDGET estimate based on the EXPOSÉ is very vague because large parts of the later SCREENPLAY are not yet specified.

In order to set up a PACKAGE, the EXPOSÉ is sent to the potential CAST to check whether they are interested in the story at all and whether they are available during the anticipated shooting period.

Sources

Interviews with Rima Schmidt (creative producer), Max von Sydow (legal advisor), Mischa Hofmann (managing director and producer) and literature (see below)

4.2 Package

Name
PACKAGE (product)
Synonyms
The Funding Puzzle, Selling the Bundle
Context
The Writing activities are in full swing. Now it is time to prepare the conversion of the SCREENPLAY to a film.
Problem
How can you plan and sell a movie that is not shot yet to the people you need to shoot it first? How can the Production Company acquire funds, people and other resources for the Shooting Activities from third parties and avoid the risk of creating an unsellable product? How can this tangled web of fragile strings between the factors be structured so that it makes sense to the TV Station and all other relevant stakeholders and they can use it to evaluate their risk?
Forces
<p>A Production Company does not want to bear all the risk of a production on his own. In addition in most cases it does not have the necessary funds to finance a telefilm alone. All the Production Company holds to shoot the film after the Writing Activities is the SCREENPLAY and the salaried specialists. Involving a TV Station in the development of the SCREENPLAY is not a guarantee that the TV Station will fund the Shooting Activities as well. So the PRODUCER needs to sell a film that is not even finished yet.</p> <p>Of course it is crucial for a telefilm to have a TV Station on board. The problem is that the SCREENPLAY is adjusted to the needs of the TV EDITOR that helped develop it. So if the TV Station leaves the project, the PRODUCER would have to sell a tailor-made product to another station (which is difficult, see EXPOSÉ) or bury it.</p> <p>So the TV EDITOR's goodwill is a fateful factor. His opinion is the most important criteria in the TV Station's decision to stay involved in the project. At the same time he is often the most demanding partner. The TV EDITOR's goal is to have the biggest audience possible. The more famous names associated with a project, the more people will watch the film. The problem is that celebrities demand a higher fee than ordinary actors or crew. So with the number of expensive participants the BUDGET increases, and more funds are needed. The CREATIVE PRODUCER and the LINE PRODUCER have means to cut costs to a certain extend (see LINE PRODUCER) but this might cause the DIRECTOR or a CAST member to turn away from the project. Or they change their mind because they lose patience. They might even leave for reasons not even connected to the project at all. Anyway, they need to be replaced by somebody who again has to be accepted by the TV EDITOR and all other stakeholders. The replacement then has a different fee and causes changes in the SHOOTING SCHEDULE thus creating manifold changes in the BUDGET. Depending on his status he or she might also be able to put through changes in the SCREENPLAY...</p> <p>In this merry-go-round even the TV Station can be a critical component. Even if the TV Station replaces only the TV EDITOR in charge, everything else has to be re-negotiated.</p>

The participants in a film project can be divided into two conflicting parties: The creative elements like the DIRECTOR, the CAST, the PRODUCER, the CREATIVE PRODUCER and also the TV EDITOR want to increase quality, no matter what the cost, to increase their reputation. On the other hand there are the fiscal elements: The DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION representing the financial interests of the TV Station, the MANAGING DIRECTOR and the LINE PRODUCER want to cut costs as far as possible for a film with a given quality level. Their goal is to increase profit. So the front line does not run clearly between the Production Company and the TV Station. While the LINE PRODUCER and the MANAGING DIRECTOR try to cut costs, the PRODUCER and the CREATIVE PRODUCER strive for maximum quality. The latter are also the ones who can finance their wishes by organizing more funds. The same conflict takes place later between the TV EDITOR and the DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION.

The people involved also have personal preferences about the people they want to work with or, sometimes even more important, whom they are **not** willing to work with. Since all these factors with their often conflicting interests depend on each other intensely, it could happen that if one changes, all the others collapse.

Solution

Create a portfolio consisting of all the ingredients needed for shooting and leading the film to success.

This PACKAGE contains LETTERS OF INTENT, the BUDGET and the EXPOSÉ. A current version of the SCREENPLAY is added as soon as there is one.

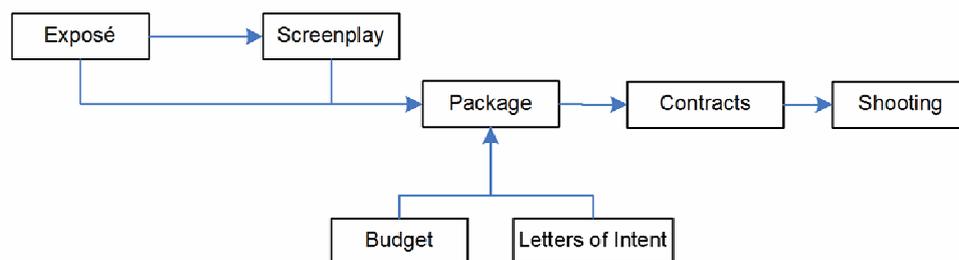


Fig. 4: Ingredients and follow-ups of the PACKAGE

Sort the ingredients by the stability they give to the fragile balance of the PACKAGE and by the effort they cause when replaced. These criteria vary for each project.

