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THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX, WORK OUTSIDE THE OFFICE:

remote work as a creative working model

Master thesis

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ABSTRACT

In the creative industry, remote work is not an exceptional prerogative of freelancers anymore. Employees of advertising, design, marketing, and communication agencies have experienced working remotely since the beginning of 2020. The creative market tries to adapt to these changes and looks for a compromise. The aim of this study was to collect opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of remote and office-based work arrangements in the creative industry related to finance, communication, and working process features of each model. The qualitative approach was chosen to conduct the study. Twelve respondents shared their detailed answers to nine open questions. The findings reflected the influence of remote work implementation, but they didn't tilt towards one or another side, but a compromise of the mix of both models was proposed by most of the respondents. Overall, the research demonstrates positive views about the remote collaborations and hiring freelancers, still there are some negative issues and barriers for remote workers and freelancers that have to be overcome. The negative aspects relate to the lack of team spirit and of managers' open-mindedness, and to the unstable financial situation of freelancers. This study contributes to the academic society with the theoretical advancement of creative remote work research, and to professionals with the insights and practical methods to manage their remote work efficiently.

Key words: creative freelance, remote work, e-work, project-based work, digital nomads, creative business model, creative industry, associate partnership.

RESUMO

Na indústria criativa o trabalho remoto já não é uma prerrogativa exclusiva dos freelancers. Funcionários de agências de publicidade, design, marketing e comunicação têm vindo a desempenhar trabalho remoto desde o início de 2020. O mercado criativo tenta adaptar-se a estas mudanças e procura consensos entre as partes. O objetivo deste estudo foi recolher opiniões sobre as vantagens e desvantagens do trabalho remoto ou em escritório na indústria criativa, com base nas características financeiras, comunicacionais e laborais de cada modelo. Foi escolhida uma abordagem qualitativa na realização do estudo. Doze entrevistados proporcionaram respostas detalhadas a nove perguntas abertas. Os resultados refletiram a influência da implementação do trabalho remoto, mas não se inclinaram para um ou outro lado, tendo sido proposta uma combinação de ambos os modelos pela maioria dos entrevistados. No geral, a pesquisa demonstra pontos de vista otimistas quanto a colaborações remotas e contratação de freelancers, mas existem ainda alguns aspetos negativos e barreiras para trabalhadores remotos e freelancers que deverão ser ultrapassados. Os aspetos negativos estão relacionados com a falta de espírito de equipa e mente aberta por parte da gestão das empresas, assim como a instável situação financeira dos freelancers. Este estudo contribui para a comunidade académica com o avanço teórico da pesquisa referente ao trabalho criativo remoto e contribui para para a prática profissional através de perceções e métodos práticos que visam conduzir o trabalho remoto de forma mais eficiente.

Palavras-chave: freelance criativo, trabalho remoto, e-trabalho, trabalho por projetos, nómadas digitais, modelo económico criativo, indústria criativa, parceiros associados.

DEDICATION

The authors dedicate this paper to the ex-colleagues of one small creative agency that was probably way too innovative and open-minded for that moment and that place. It has rescinded overnight, and will never rise from the ashes, but the lesson has been learnt.

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INTRODUCTION

Thematic framework

In the creative industry, remote work is not an exceptional prerogative of freelancers anymore. Since the beginning of 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown most people, in this case, employees of advertising, design, marketing, and communication agencies have experienced working remotely. Step by step they got along with the tools and techniques for distant communication, organized their home offices, got used to presenting creative ideas via video conferences. And they got a taste for remote work.

Ubiquitous internet coverage and sudden opportunity to try working from anywhere caused by the global pandemic has brought diversity of business models, open-mindedness of business owners and flexibility of work arrangements in the creative industry to the next level.

The creative working process will never be the same again. Labor market has changed, and creative employees don't want to work with the usual schedule, they seek for more freedom of actions even being employed. Self-employed experts and freelancers have more opportunities to find projects from abroad than before. Creative companies need to adapt to these changes and find the compromise between sustainable but conservative working process and new employees' attitudes and expectations of freedom. Some creative employees still want to work from their offices, some go freelance, full-time remote, or to become digital nomads and travel with their equipment, always being in the "workation" mode.

Not many authors have researched the prominent topic of freelance, and there is a gap in scientific studies on creative remote collaborations and associate partnership, especially in the field of art and advertising. Hence, the academic society needs to do more research on this subject, and this study fulfills the empirical evidence and provides wider information about advantages and disadvantages of remote work in the creative industry based on practice and insights of creative freelancers, employees, and managers.

Research objectives

The aim of this study was to collect opinions about the work arrangements at the creative market and to build awareness about remote and freelance work for creative talents in the field of marketing, advertising, design, and video production. The research was carried out in the 2020-2021 period, right in the wake of the events, during the process of changes and new work arrangements establishment. It helped to collect the freshest memories and perceptions.

Methodology

The attitudes towards the remote collaboration of creative professionals and their employers and clients were investigated. The qualitative approach was chosen to conduct the study. Freelancers, creative employees, and managers were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of remote work and office-based work from their professional perspective. The respondents were from different countries and therefore with different mentalities and working traditions. They had to compare both models and to come up with the differences of benefits and drawbacks that each model had. 12 respondents, 4 per each target group, shared their detailed answers to 9 open questions. Some of them received the questionnaire and replied via text responses, some of them were interviewed live.

The findings reflected the influence of remote work implementation, but they didn't tilt towards remote or office-based side completely. A compromise of the mix of both models was proposed by most of the respondents as a conclusion.

Contribution of the study

This study contributes both to the academic society and to creative professionals and managers who deal with creative freelancers and remote workers. Theoretical advancement of creative remote work research contributes to the literature, gathering the issues related to the creative industry in one thesis. The participants of this research provided the community with practical methods of efficient work. Creative workers can learn about the popularity of the

remote working model and implement the insights from the literature and the practical methods in their daily work. Management professionals can use the findings of this study to improve their projects, enlarge their polls of creative workers and broaden the horizons of their companies.

Structure of the work

The study consists of the conceptual theoretical approach to the topic, followed by the explanation of the research method, then continued with the presentation of the respondents and the results based on their opinions, and ends with the main conclusions, constraints, and suggestions to future research.

1. REMOTE WORK: BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTS

1.1. Historical background

Remote is not a new word in the world of proprietorship, especially in the field of art and advertising, creative freelancers have existed for centuries. Remote work and freelancing have been practiced in the creative industries for a long time (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019), but now they are on the rise as creatives can do their job being anywhere using technologies (Charalampous et al., 2019).

