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Frictionless Future



Bold predictions on where the creative industry sees itself in 5 years.



Nature is the original frictionless system. What can it teach creatives about adapting?



Creative work is evolving

Creative work hasn't changed this fast or this fundamentally in a long time. The volume is up, with 92% of creative professionals saying their team's expected output has increased in the last year alone. The tools are multiplying, the timelines are shrinking. And yet, what a smaller, sharper team can do right now would have seemed impossible three years ago.

As a creative partner to some of the world's fastest-moving enterprise teams, Superside set out to understand what this moment looks like from up close.

We surveyed 211 directors and above at enterprise companies, and interviewed leaders who are already living in the future most people are still theorizing about.

What we found was a genuine creative renaissance, hiding inside all the noise.



Where does the creative industry see itself

in 5 years?



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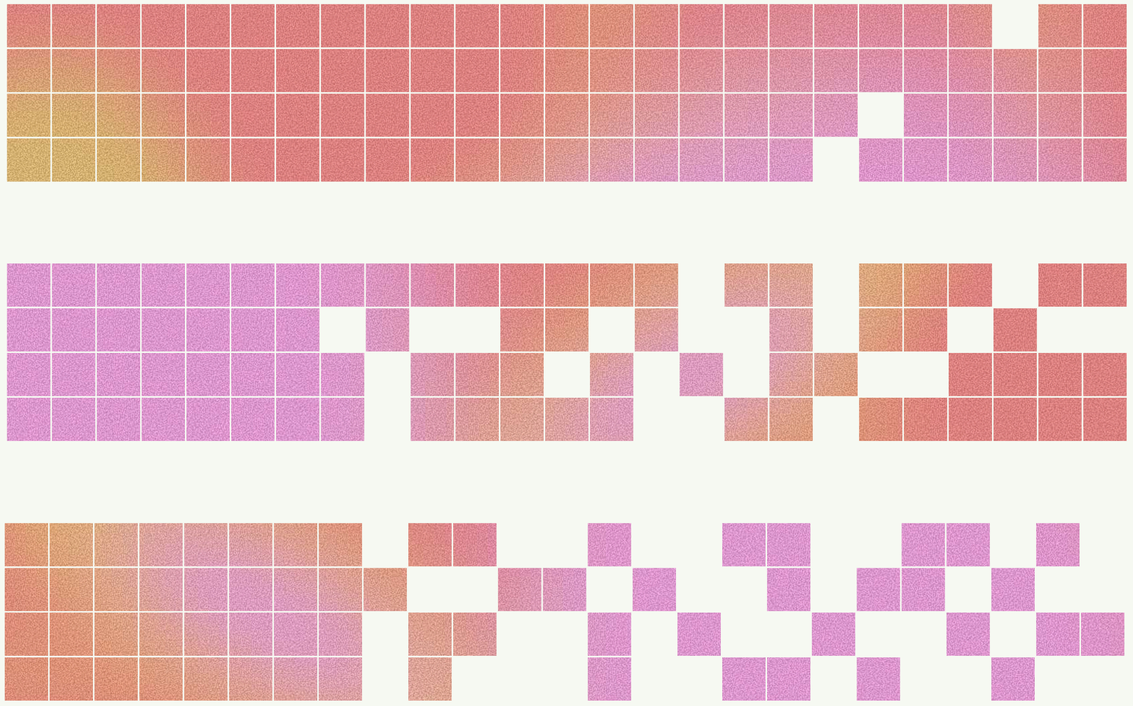
AI is a big part of how creative work is changing. **79% of creatives** think it will be the single biggest force reshaping how their teams work in the next three to five years.

But the way creative work gets made is changing just as fast as the tools doing it: non-designers are building landing pages, brand designers are shipping code and marketers are producing content that used to need an entire creative team. The line between 'creative' and 'not creative' is dissolving, and fast.