The least fluctuating factor is usually the TV Station. So start here and design all other ingredients to fit the will of its TV EDITOR or at least convince him to accept them. Use as much diplomacy as necessary.

To increase your chances, stay in dialogue with the TV EDITOR and choose ingredients that are likely to be accepted by the TV Station. Starting with what you have, use the SCREENPLAY (or any step before) to convince the DIRECTOR and CAST.

Do not contract your CAST, CREW and DIRECTOR yet, but rather encourage them to sign LETTERS OF INTENT. Obviously the PACKAGE becomes more attractive with every celebrity that enters it. With a LETTER OF INTENT of a well known DIRECTOR it is easier to convince a celebrity actor to play the leading role.

You always have to keep an eye on the BUDGET. Always measure if you need the genius artist or if the down-to-earth craftsman will do. If the BUDGET grows too big, compensate by either cutting costs at other line items or raising extra funds. If the TV Station does not add some, the most common option for funding is to apply for FILM SUBSIDY. You can also hold back some exploitation rights and sell them to somebody else. Replacing the TV Station is the very last option as the whole SCREENPLAY is adjusted to it.

Use the advantage of having different stakeholders within the Production Company. Before presenting the PACKAGE outside, let your own creative employees discuss it with the fiscal ones internally first. Iterate the whole process until the PACKAGE is complete.

Consequences

The result of these Strategic Activities is a set of documents which all depend on one another. It might be a tedious process, people might lose patience and all sides have to accept compromises.

But once the puzzle is solved, you have a lot more resources at your disposal than you would have by just starting to shoot. And in addition you have not only reduced the risk of your partners but also your own. The creative and the fiscal stakeholders have a pretty good picture of what the SCREENPLAY will become.

The creation of such a PACKAGE can take months or even years. Of course it is more than normal that change happens in this long period of time. Thus the PACKAGE usually gets adapted or knocked over several times until it completes its mission: The signing of a PRODUCTION COMMITMENT.

Examples

A PRODUCER about the adjustment of a telefilm to a certain TV Station:

“Let’s have a look at a comedy for example. It could run at several stations. Then all people involved, especially the TV editor and also the producer try to convert it into a program specific to that station. This involves the detailed development of the screenplay, where the main focus is shifted a little from station to station. [...] You keep this in mind when you choose the cast. If it was a different station, you might choose different actors. Or another director. That is the process that takes place in the strategic phase. A project that defines its own characteristics is turned into a program belonging to a specific station that fits the image of a station, of a certain timeslot. There are always resistance and conflicts in this process. Not always is the TV editor the only one who knows how to make a film for his station. Sometimes you have to tell him that a different cast would fit his needs even better. Taking care of that is also a little the responsibility of the producer and requires knowledge and the experience of the past years. Because in the end, we are judged by our success.”

“And then I talked to the TV editor. I knew that she thought much of a certain director. So if that director is in the package it would be another good reason for her to enter the project. This is how the puzzle becomes a big picture piece by piece.”

A CREATIVE PRODUCER about the negotiations with the TV Station:

“The rights on a commissioned production are in most cases passed over to the station completely. Often they fall back to the production company after years, but in effect the film has already been exploited completely at that time. As a producer, I can try to hold back the foreign rights. This is done if you know that the costs of a film will exceed the regular TV budget but the station wants the film nevertheless. The producer then hopes to gain back the missing budget through the foreign sales. Sometimes it works, but not always. Often the station says: ‘No, we want to get the foreign rights as well.’ In return they add a little to the budget, but it does not cover the whole costs. So you have to try again to produce the film a little cheaper.

If 300,000 Euros of additional expenses are calculated and I get only 100,000 from the station, I still have to watch out.”

Related Patterns

Creating the PACKAGE is mainly the job of the PRODUCER who is assisted by his staff, in particular by the CREATIVE PRODUCER and the LINE PRODUCER. For a commissioned production he only needs to convince the TV EDITOR, the DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION, and the other decision makers at the TV Station.

Sources

Interviews with Marion Dany (line producer), Mischa Hofmann (managing director and producer), Rima Schmidt (creative producer), Marc-Oliver Dreher (production manager), Max von Sydow (legal advisor) and literature (see below).