Woronkowicz and Noonan (2019) addressed the history, saying that freelancing is an old, if not ancient, business model. It looks like an established pattern for creative talents to choose the path of independence. In the Middle Ages, salaried artists worked mainly in European aristocracies, while the majority of artists usually were freelancers earning money at workshops, medieval fairs, and street markets. Nowadays, artists keep the entrepreneurial mindset, they tend to depart from traditional approaches (de Guillet, 2000) and create innovative products (Wijnberg & Gemser. 2000). Schumpeter (1942) developed a theory of creative destruction, meaning that creating novelties can disrupt the regular flow of economy, as artists being entrepreneurs always try new ways to generate new disruptive ideas.

Scholars noted that flexible work arrangements began attracting attention in the mid-1970s. As Evans, Kunda, and Barley (2004) described, those years women started to get managerial positions with more responsibilities, and it caused family conflicts as men and women worked 40 hours per week and didn't have enough time for kids. In the 80s "work-from-home" was a limited opportunity to gain a certain level of flexibility at employed work that helped female workers to find a work-childcare balance (Sako, 2021).

"Work-from-anywhere" model is more flexible and based on the technological breakthrough (Choudhury, 2020; Sako, 2021). Mari Sako (2021, p. 22) believes that "tasks, not jobs, will be subject to remote working," and Lund et al. (2020) agrees with this statement. Artists, designers, people who work in entertainment fields, sports and media seem to be less

interested in being attached only to their offices, and companies have already gotten used to hiring specialists remotely to deal with tasks, not full-time occupations (Sako, 2021).

Companies have been attracting independent creatives more and more since 2000 (Flinchbaugh et al., 2020). The recent movement towards working environment flexibility was stimulated by the trend of creating better work-life balance for the employees (Shin et al., 2009), the prominence of remote work on work-life integration (Beauregard & Basile, 2016) and, thus, productivity for the companies as telework affects the overall performance (Popovici & Popovici, 2020). Scholars admit that managers will keep hiring freelancers more and more as it helps companies to reduce their costs (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Connelly & Gallagher, 2006) and let experts gain desirable flexibility of work life (Spreitzer et al., 2017).

The possibility to work remotely, away from the offices, is mostly connected to the widespread adoption of the variety of new appearing technological tools that are widely available to people and companies (Ter Hoeven & Van Zoonen, 2015). Boselie (2010) stated that workers are engaged in remote work from their homes or offices in order to reduce commuting. The modern world of globalization with the ubiquitous internet coverage and growing amount of well-equipped coworking places allows working wherever and whenever using laptops, tablets and smartphones (Maitland & Thomson, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused big changes in the number of people who started working remotely in 2020, accelerating a worldwide telework revolution for all the businesses, fields, and even countries. Lockdown was intended to stop spreading the virus, and universal and pervasive telecommuting became a new normal for most people, even if their jobs were not naturally prepared to be remote.

The future of the creative work setting after the COVID-19 pandemic is over is hard to predict. There are speculations in the scientific society based on different observations and human insights. For example, Stef (2020) thinks that people try to keep their work and personal lives separated, and being tired after the lockdown they crave the community and

networking, so they will be happy to go back to the office for a scenery-changing and socializing commute. Emily Heaslip (2020) and to Harvard Business Review (2020) consider that while some employees go back to their offices, some can go to coworking spaces, and the rest will work from home or from anywhere. Networking and collaboration will continue if companies adapt accordingly (Heaslip, 2020).

1.2. Market reacts to remote

The labor market is changing rapidly, these changes affect work principles in creative companies (Zadik et al., 2019), and it is significant for organizations to be prepared for it.

There are specific knowledge and skillsets that either require a lot of training for the in-house team, or are quite narrow, and there are moments when it is more efficient and cost-effective to hire an experienced contractor. As Flinchbaugh and his colleagues (2020, p. 2) mentioned in their study, "Contractors are often hired to bring expertise to specific project areas."

Any kind of creative freelance or contractor work is considered as a "nonstandard" arrangement. Kalleberg (2000) compares it to a "standard" arrangement which means that an employee works 40 h/week being supervised by a manager at the workplace.

Alternative work arrangements allow companies to crowdsource contingent workers from around the globe and rely on software applications to divide tasks and supervise processes (Schwartz, 2018). Some companies (GitLab, f.e.) have already implemented the work-from-anywhere lifestyle, they abandoned the offices and switched everyone to work effectively remotely in more than 60 countries (Choudhury, 2020). Some countries, f.i., Estonia and Barbados, have created a new type of employment visa for digital nomads (Choudhury, 2020), mobile experts equipped with digital devices can work anytime, anywhere (Kleinrock, 1996).

Creative agencies are project-based, and their workload relies upon the team members' special talent and creativity (Hotho & Champion, 2011; Lampel & Germain, 2016), experience and skills (Turok, 2003), and also on the following current trends (Hotho & Champion, 2011). Each of these specialties and niche skills can become added values to distinguish from the others. As the success of an agency fully depends on its creative minds well-being, the companies may choose business models that provide their talents with the best environment. Even if they need to leave the nest.

In 2020, Advertising Age, a global portal that shares news and data on marketing and media made a list of the best places to work that year. It was a list of top 5 advertising agencies, and 3 of them mentioned that they provided their team members with the opportunity to work from home or remotely. Namely, #1 on the list was TINUITI Digital agency, and its creative workers have a flexible schedule and 27% of them work remotely (Advertising Age, 2020). Remote looks like a new normal option for creative agencies.

Telework can be organized in various ways. Leonardi, Treem and Jackson (2010) identified four options of working remotely:

- from home or other location, but not from the office;

- some time from home, some time from the main office;

- from a branch office or at the client's while the rest of the team is at the main office;

- from another city or abroad, far from the rest of the team.

Though, even creative employers can still be conservative to allow employees to work remotely. They still suggest the same persistent contracts with a full-time presence at workplaces — from 9:00 to 18:00 from Monday till Friday and 25 days of vacations. But the dynamics of freelance for different occupations and industries (Markusen, 2004; Markusen et al., 2008) leads to creating effective economic development with the encouragement of proprietorship (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019).

1.3. Hybrid model

Creative workers may keep being based at one same agency and freelance, that is what hybrid employment for creatives is about. Scholars see freelancers as a hybrid of employees and entrepreneurs — being hired by companies they still take a risk and look for side projects to apply their skills somehow else (Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013; Huđek et al., 2020).

The rules of the hybrid model were slightly developed in 2020, as lots of non-creative workers had to accept the hybrid model and see what it was due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and lockdown. Big social research institutions explored the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and came to a conclusion, that workers did actually like the hybrid work model, and companies understand that they have to react.

COVID-19 has destroyed barriers and suggested technological changes to popularize remote work (Lund et al., 2020). If digitalization of the working processes was slow and gradual before the pandemic, being not for all, now almost every person in the world tested and practiced telework. The pandemic lockdowns showed that many people don't in fact need to be together with their colleagues on-site to do their jobs — employees, teams, entire companies can work remotely, and the COVID-19 crisis has opened business owners' eyes to the idea of adopting the "work-from-anywhere" model (Choudhury, 2020).