The numbers tell their own story:



97% say the role of the creative professional will look fundamentally different in 5 years

77% say AI-assisted creative production will be a permanent, long-term change

62% say the automation of workflows and approvals will be a lasting, structural shift in creative work

And through all of it, **97%** say it remains extremely or very important that creative output stays distinctly human in voice, aesthetic, and intent. The creative profession is finding its footing in exciting new territory.



Taste is back, and it's *non-negotiable*

As AI handles more of the doing, something harder to fake has emerged as the real competitive advantage: **knowing what good really looks like.**

61% of creative leaders say strategic creative direction and concept development will become even more valuable as AI grows. Almost half of those surveyed said the same about creative experimentation and risk-taking.



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"We now have a set of tools that are incredibly robust and are producing really interesting work, and you can see the elevation in how people are using them. The thing that's staying the same is that *you still have to have taste. You still have to have aesthetic intelligence.* **You have to use design thinking to understand a problem and understand how you're going to get to a solution."**



James Hurst
VP Global Executive Creative Director
at HelloFresh

Aesthetic intelligence

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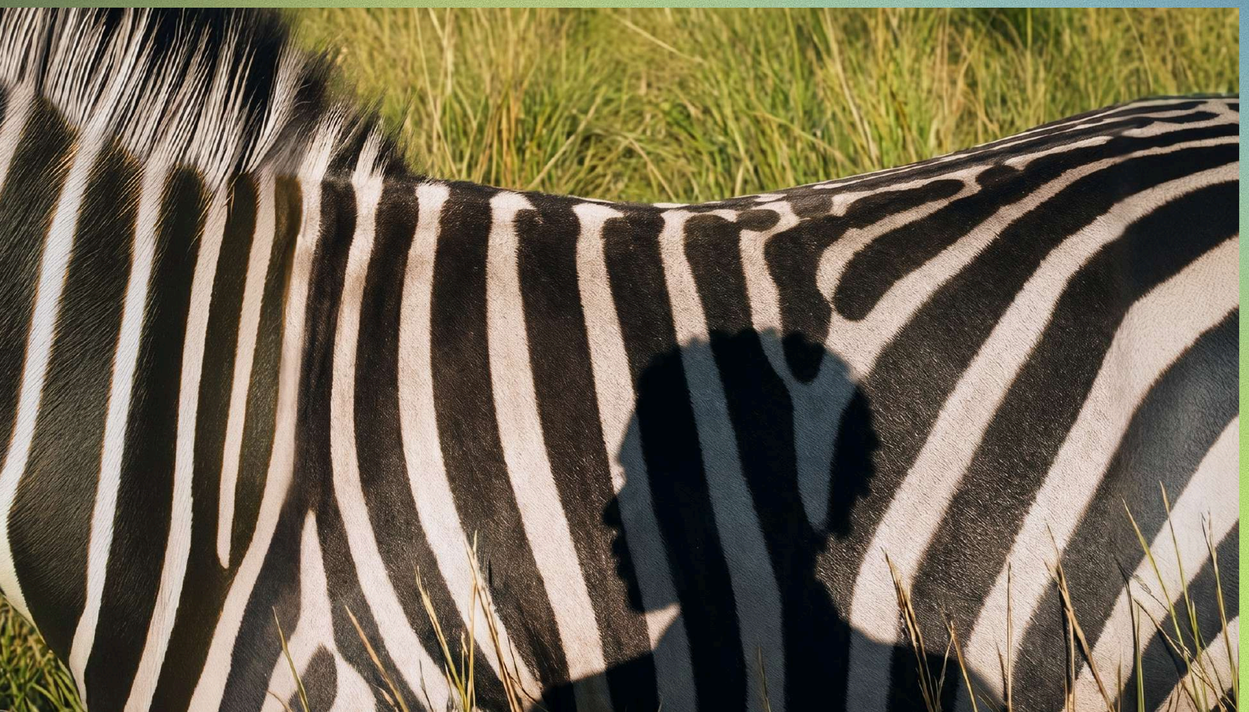
2. A striped or spotted coat looks purely decorative. It's not. In the right habitat, it can dissolve an animal's outline entirely, making it invisible unless you know what to look for.