4.3 Line Producer

Name	LINE PRODUCER (action role)
Synonyms	Nerve Center, Head of Production Managers
Context	A Production Company has decided to turn a story into a telefilm. Other than in the creative Writing Activities there will be a lot to organize in the subsequent Strategic Activities and Shooting Activities.
Problem	<p>How can you control all the organizational aspects of a project?</p> <p>The diverse elements of making a telefilm, including scheduling, BUDGETS, staffing and PACKAGING need supervision. How can you ensure that the corporate philosophy is incorporated into the new project? If there are several projects at a time, how can you profit from that instead of letting them interfere with each other?</p>
Forces	<p>The number of people involved in the project will increase during the Strategic Activities and will expand when the Shooting Activities start. This needs to stay a controlled process instead of random growth.</p> <pre> graph LR WA[Writing Activities] --> SA[Strategic Activities] SA --> ShA[Shooting Activities] ShA --> EA[Exploiting Activities] TE1[Television Editor] --- WA CP[Creative Producer] --- WA A[Author] --- WA LP[Line Producer] --- SA CS[Central Services] --- SA TE2[Television Editor] --- ShA PM[Production Manager] --- ShA </pre>
<p>Fig. 5: Focus activities of action roles</p>	
<p>When the Strategic Activities begin, the Writing Activities are often not yet finished. Furthermore, the PRODUCER and CREATIVE PRODUCER have their focus on script development and other aspects. If they have to take care of all the organizational details, even if they only have to supervise the Central Services, they are not using their core abilities. On the other hand, if all organization is done by PROJECT MANAGERS who are hired on a project-by-project basis, a consistent corporate philosophy will not be maintained in the single projects.</p> <p>So there needs to be a close cooperation between the continuous Production Company and the fluctuating PRODUCTION MANAGERS. The cooperation and government must be balanced such that production managers are still in charge which means they do not have to constantly ask for permission to proceed, but are still subject to influence.</p> <p>The information produced and exchanged within the Production Company needs to be routed and stored.</p> <p>For a commissioned telefilm the TV Station allows the Production Company a fixed percentage of the BUDGET as profit. So the PRODUCER can only increase his profit by cutting the costs even more within the already tight limits set by the TV Station.</p>	

If you overdo the cutting, the film might flop and thus fail to meet the customer's requirements. On the contrary: If you invest some of your profit and by that attract a greater audience, this is beneficial to your reputation as PRODUCER and the TV EDITOR is more likely to entrust you with follow-up projects.

Solution

Supervise the organizational and commercial aspects of all projects of a Production Company. Take care of the strategic project planning and control its operational execution inside the Production Company as well as in the cooperation with business partners.

In his position as head of the Central Services and the PRODUCTION MANAGERS during the Strategic and Shooting Activities the LINE PRODUCER is the main contact person for financial and organizational concerns. He monitors all projects in parallel and integrates them into the context of the Production Company. The LINE PRODUCER has to keep an overview not only over all current productions but also over the consequences of past ones and those to come.

Together with the PRODUCER he negotiates the BUDGET with the TV Station. The LINE PRODUCER is responsible for the finances of a project and its compliance with the BUDGET. This requires close coordination with the CREATIVE PRODUCERS to ensure that the LINE PRODUCER allocates the BUDGET in a good way and that the CREATIVE PRODUCER knows what BUDGET is available for which line item/activity.

A central job of the LINE PRODUCER is to adjust the BUDGET every time the PACKAGE changes. He has to work together with CREATIVE PRODUCER and the PRODUCTION MANAGER to cut costs when necessary. The goal is to achieve the maximum quality result within the given BUDGET. If the quality is not satisfying, the MANAGING DIRECTOR is normally willing to exceed the BUDGET a little and compensate the additional costs from his share. In the long run this sacrifice is smaller and, more important, easier to predict than the loss of reputation on the market ruled by the demand oligopoly of the TV Stations.

The LINE PRODUCER delegates some of his tasks to experts who work on their subject across all projects. To keep communication effective, every co-worker can access these Central Services directly. They again work closely together with the LINE PRODUCER to make sure he is sufficiently informed. Just like with the PRODUCTION MANAGER, the LINE PRODUCER decides how strong his influence needs to be. The LINE PRODUCER must not become a bottleneck whereby all decisions would be made by him.

The LINE PRODUCER has to slacken the PRODUCTION MANAGER's reins just as much that he keeps the control and has influence on the production in order to enforce the corporate philosophy and enable synergetic effects. Such effects can for example be achieved by arranging framework agreements with film laboratories that are based on the volume of the whole Production Company rather than on the single project.