Slack's Future Forum research showed that only 12% of knowledge workers want to come back to the office, and 72% prefer to remain the hybrid remote model, and this willingness is stronger for young workers (Elliott, 2021). They also stated that the feeling of belonging to a company can be achieved remotely.

McKinsey Global Institute researchers (Alexander et al., 2021) state that companies understand that the future is more hybrid, that it will remain for highly educated and well-paid professionals, and that the process of hiring should be reimagined.

The article by Marie Puybaraud (2021) is published at the World Economic Forum and comes with several positive statements about the hybrid model that has been accepted massively in 2020 due to the COVID-19 restrictions:

- that "we can already celebrate the birth of hybrid work, and cry "long live remote working;"

- that "work will not be somewhere you go, but something you do;"

- that collaborators in the future will be "a dispersed, digitally enabled, liquid workforce."

Lund and his colleagues (2020) ran research about the moment when the COVID-19 pandemic started, and many workers went remote. They point out that hybrid work affects urban economies, as there is less commuting, less gasoline consumption, people care about buying new cars less and they eat out not that often.

Still, as the pandemic shows, most tasks in most jobs can be handled remotely, but still, people need people — closeness to co-workers hurries up and intensifies the brainstorming and feedback process, and finding the balance here will help most companies switch to a hybrid model that combines remote and in-house working (Sako, 2021). Even the work that needs close collaboration can be done remotely successfully, but an impactful managerial effort is needed (Makarius et al., 2021).

1.4. Coworking spaces and remote connection tools

Freelancing attracts skilled experts who seek the freedom to work from anywhere, but only 27% work remotely — at home, coffee shops or co-working spaces (Sako, 2021). Creatives may work without offices, but they may need community, networking, and socialization.

Lately, the drastic global rise of the concept of coworking spaces and shared workspaces has been observed (Wijngaarden et al., 2020). Coworking space is a workplace available with a membership that brings together different professionals who work on different projects and different companies (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Spinuzzi (2012) called it "working alone together."

Coworking is all about community (Spinuzzi et al., 2019). For coworkers, the chance to join a community and socialize is more important than networking opportunities (Brown, 2017). Coworking communities may foster productivity and collaboration (Garrett et al., 2017) or simply provide a non-profit and informal environment (Alacovska, 2018). Coworking spaces enable sharing the knowledge and experience along with members, creating strong relationships among independent coworkers without competition (Wijngaarden et al., 2020). It covers the needs of face-to-face interaction and knowledge absorbing from colleagues.

Networking is massive nowadays, it's essential for creatives. Project-based workers network locally, wherever they are (Neff, 2012; Saxenian, 1999). Friends, connections nearby and previous collaborations that are kept in touch — all these factors help creative freelancers find new projects (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012). And reputation plays the main role here. When word-of-mouth is not enough to find new projects, staffing agencies, and online networking platforms (such as LinkedIn and Fiverr) help as mediators between freelancers and clients in certain fields (Benner, 2003; Cappelli, 2008).

Creatives don't have to carry projects from their homeland wherever they go. Digital nomads use different online freelancing platforms such as Upwork or Fiverr to find new projects and deal with clients directly (Frey, 2013). These platforms are easy to use for both sides, they are user-friendly and transmit profiles, skills, and prices. The popularity of these platforms is caused by the "work 3.0" concept, meaning that certain work is in high demand and can be done online (Popiel, 2017). In 2013 Frey predicted that in 10 years around 75% of millennials will freelance.

Norbäck and Styhre (2019) interviewed freelance journalists and found out that most of them commuted to offices, usually coworking spaces. They noticed that freelancers work from home at the beginning of their remote career as it requires additional spendings. But with time they realize that it's worth extra costs. The interviewees shared their opinions about the necessity to distinguish work and home and to switch off, to delegate technical issues to the coworking space team, to be a part of a community and benefit from it, to network, to collaborate and to build a productive routine (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019). Sharing projects with coworkers or hiring each other happen regularly (Wijngaarden et al., 2020).

In 2020, Wijngaarden, Hitters and Bhansing did an investigation on fruitful knowledge exchanging in coworking spaces. They found out that working in the same room doing different jobs, having parties, and playing foosball together can be enough not only to avoid loneliness but also to create a constant buzz. This buzz boosts knowledge and expertise exchanging, sharing ideas and opinions, and it helps to learn about new technologies and innovations and implement them in creative projects (Wijngaarden et al., 2020). This buzz is a disruptive push to creativity!

Distant teamwork requires the usage of way more platforms, applications, and messengers. Communication on the projects and brainstorming is hard to deal with remotely. Applications like Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Google Hangouts are helpful here, but they are better for those colleagues who are not a lot far from each other. Choudhury (2020) found out that one or two hours difference in time zones between offices of a big company reduced the number of video meetings by 9.2%, colleagues tended to make occasional calls, but gathering the whole group together for an online meeting was almost impossible.

The proper tools to telework emerged several decades ago and have been expanding since then (Popovici & Popovici, 2020). The possibility to work remotely, away from the office chair is enabled by an outbreak of the high-performance individual technological means (Ter Hoeven & Van Zoonen, 2015). Thanks to technological advancement knowledge workers can perform from anywhere via portable devices (Maitland & Thomson, 2014). Computers,

tablets, smartphones, cameras, drones — everything can be put in a suitcase or a backpack to travel with their creative owners around the world.

To cope with time differences distant team members can use online whiteboards such as Miro, platforms like Slack channels or shared Google documents. The participants can work on the online documents whenever they are ready, and "the contributions to the shared work must be visible to other contributors" (Choudhury et al., 2020, p. 8). This way remote workers share early ideas easier, feedbacks are quick, and there is way less pressure to fine-tune the ideas before sharing than it usually is before any kind of a formal team meeting; Choudhury (2020, p. 64) called it "blameless problem-solving."

The tools to work together at a distance cover so many needs that actual presence at the office may seem unnecessary. They support such collective creativity boosting techniques like mind mapping or brainstorming (Liegl, 2014). Lund et al. (2020) are looking forward to virtual watercoolers appearing to fulfill the socialization experience.

1.5. Career paths concepts

Handy (1985) called freelancers of those times "portfolio workers" as they worked for themselves to build portfolios of their professional activity. Even working together on projects, individuals distinguish their parts of the collective work to promote themselves and their skillsets later.

As Gretchen Spreitzer and her colleagues (2017) discovered, all people manage their careers individually — no matter if they are full-time employed or freelance. They can't expect career advancement from companies only, they are the designers of their careers (Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013). It happens because companies can't provide employees with proper career growth (Bidwell, 2009), especially when the companies are small and all the top roles are already assigned, so there is no opportunity to grow.