3. Ornament or armor? In a moving herd, a zebra's stripes dazzle the predator, meaning the pattern is their protection.



Taste is built over years of looking at good work, making bad work and knowing the difference.

As output becomes cheaper to produce, the ability to set and defend a standard becomes one of the most valuable things a creative leader can bring to the table.

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Telling *real from generated* will be a core creative skill



Changing tides



④

Oldest trick in the ocean. Despite being colorblind, cuttlefish can read their surroundings and instantly transform their skin color and patterns to match.



Speaking of taste, here's the take nobody is talking about loudly enough yet: as AI-generated imagery floods every channel, someone in your organization needs to be able to look at a piece of work and say with real confidence whether it was made with intention or just made.

Audiences are already developing a sensitivity to work that feels hollow, even if they can't articulate why. The creative leader's job is increasingly to be the person in the room who can tell the difference.

"Good creative work is always **built on a foundation of curiosity, not assumption.** When everyone is pulling from the same digital banks and references, things start to look the same." says Alyssa Boisson, Executive Creative Director at Superside.

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"It becomes even more important for creatives  to draw inspiration from the real world—from culture, from people, from  places that exist outside of a prompt."

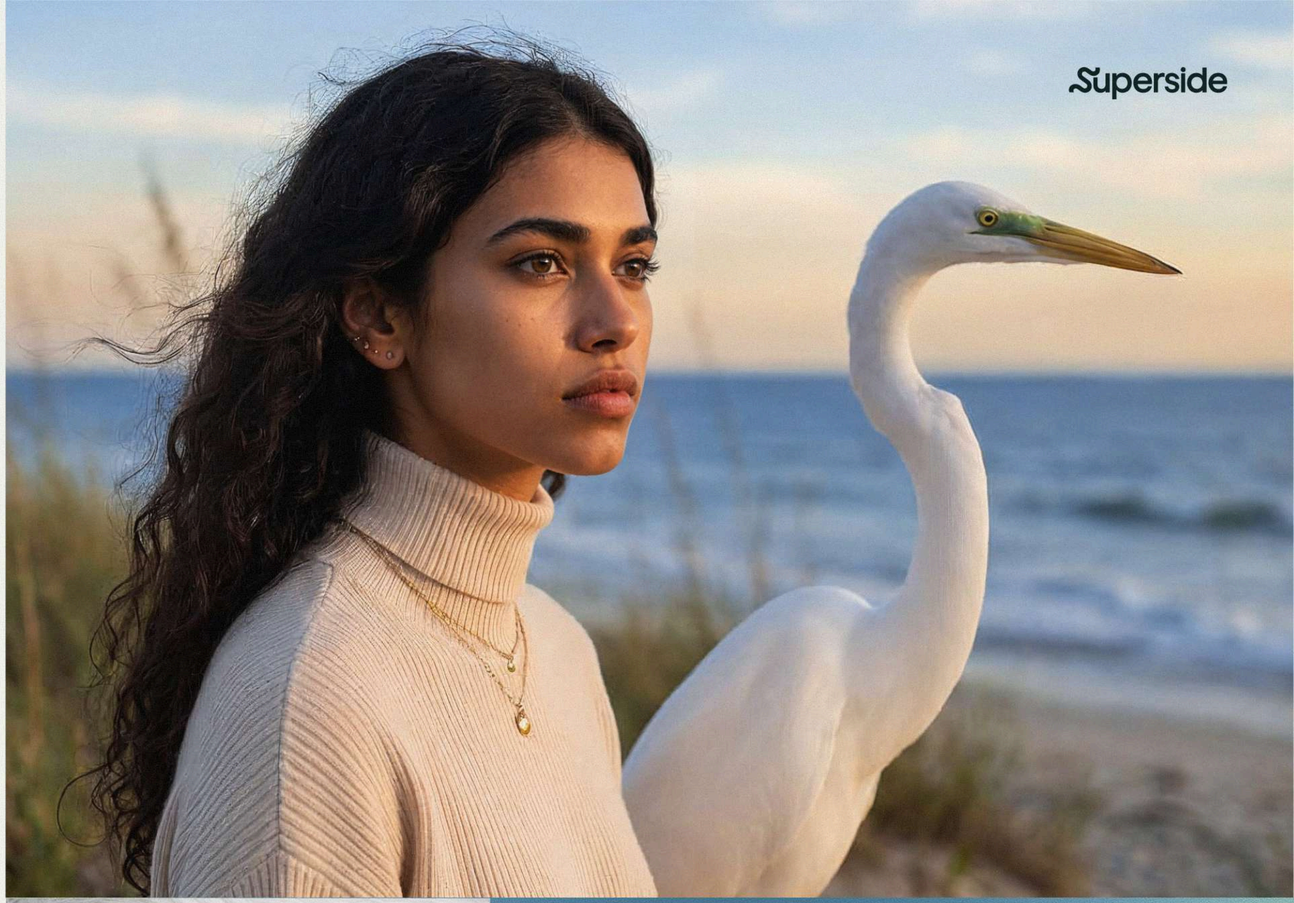
Alyssa Boisson
Executive Creative Director at Superside