By choosing the PRODUCTION MANAGER for every single project, the LINE PRODUCER makes sure that only those are employed with whom the cooperation works best. For a smooth cooperation there has to be a certain mutual trust between the two. This trust is usually built up in the course of a perennial cooperation. Only then do both know the strengths and weaknesses of their counterpart and the LINE PRODUCER can give more and more responsibility to the PRODUCTION MANAGER. As a goal the PRODUCTION MANAGER receives the BUDGET and SHOOTING SCHEDULE often developed by himself anyway. If everything runs perfect, the LINE PRODUCER only monitors the development of the expenses during the Shooting Activities with the help of the DAILY REPORTS and the COST TO DATE and and incorporates it into the company's

CASH-FLOW PLAN which he then passes on to the MANAGING DIRECTOR.

It is the responsibility of the PRODUCTION MANAGER to provide him with all information necessary beyond this without further request.

Consequences

Putting a LINE PRODUCER in charge of the jobs described relieves the specialists for other tasks. The extra position introduces additional overhead but by concentrating on the organizational concerns the LINE PRODUCER gathers experience and is a valuable expert himself. His experience becomes especially appreciable when it comes to PACKAGING and maximizing profit without destroying quality.

Without extra effort the information circulating in the Production Company is bundled in a proper interface for both the creative and the organizational roles.

The more the LINE PRODUCER can delegate, the less effort he has to invest into the single production and thus he can supervise and coordinate a larger number of parallel productions.

The main thought is that the PRODUCTION MANAGER is the executive part of the LINE PRODUCER. But the latter also assists the PRODUCTION MANAGER on activities that exceed the realm of the subordinate Production Unit.

Examples

A LINE PRODUCER about instruments to save money:

“If you scheduled 30 days but you know: the station’s budget will only allow 25, things become challenging. You need to simplify: Merge sets, thus reducing costly location changes or eliminate a character by deciding that the single sentence he says can also be said by somebody else and reduce him to an extra.”

“There are efforts that are inevitable. If you plan a disco and say: ‘20 extras will do.’ It won’t work. It simply needs to be full. On the other hand you may consider if an actor really has to fly business class or whether economy class will do. Does he really need his own camper van or will he be able to cope without?”

A PRODUCTION MANAGER about the cooperation with the LINE PRODUCER:

“The line producer gives you certain guidelines, because she has already taken care of the funding and the big contracts. She might already have calculated the contracts of the main cast and the director long ago. [...]

Since we’ve known each other for several years now, she knows that I like to do the budget calculation and schedules myself because I want to create the base of my work on my own and not have it arranged by somebody else. Only if I know the strength of the foundation, can I know what the strength of the house will be. Otherwise I have to reengineer it all.”

A MANAGING DIRECTOR about the cooperation between CREATIVE PRODUCERS and the LINE PRODUCER:

“The line producer talks with the producers and creative producers. I have no idea what they are communicating about. Actually I don’t want to be bothered whether an actor is too expensive or whether it might rain in June or whatever. That’s their job.”

Related Patterns

The LINE PRODUCER supervises each production from creating the PACKAGE to the DELIVERY to the TV Station and the FINAL COST REPORT.

The LINE PRODUCER is supported by a number of specialists pooled in the Central Services. These include the ACCOUNTANT who helps with concerns related to billing or the cooperation with banks. He is assisted by the LEGAL ADVISOR when forming contracts and negotiations. After the Shooting the LINE PRODUCER also supervises the Post-production. He can delegate this task to a POSTPRODUCTION COORDINATOR.

Looking at single projects, the LINE PRODUCER directs the PRODUCTION MANAGERS who themselves each control a Production Unit.

The LINE PRODUCER finds his counterpart in the DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION at the TV Station who coordinates the organizational and financial issues there.

Sources

Interviews with Marion Dany (line producer), Marc-Oliver Dreher (production manager), Mischa Hofmann (managing director and producer) and literature (see below)

5 Thumbnails

PITCH PAPER

Describe only the plotline and the key features of a story on one, maximum two pages. Only catch attention.

A PITCH PAPER is often too short for a decision. So the TV Station asks for an EX-POSÉ before it commits itself to continuing a project or not.

BUDGET aka. CUTTING COSTS

Together with the CREATIVE PRODUCER, the LINE PRODUCER develops ways to tighten the plot and thus cut the costs. The production costs of the finished SCREENPLAY can be reduced by some degree without making the quality of the product suffer.

In addition to enabling synergetic effects by framework agreements and other means, money can also be saved through effective organization. First reduce factors that will not have an effect on the “image”, i.e. the final product. This effect to the product is the crucial criterion when judging saving potentials. If the options do have a positive effect on the quality of the film, prefer those with a big effect compared to their price.

Any cutback will always provoke resistance from the DIRECTOR and the other creative staff striving for a maximum in quality.

A BUDGET becomes more accurate as the underlying SCREENPLAY and SHOOTING SCHEDULE become better defined and the PACKAGE becomes more complete.

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