Knowing that employees face the direction of freelance as a possibility to get projects outside their current company rather than within it (O'Mahony & Bechky 2006). This is how eventually experts start moonlighting and become associates and independent contractors. To be in demand, especially abroad, freelancers have to be active and develop new skills that are required by the market (Strauss et al., 2011). Every unique practice is a competitive advantage to them. O'Mahony and Bechky (2006) described this situation as a career progression paradox: workers have to have great skills to find a job and have to find a great job to improve their skills.

Not everyone cares about career promotion, though. People may choose their profession because they truly love it, they don't want to change anything, as promotion usually impose more managerial obligations and it doesn't mean a successful achievement to creative minds (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009). Scholars call such an unusual career trajectory "boundaryless careers" (Hall & Las Heras, 2010; Spreitzer et al., 2017). It means changing employers and clients quite often, keeping the beloved job as it is, preferring temporary creative projects and denying promotions for personal motives (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009).

There is another concept that exists side by side with the boundaryless careers — "protean careers," that require pro-active self-management and seeking for a purpose (Spreitzer et al., 2017). It is considered to be more ambitious, compelling, and to give its followers a better balance between work and life (Direnzo et al., 2015) and "higher human, social and psychological capital" (Spreitzer et al., 2017, p. 492). These are the dimensions that help creative freelancers measure their achievements (Van den Born & Van Witteloostuijn, 2013).

Parker and the colleagues (2009) developed another concept — "intelligent career" that is composed of "ways of knowing," and all these pillars are linked and interrelated:

• knowing why — understanding the motivation and purpose;

• knowing how — implementing the expertise and skillset;

• knowing whom — networking and keeping professional connections.

In David Throsby's (2006) research the concept of the "production function" was developed. In this model, creativity, talent, time the artist spends at creative work, education, and experience are considered as inputs of an artistic process the same way as, f.e., technology, equipment and supplies are inputs in the non-artistic production process (Throsby, 2006).

These concepts bring us to a broad notion called "smart jobs": career paths that provide fruitful evolving networks and appealing job opportunities; and stimulate followers to challenge themselves and find the best version of themselves (Hall & Las Heras, 2010).

The study by Bögenhold and Klinglmair (2017) showed that more than half of Austrian companies consist of one single person. The authors justify this popularity of creating nano-companies by the fact that there are not enough opportunities, and there is a willingness to work with no boss above.

Binder and Coad (2013) have come up with the thought-provoking findings:

- those who come to self-employment from traditional jobs are more satisfied with their life than those who choose freelance from being unemployed;

- the level of satisfaction with life for unemployed who go freelance and who are hired by a company is the same.

These findings helped authors define two types of self-employment — self-employment for opportunity and self-employment from necessity (Binder & Coad, 2013).

2. CREATIVE FREELANCER PROFILES

2.1. Knowledge workers

Drucker (1999) was the first who came up with the classic term of "knowledge worker." Knowledge workers are the kind of workers who gain and apply information during the working process (Davenport et al., 1996). They are high-level professionals with enriched human capital due to education and practical experience (Baitenizov et al., 2019). They never stop learning, they always evolve and grow personally and professionally. They accumulate knowledge, they share knowledge, they are creators of new knowledge — and they offer qualified personal services for remuneration (Strebkov et al., 2016; Baitenizov et al., 2019).

Zadik and his colleagues (2019, p. 41) noted that highly professional knowledge workers choose a self-employment path to be able to control their time and "to put their professional skills to work." They are autonomous, they have freedom of action and more decision-making responsibilities (Pyöriä, 2005). They tend to use technologies and innovations to work on their projects without being attached to the office (Hislop, 2013) and manage their time efficiently to maintain a better work-life balance (Bentley & Yoong, 2000).

These top-freelancers represent unique skills, talent, and specific knowledge as human capital, and the companies hire them for their valuable and rare expertise for high remuneration (Zadik et al., 2019). "They're increasingly trusted by corporations to do mission-critical work... super-temps are growing in number and we think they're on the verge of changing how business works" (Miller & Miller, 2012, p. 51). Their work is creative and abstract (El-Farr, 2009), and it is hard to standardize (Pyöriä, 2005).

The difference between knowledge workers and non-knowledge workers is vague, as all kinds of jobs involve some knowledge (Alvesson, 2001). Frenkel and colleagues (1995) distinguished them the way that knowledge workers are theoretical, talented, and creative while routine workers are more contextual as they don't have to be creative to do their job.

Recent researches assume that artists value emotional motivations toward work rather than rational motivations. The Work-preference model presented by Throsby (1994) showed that labor in its common sense is not just a means to income for artists, as they are driven by satisfaction while creating art. So, to evaluate the artists' preferences in work both financial and non-financial benefits should be measured (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019).

The research ran by Woronkowicz and Noonan in 2019 shows that creatives go freelance, then switch to self-employment, and then go back to freelance more often than other professionals. According to their study, particular behavioral and demographic patterns distinguish a potential freelancer:

- creative freelancing have been followed mostly by white married college graduated men;

- or part-time employees with several occupations;

- married women may go freelance to follow their dream to be artists, but being risky and independent from a spousal support is one of the main features of a creative freelancer;

- creatives tend to start their own business when they live close to a large artistic community.

Not all the demographic features matter for becoming a creative freelancer. Creativity doesn't correlate with age, as it doesn't base on the job experience, but on talent, and a college degree doesn't give creativity with a diploma — it is not what is being taught in schools, but it can be developed, trained, practiced and eventually unleashed (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019).

2.2. Digital nomads

A digital nomad is a roaming knowledge worker who is equipped with a laptop or other portable devices and works wherever — coffee shops, airport lounges, transport means, beach, etc. (Kleinrock, 1996; Liegl, 2014). Nomadic technics, mobile technologies, mobility,

better transportation, and globalization help making urban creative freelancers' work more efficient (Liegl, 2014). Nomadicity is on the steady rise because of the necessity to start self-employment and because of the non-employer companies (Spinuzzi, 2012).

So why do creatives become digital nomads if they don't really have to travel?

The possibility to be mobile and work from wherever seems very appealing, freelancers and digital nomads consider "the freedom to live anywhere in the world as an important plus" (Choudhury, 2020, p. 61). The author also underlined that this feeling is mostly shared by millennials, they would like to become digital nomads to travel and work remotely. Creative freelancer's lifestyle doesn't have to be attached to a location, they can work and travel or relocate temporarily for a project (Markusen, 2006). Work-from-anywhere lets creatives keep their good jobs while dealing with immigration as moving abroad usually affects the ability to find a decent job (Choudhury, 2020) competing on the new labor market with locals.