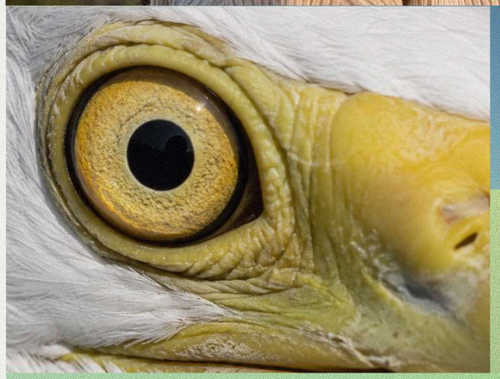
Building your own taste is like building your own high-quality data set to pull and remix from. The more niche, the better.

According to Jessica Rosenberg, Head of Brand at AirOps: **"AI is still a tool. The vision, the idea, and the creativity came from my team and I. That's where the magic and the power really come: when you have the creative vision, experience, and craft sensibility that the human contains, and when you infuse that into an AI machine, extraordinary results can happen."**

The creative leaders who build the most distinctive work in the next five years will be the ones who stayed clear on what the tool is for, and what it is not.

As output becomes easier to produce at scale, the ability to stand behind work that feels human becomes one of the most powerful things a creative team can offer.





5 Patience is the great egret's greatest weapon. To hunt, they can stand motionless for extraordinarily long periods, and then strike with a spear-like lunge.

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With AI on execution, *soft skills* are making a comeback



In three to five years, creative leaders expect AI to handle mostly or entirely without human input:

44% Image and visual generation from briefs



43% Editing, iteration and approval workflows

43% Creative strategy and campaign concepting

38% First-draft copy and content generation



That's a lot of ground. What it means in practice is that the creative skills hardest to automate are becoming the most strategically important ones to develop and protect.

"AI is really good at being deductive. The thing it can't do is think of a novel way of solving problems, or decide 'I'm not going to solve this problem because I think there's actually a different problem underneath it.' *That layer of human intelligence is, and will be, radically important."*



James Hurst
VP Global Executive Creative Director
at HelloFresh

Hiring for execution skills alone stops making sense when AI can execute. The criteria shift entirely—towards judgment, curiosity, the ability to ask better questions, and a hunger to push past the obvious answer.