One of the reasons to change locations is the desire to be surrounded by beautiful and inspiring things and places. Creative people value aesthetics and good taste, they expect the environment to stimulate their creativity and to relax their eyes without disturbing tasteless elements (Reckwitz, 2012). Creative minds about the place: as ideas can be inspired by anything, the place and eye-catchy details there affect productiveness a lot (Liegl, 2014), and not any space can match their expectations and taste.

Also, as Michael Liegl (2014) notes, not every place is made for digital nomads — not all the cafe owners are happy to see a person working there for hours, using Wi-Fi and electricity to charge devices, and paying for just one coffee. So, the process of finding the best place to work is quite a quest.

Liegl (2014) considered laptops to be a kind of ticket to run away the better places, a tool for short-term escapism. The author interviewed creative knowledge workers who didn't need

any teamwork, on the contrary, needed silence and being on their own. But such loneliness is very subjective when a creative person is traveling.

Any kind of shared workspaces, be it coworking spaces, coffee shops, or open-plan offices, create interruption and lack of privacy (Ashkanasy et al., 2014). But the fact that independent contributors prefer them rather than working from home means that people need people around to be productive (Garrett et al. 2017), these places have some noise and life, there are eye-catching things and scraps of distant conversations to boost creativity. Michael Liegl (2014) observed that creative digital nomads like to work from "happening places," where the environment is full of dynamics and things going on. The author's interviewees also claimed that being with their laptops in public places was forcing them to work harder, as they felt that everyone was watching them. And even when no one is around them there in a coffee shop, nomadic creatives may share a picture with their location on social media, making the followers being there virtually (Liegl, 2014).

Creative nomads have the privilege to choose different places to work from, and these choices will be based on the complexity of factors and feelings (Liegl, 2014) — from the mood and weather to the level of hunger or caffeine calling. For a creative freelancer, every place can become a workplace — a piece of copy can be written in a cafe between the courses, photos or videos can be edited on a train as trips take several hours and work can help kill the time.

Michael Liegl (2014) also came to an interesting observation that creative nomads feel more productive on the way, on trains, planes, etc. Creative people find inspiration in the monotonous trip enjoying the opportunities of transport means: having enough time for being by themselves, with less interruption and with nice views to observe (Liegl, 2014).

After traveling around creative nomads may decide to settle down for a longer period. Following the study by Jinliao He and his colleagues (2018, p. 310) and their questioning "where is creativity?" it can be noticed, that creative talents choose both urban and rural environments. People are different, and the creative amenities they may value the most are

different: f.i., facilities for social networking, opportunities for a bohemian lifestyle, cultural diversity, picturesque landscape, even better air quality may influence their choice (He et al., 2018). However, the countryside makes freelancers less concentrated, and they contribute to a local economy less (Argent et al., 2013).

Creative talents tend to choose advantageous pro-artistic clusters with similar professionals and industries (Markusen & Schrock, 2006) to have opportunities to network, to share ideas (Becker, 1982), to collaborate, and to brainstorm. These places can be far from their offices, homelands, or clients' headquarters.

The agglomerations with high artistic concentration enhance the likelihood of creative entrepreneurship and partnerships between co-locating creatives (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019). Also, a trendy location in a happening city is an added value to the creatives' personal brands (Pratt, 2000).

2.3. Associate partners

An associate partnership is the way freelancers with a specific set of human capital (knowledge and skillset) work on particular projects.

> It involves both a different way of thinking about the business and a radical restructuring of its operations. In some ways, it is a modern vision of the guilds that were the first commercial creative establishments (Foote, 2009).

The associate model is based on employee profit-sharing. Agencies save on taxes, as their partners are not employees, and partners have freedom of action and can earn more because they may "work not for a salary but for a commission on each project they are given responsibility for" (Foote, 2009).

High-skilled contractors sell their expertise to short-term projects (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Flinchbaugh et al., 2020). They can be hired as associates by creative agencies, but they can deal directly with clients as freelancers (Osnowitz, 2010). Usually, their wage is calculated not per month, but per hour or per project (Cappelli & Keller, 2013).

Project-based collaboration is a middle ground between employment with its bonuses (job security, health and pension benefits, career ladder) and self-reliance (Kalleberg, 2009; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988) with a certain level of risk (De Witte, 1999; Kalleberg, 2009; Sennett, 1998).

From time to time collaborating with an associate is an important decision to increase the growth of the company, boost sales or add helpful hands for the employees (Gerber, 2006).

Gerber (2006) explained the necessity of hiring an associate partner as employees can experience burnout because of the day-to-day intense work; thus, revenues begin to decrease, and business owners can add new specialists that can bring fresh mindset and vision, enthusiasm, offer additional services and assume functions that other employees are not good at or don't like doing.

> Many practitioners feel that they […] lack […] brainstorming, needed to build the business. Or, it might be a situation in which other area practitioners have skills in certain areas that have given them a competitive advantage. A new associate might bring in an expertise in certain areas […] that will generate more revenue from the existing […] base (Gerber, 2006).

As Slack et al. (2014) stated, an employer should consider not only the technical competence and enthusiasm of a future associate but also the period of collaboration. For the associate, such a partnership meant upgrading his/her communicating and practical skills necessary for career development.

According to the case study described by Slack et al. (2014), the parties agreed to start the collaboration with two years and the possibility to prolong for the third year, and such a period enables a long term relationship between the associate and the employer, and also gives time to plan succession (Slack et al., 2014).

The authors mentioned the steps of the involvement of an associate partner:

• agree on the pattern and the deadlines of activities and materials delivery;

• involve the associate to the project and documentation;

• provide the associate partner with the necessary and useful employer's materials.

Slack et al. (2014) case study was about an associate practitioner in a university, the authors came up with a conclusion that although academic staff had relevant knowledge to share with students, the associate partner even with no previous teaching experience but with the practical skills managed to gain students' respect and attention by sharing valuable personal insights that can be implemented in the students' future careers. This flair of applied knowledge and skills can impress and influence employees — they can learn new from an external person highly qualified and developed in his or her specialization.

Pentagram boutique-looking world-largest independent design studio with a global reach (Carson, 2017) is the first and the most famous company with an associate partnership model in the creative world. Five co-founders opened a design boutique in London in 1972 with a unique business model – equal partners were co-operating and sharing profit, knowledge, skills, and workspace (Carson, 2017). Now Pentagram consists of 21 small studios worldwide with 170 partners, each of which brings his or her unique style, ideas, and visions, which makes Pentagram highly diverse (Carson, 2017).

Pentagram rejects everything connected to corporative style, cherishing the feeling of independence and equality, but not anyone can become a Pentagram partner. Carson (2017) found out that the quality of work plays the most important role, the partner should be able to leave a mark with his or her projects, but the personality affects the final decision of choosing a person. Pentagram positions itself as not just an agency and job, but a family, so the associate partners are chosen to match the beliefs and values of the Pentagram community (Carson, 2017).

2.4. Different professions, same patterns

Scholars studied freelance workers in different fields, and the same behavioral patterns and mindset seem to drive creative workers to go freelance. Bencsik and Chuluun (2021, p. 357) found a polarity in the hedonic lifestyle of self-employed — they "are more likely to experience both positive (such as happiness, enjoyment, and smiling) and negative (such as sadness, anger, and stress) feelings than paid employees."

Intentionally or not, self-employed people are real control freaks — they have the complete responsibility for making decisions, time management, and skills applications, and it can affect their welfare in a good or bad way, unpredictably (de Lange et al., 2003).

Those who start their freelance career tend to ask their friends to share recommendations around their circles of contacts, but another networking source prevails:

> … ex-colleagues, as those people in a position to comment on the quality of an individual's work, become the dominant form of contact used to secure either direct work offers, recommendations or general job information (Blair, 2001, p. 160).

All the creative freelancers have to network hard, attend seminars, events and afterparties to make contacts, as not all the projects are advertised, but the opportunities can be told about as a friendly gesture (Skillset, 1996).

Studies on freelance journalists (Edström & Ladendorf, 2012; Norbäck & Styhre, 2019) and contract collaborators in the field of media (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010) show that they cherish their professional freedom and flexibility, understanding that their work is not well paid, precarious and with no job security. Being a copywriter or writer doesn't require a lot of equipment, and such a work can be done from wherever, but this niche is rather competitive.

The study on freelance translators showed that freelancers depended on their skillsets, fields of expertise and on the ability to manage the variables in the formula of success — "client

base, workflow and rates of pay" (Fraser & Gold, 2001, p. 695). This notion in this study can be considered related to creative fields as well.

Usually, video production is a project-based process, and professionals related to this field (film directors, cameramen, casting directors, producers, and managers) are freelancers (Langham, 1996). They may create hybrid partnerships — production studios — and work on projects in teams, but they are open to other collaborations independently.

Freelancers in the media, design and arts try to flatter their clients and constantly shift between clients, agencies, and production styles to get new projects (Platman, 2004; Storey et al., 2005; Gold & Mustafa, 2013; Shevchuk & Strebkov, 2018). They try to keep their clients at any cost, sometimes these strategies can even hurt their welfare. Gold and Mustafa (2013, p. 198) called this phenomenon "client colonization" — when freelancers adjust to the clients' working process, needs, and deadlines, being alerted 24/7.

Good earnings and good locations with a high potential to get a project — basically this makes any self-employed happy (Bencsik & Chuluun, 2021). Following the same study, an interesting fact was found: education does not help to gain success and happiness being a freelancer it is the other way round, "the highly educated self-employed individuals are less satisfied" (Bencsik & Chuluun, 2021, p. 356).

2.5. Personal branding

According to Langham 1996 (p. 74), "the main problem always was, and, in fact, remains "getting in." Helen Blair (2001, 2003) formulated the main tenets of creative freelancing: "It's all down to who you know" and "You are only as good as your last job." Norbäck and Styhre (2019) remind of nurturing good relationships with clients, as they may change jobs and open new horizons for a freelancer they know well as well. Creation of a supportive community

with other freelancers, as "know who" is as important as "know how" in the creative industries (Gill, 2011).

Freelancers constantly feel this pressure of competition (Gollmitzer, 2014), and they have to fight for their piece of cake, always stay alert for new projects; it is a full-time job. Halpin and Smith (2017) called this continuous process "employment management work," and Norbäck and Styhre (2019, p.9) added the phrase "on steroids" to refine this statement. It explains why freelancers seem to be at work 24/7. Norbäck and Styhre (2019) came up with the paradox that freelancers are not really "free." The study presents an ugly truth of being a Swedish freelance journalist, and it has a depressive Scandinavian aftertaste.

Creative freelancers have the techniques and tools to manage their projects, client base, portfolio, and work-life balance successfully and not to let their freelancing become just a "luxury hobby" (Örnebring, 2018).

Creative entrepreneurship doesn't end at the level of a business a person runs, the image of this person plays a significant role in being an entrepreneur. Peters (1997, p. 83) said: "We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketers for the brand called You." Thus, freelancers should use all the possible tools to transmit their professional side of life and connect it to their personality, which means they have to work on their personal brand.

Personal branding means marketing people as brands (Blaer et al., 2020). Freelancers create personal brands of their professional identities (Vallas & Christin, 2018) to build the notion of their reliability and expertise available to be hired (Barley & Kunda, 2004). Creatives need to promote themselves in order to find new projects, and a portfolio maybe not be enough — they can use more platforms to publicize their works and their personalities. Social media are essential for looking for new work projects (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Cohen, 2016), and building a personal brand there are inexpensive and effective (Shepherd, 2005).

Creative minds may keep full-time non-creative jobs to provide a stable income without identifying themselves with those jobs (Perrenoud, 2007). It happens a lot in the creative industry. They can even use pseudonyms so that their creative personal brands won't be associated with their full-time non-creative jobs (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019), as they hope to leave it as soon as the freelance project starts being paid properly (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019).

Being active online, building their personal brand, developing their tone of voice add points and viewers to their professional performance. Peters (1997, p. 83) claimed that personal branding can create a "halo effect", that it has a power to influence, to amplify the reputation and to contribute to the career. Gandini (2016) suggested names for the trends related to the fact that freelancers care of their reputation — "economy of freelance" and "reputational economy." Schawbel (2010, p. 6) formulated self branding as "individuals and entrepreneurs differentiating themselves [...] by identifying and articulating their unique value proposition" to transmit expertise, reputation and to become recognised as a reliable expert in their field.

3. REASONS TO CHOOSE CREATIVE FREELANCE

3.1. Why do knowledge workers go freelance?

To go freelance, or to remain employed — that is the question for many creatives. As both options have pros and cons, and the grass seems greener on the other side, no matter which side has been chosen before (Gurton, 2019). Those employees who look forward to freelancing usually expect to achieve perfect work-life balance (Evans et al., 2004) and earn as much money as their employeed colleagues of the same skillset (Kalleberg, 2000). Freelance looks attractive as it can bring more money, but it gives less security, and employment provides with more stability and team work, but gives less freedom and flexibility (Gurton, 2019).

The reasons why creatives seek for freelance projects or end up with self-employment are mainly connected to the artistic nature of the workers, not necessarily the willingness to become an entrepreneur.