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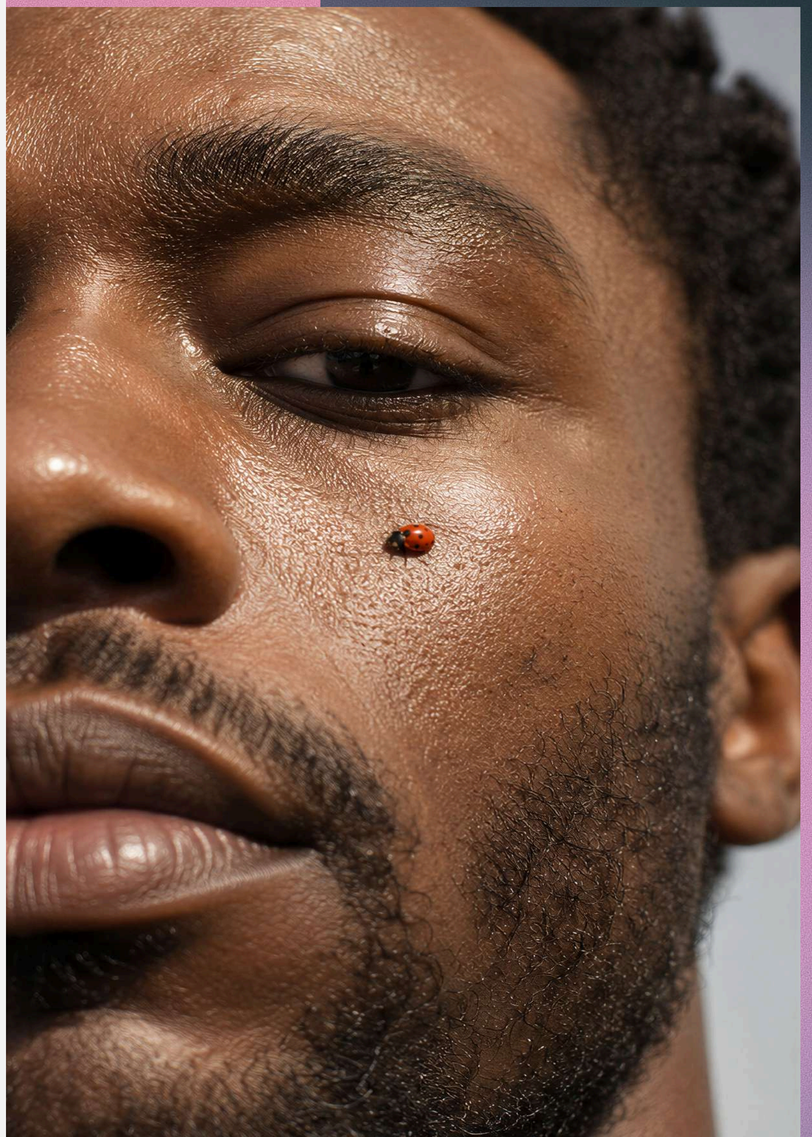
6 The tiny ladybug is surprisingly good at adapting; they live (and thrive) in almost any environment on earth, from rainforests to arid deserts.



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Tomorrow's creative leaders will be *closer to the work*

Creative symbiosis

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7 On the tundra, conserving energy is crucial. A caribou's hooves break through the frozen ground, exposing insects for the arctic fox who follows closely behind.

For a long time, progression meant moving away from making and moving into boardrooms, strategy decks and stakeholder management.

That model is breaking down:

47%

of creative leaders expect significant AI augmentation to their existing team structure

65%

expect AI-augmented generalist roles to dominate within three years



When threatened, musk oxen form a tight circle: calves at the center, horns facing out. Not the biggest herd, but every animal knows exactly where to stand.

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"I think we're going to start to see teams that are smaller and more focused. Eight years ago, I led a global creative team of twenty-plus people, and that was the norm. But now it's a five-person team. *You hire people that are T-shaped: deeply skilled in one area but capable across many."*



Jessica Rosenberg
Head of Brand at AirOps

In five years, it's highly likely that the most admired creative teams won't be the biggest ones in the room. What's replacing headcount and hierarchy is something leaner and more direct: one or two deeply experienced leaders working alongside a small, hyper-capable team where everyone makes things, and nobody hides behind a title.