Creatives moonlight frequently — it means they have a regular full-time job and additionally get involved in side projects in their free time (Alper & Wassall, 2000; Menger, 1999). It seems safe to have an effortless ongoing job that pays bills — with a predictable stream of work and steady income (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019) and take creative side projects. Freelancers can also be involved in hybrid entrepreneurship, when full-time employees are constantly trying to do several side projects as as a second freelance job (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016; Nordström et al., 2016). It gives artist workers opportunities to make creative self-employment their main job (Folta et al., 2010), because hybrid entrepreneurship is linked to fast-growing ventures (Folta et al., 2010) and income sustainability (Rafiee & Feng, 2014).

Artists shuffle between arts-related and non-arts labor markets (Throsby, 2010) to gain extra income from arts-related projects (Menger, 1999) on the one hand, and to get full-time job benefits that creative employment can't provide them with. But whenever the arts-related

work starts bringing more income than the non-arts labor work, a creative will become a self-employed more likely (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019).

The main reason for launching a business that was mentioned the most in the research by Dvouletý et al. (2019) was to be one's own boss. Such an emotional benefit prevails over the material profit (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). Hamilton (2000) found that many people would like to launch their own businesses and become self-employed, understanding that their income will or may become lower than an employment salary, and they will work longer hours than employees (Blanchflower, 2004; Hurst et al., 2014; Hyytinen et al., 2013).

Still, self-employed experts can get the most of their flexibility, and manage their working time on their lifestyles, income expectations and family commitments. Evans, Kunda, and Barley (2004) ran a set of interviews with independent contractors and came up with the notion that if gig workers want and can afford working from the beach and no longer than 20 hours per week — why not? And if the lifestyle changes or there are more obligations appear that require stability (f.e., kids or mortgage) — they can reconsider a full-time occupation (Evans et al., 2004).

Umney and Kretsos (2015) pointed out the compromise between the autonomy with flexibility and decent remuneration with regular projects flow that freelancers face daily. They pursue the possibility of earning more with flexibility and freedom of choices and mistakes, as self-employment gives personal autonomy, flexible working schedules and the opportunity to handle the involvement in multiple projects (Menger, 1999; Dvouletý, 2020). At the same time freelancers have to manage hard work, risks and doubts daily while looking for more sources of income, working on the clients' tasks, and dealing with unstable financial flows (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) noticed that it looked like freelancers understood that contract work was precarious, but freedom seemed more attractive than employment stability for them.

Creative freelancers needed a creative neologism, and Hermes with the colleagues (2017) called them "precariats" — it's like "proletariats," but with the precarious nature. Stress can be caused not only with the work related processes. Leighton (2016) study reminds that mortgage or a rental contract are at a risk for a freelancer as banks and landlords trust employment documents more than project-based contracts.

Freelancers' stability is controversial and subjective, but project-based creative work can be contingent and contractual, thus, reliable in long term for contractors (Markusen, 2006). Self-employed artists can participate in several different projects at the same time, avoiding routine thanks to pluriactivity (Bajard, 2020). This work on projects for multiple companies with various specializations at the same time is called cross-employment (Baitenizov et al., 2019).

Leaving the comfort zone at the office may be also caused by the fact that companies can't provide employees with stable careers and sustainable salaries (Cappelli, 1999), they have to seek for "a continuous stream of sequential and parallel assignments of limited duration" (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019, 1). Also, there are issues with the employment: some can not find an employed job, some are forced by the employer to go for self-employment to reduce the company's taxes (Dvouletý, 2020).

3.2. Choosing self-employment

The creative freelance seems to be born to grow into entrepreneurship (Barry, 2011; Lindqvist, 2011), and remote work can eventually lead to freelancing and/or independent consulting work. Cieslik and Dvouletý (2019) classified self-employed people as solo entrepreneurs (those freelancers who work alone) and job creators — those who have at least one employee, they are mostly middle-aged highly experienced, and educated professionals-workaholics (Dvouletý, 2018).

The researchers Bencsik and Chuluun (2021) hypothesized that hedonism is one of the drivers to go freelance, but the hedonic lifestyle of a self-employed person seemed to contrast with stress and irritation because of the higher job demand and lack of job security, as their work is financially unpredictable and heavily loaded. The optimism about flexibility, self-employment, and independence being drivers of economic growth (Florida, 2005) meets the realism of the questionable security and rights of self-employed creatives and artists (Williams et al., 2020).

Starting freelancing experts can work in the shadow economy (Baitenizov et al., 2019) or go for legal registration and become self-employed. Freelancers use different loopholes to avoid paying full taxes. Governments know about it and try to encourage and motivate them to come out of the shadows with taxation bonuses. In some countries, self-employed people pay a low or gradual percentage of taxable sums, or a certain amount of money that is not connected to the income, or pay no tax at all (Baitenizov et al., 2019). Usually, after all, the tax on earnings for self-employed professionals is lower than for employees (Gimpelson & Kapeliushnikov, 2014).

"Employed isn't necessarily better or worse than freelance status; it's a matter of personal preference, skills and circumstances" (Choudhury & Pritchard, 2019, p. 47). Employed creatives involved in all the phases of working with a project and all the stages of product development, but freelancers might be flexible about the topics and areas of implementing their knowledge, shuffling different subjects comfortably (Choudhury & Pritchard, 2019). Freelancers don't have access to company-based in-house training, so they practice specific job-related skills to be useful for a variety of projects (Hardy & Walker, 2003; Marler et al., 2002). They build a diverse portfolio to progress in the profession even without a career ladder (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006).

Self-employment may not seem to be equal to entrepreneurship, but the level of independence freelancers seek makes them look and actually act like entrepreneurs (Douglas & Shepherd, 2002), and such a career path is a new normal (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Self-

employment and entrepreneurship seem to be linked (Blumberg & Pfann, 2016; Guerra & Patuelli, 2014). Sometimes freelancing looks more like a "forced entrepreneurship" (Rottwilm, 2014), or "subsistence entrepreneurship" (Schoar, 2010), or "forced lancing" (Bittner, 2011, p. 13). It is caused by the oversaturated labor market, when the amount of professionals with the same skillset becomes too big (Werne, 2016). Many previously employed creative professionals have become freelancers to be able to keep their profession (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019) and implement their knowledge and skills in various ways (Choudhury, & Pritchard, 2019). Self-employment looks like the simplest form of entrepreneurship (Blanchflower & Oswald, 1998), but it means multitasking (Lazear, 2005) and, thus, taking different tasks from different clients and different fields.

Someones' businesses can become profitable, making the owners superstars (Sorgner et al., 2017), while some freelancers can hardly pay bills (Mühlböck et al., 2018). Self-employment choice can be the next step after paid employment or unemployment (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019). Usually, creatives choose self-employment looking at it as a perspective direction at first, and if they decide to leave arts occupations they choose paid full-time employment, seeking stability (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019).