PREDICTION 05: HERD MENTALITY

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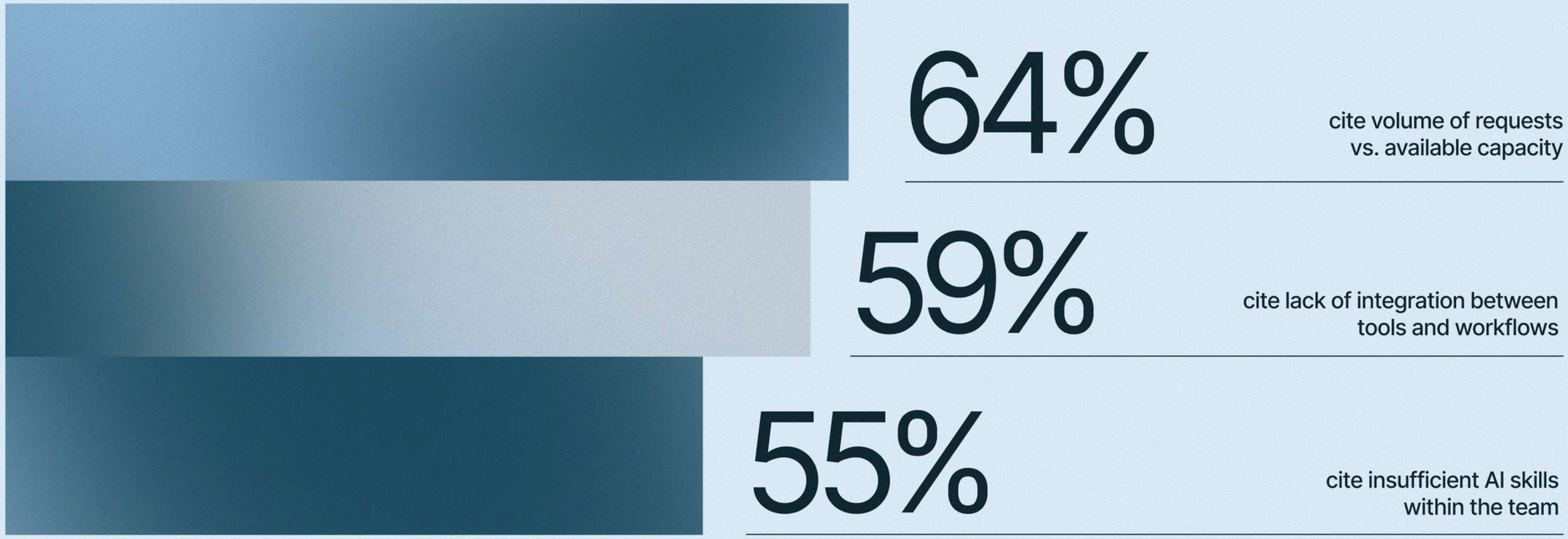
A team's *culture* will matter just as much as the *technology*



We asked creative leaders what would make the biggest single difference to how their teams operate and AI integration comes first **(35%)**, followed by automation and efficiency **(25%).**



That’s expected. But let’s take a closer look at what's actually blocking them right now:



64% cite volume of requests vs. available capacity

59% cite lack of integration between tools and workflows

55% cite insufficient AI skills within the team

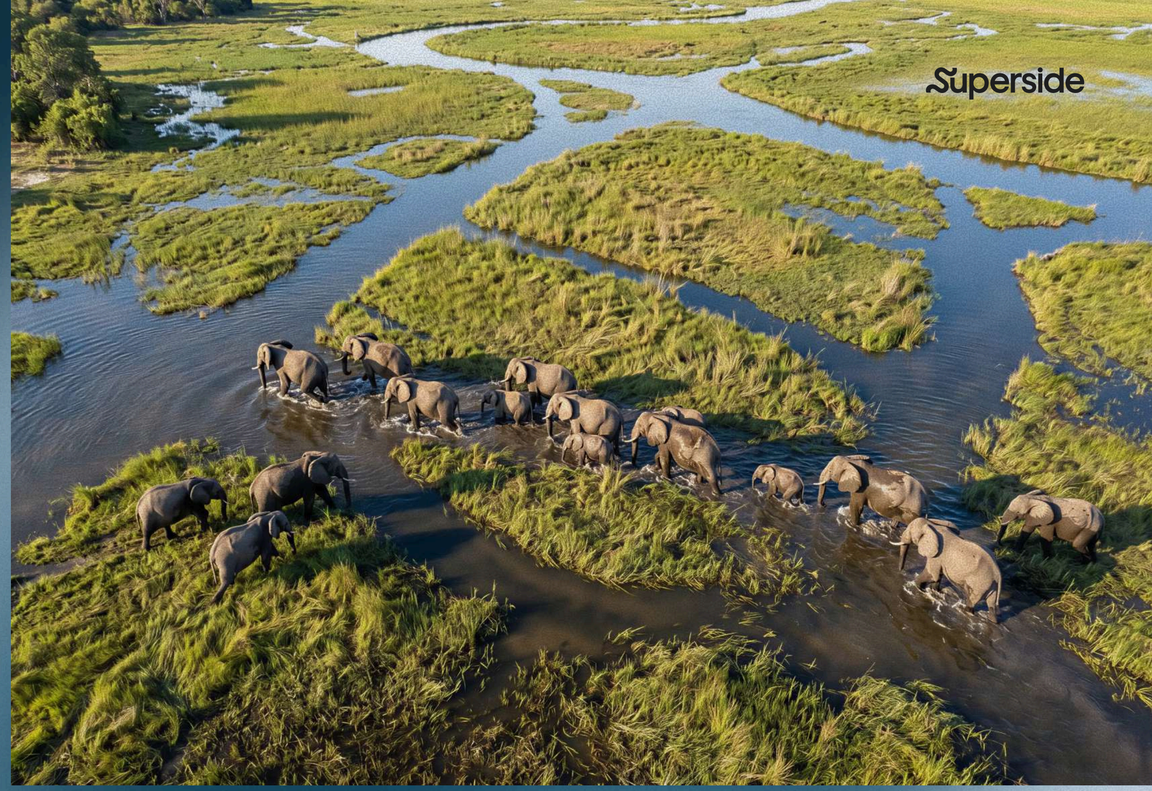
Most of those are culture problems:

trust, alignment, shared understanding of what quality output looks like.

“We've always been curators, but the way we do that is changing. *The level of responsibility is only going to increase.”*



Alyssa Boisson
Executive Creative Director at Superside



9 Elephant herds are led by the oldest female. The matriarch's value is her memory: decades of accumulated knowledge about the landscape, threats and where to find resources.

Team culture is about to become the most underrated competitive weapon in creative work.

The technology is a given, but the teams that align on what good looks like in an AI-assisted world, and build the trust to act on it, will pull ahead in ways that are very hard to catch up with.

OUR FINAL PREDICTION?

This next era of creative work belongs to the people *genuinely excited* to find out what they're capable of.



49%

of creative professionals think AI replacing creative roles entirely is the most overhyped story in the industry right now.

They're right. The leaders who thrive will be the ones who embrace AI as a tool to amplify creative output, rather than a replacement for the craft and judgment behind it.

The future is creatives who are more capable, more versatile, and more in demand than ever, leading smaller, sharper teams, making work that earns its place precisely because a person cared enough to make it matter.

So keep caring about the work. No matter what changes, creativity will never go out of style.

Based on a survey of 211 creative and marketing directors at enterprise companies (500+ employees), conducted May 2026.

For more AI-creative insights, visit superside.com

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