Studies demonstrate contrasts and contradictions: some of them show positive outcomes from remote works, some of them, on the contrary, show negative points, some studies claim that telework improves the work-life balance, some say the opposite (Boell et al., 2016). Some scholars consider crowdsourcing and collaboration using internet connection and software as easy working conditions without mediators (Katz & Krueger, 2016). Others observe rising payment risks and social distancing among people who work on the same projects from different places in the world (Graham et al., 2017; Lehdonvirta, 2016; Scholz, 2013).

As remote work becomes more and more popular and widely implemented, both beneficial opportunities and dangerous challenges for both companies and creative workers are exposed (Popovici & Popovici, 2020). Unique procedures should be created to help managers deal with the remote workers taking into consideration companies' context (Peters et al., 2016).

3.3. Productivity issues

Not only freelancers are those who work remotely. Companies adopt flexible working policies to let employees choose how much, when, and where they work so that they can a maintain better work-life balance (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), but such flexibility doesn't suit everyone. Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen (2015) came up to the positive findings that the more flexible the working environment, the better individuals manage their work-life balance: they are more autonomous and effective at work and feel better being at their favorable location and working during the hours they feel more productive.

Employees, especially millennials, seem excited about traveling the world, and working from anywhere while being employed looks like a perfect work-life balance for them (Choudhury, 2020). They find it advantageous to work on several projects for different clients at the same time (Choudhury, & Pritchard, 2019). Distant work abroad appears to be a distant dream for employees tethered to office work, however, existing empirical evidence on the remote employees' well-being is controversial (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017).

Managers point out that productivity increases when employees work remotely (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gregg, 2011; Bloom et al., 2015) as quiet, comfortable surroundings let remote workers focus better and, thus, perform better (Baruch, 2000; Fonner & Roloff, 2010). At the same time managers admit that it is difficult to impact teleworkers' motivation and satisfaction, to measure their initiatives, and to track the remote working process (Popovici & Popovici, 2020).

Remote workers enjoy their increased flexibility, autonomy, and freedom of time management and of working location choice, they manage their workday following their personal productivity cycle (Morgan, 2004; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Pyöriä, 2011). They feel that their work-life balance gets improved (as the working process is adjusted to have more time for the personal life and needs), they note the increased satisfaction from work and reduced level of burnout (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gregg, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2011; Bloom et al., 2015).

But working from home, cafes, or coworking places can have side effects. As Gold and Mustafa (2013, p. 209) remarked, "not every home will be a "working home." Remote workers can get distracted by family members and coworkers (Leonardi et al., 2010). It increases the conflict between work and private life, as the boundaries are blurred (Gregg, 2011).

Also, the flexibility in time management can cause the "autonomy paradox" (Boell et al., 2016), meaning that flexibility can lead to work intensification, as the remote working schedule can become more unpredictable and vague. At the same time, remote workers may intensively overwork on purpose to compensate for the privilege of flexibility (Chesley, 2010; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010) or, according to Chesley (2014), they can keep working during non-working hours. All these extra activities blur the boundaries between the occupation and the personal life (Tietze & Musson, 2005) and lead to stress.

Productivity-related advantages and disadvantages of remote collaboration from managers and remote creative perspectives are combined in Table 1.

Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective	Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective
Advantages		**Disadvantages**	
Increased productivity (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gregg, 2011; Bloom et al., 2015), quiet, comfortable surroundings let remote workers focus better and thus perform better (Baruch, 2000; Fonner & Roloff, 2010).	Increased flexibility, autonomy, and freedom of time management and working location choice based on the personal productivity cycle (Morgan, 2004; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Pyöriä, 2011). Improved work-life balance as the working time is adjusted to have more time for the personal life and needs, increased satisfaction from work and reduced level of burnout (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gregg, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2011; Bloom et al., 2015).	It is difficult to impact teleworkers' motivation and satisfaction and to measure their initiatives and to track the re-mote working process (Popovici & Popovici, 2020). Employees can become jealous to the contractors and feel insecured, so the managers should reassure them that their job positions are safe (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006).	"Autonomy paradox" — flexible work system can lead to work intensification, as remote working schedule can become more unpredictable and vague (Boell et al., 2016). Distractions from family members and coworkers (Leonardi et al., 2010), increasing the conflict between work and private life, as the boundaries are blurred (Gregg, 2011).

Table 1. Productivity issues: perspectives found in the literature.

According to Green (2001), there are "extensive" and "intensive" types of effort. Extensive effort relates to the time spent working, meaning that those who work fewer hours put less extensive effort (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Intensification of work refers to physical and mental input (Green, 2001), which is usually seen as negative outcomes for employees (Fairris & Brenner, 2001), even though changing the location of work should not change the intensity of efforts (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

In order not to overwork creative freelancers resist overtime (Osnowitz & Henson, 2016) and accept deadlines and timings carefully (Occhiuto, 2017).

3.4. Worldwide connection and socialization issues

Working remotely — from home and from anywhere — creative freelancers show low social proximity (Weeden, 2002), and also they deal with a lack of communication with teams and clients, scattered payments, and uncertain career progression (Schwartz, 2018). Without the "career ladders to sequence jobs," freelance creatives need to find strategies to "craft their own careers" (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006, p. 918).

The analysis conducted by Boell et al. (2016) shows that creative activities that require concentrating, teamwork, and brainstorming ideas still depend on the personal needs and temper qualities of each individual — one may seek a quiet working space with no interruption, and home-based work may seem a perfect solution, another one needs face-to-face communication with colleagues, and he or she can't work distantly. Even the most introverted gig workers can face "loneliness, irritability, worry and guilt" (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003, p. 196), so independent creatives can join coworking spaces.

Usually, freelancers stay solo voluntarily (Burke et al., 2020; de Vries et al., 2020), or because there is not enough work to do to delegate to extra units, or it is difficult to find well-trained staff, or it is simply economically inefficient (Dvouletý, 2020).

But sometimes, in order to fight loneliness and isolations and to make something great, freelancers can bring their expertises together and create partnerships. Having Erich & Kallman agency as an example, Zach Brooke (2017) showed that small and fruitful collaborations can start with 2 highly professional free agents. Instead of getting new jobs with top positions professionals can get interested in creating their own agency together, as they feel their skills are "a unique and powerful combination" (Brooke, 2017, p. 31).

Such a drive for socialization can be caused for profit. When freelancers band together they can pitch for new projects more efficiently — if one wins, the others win by default (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019).

Schwartz (2018) stated that being open-minded to hiring remotely expands the creative pool for managers. It opens creative horizons, especially when the projects are targeted at many different markets. Companies can invite talents from all over the world to work on their projects, making sure that each task is done by workers with appropriate skillsets, and it doesn't matter if they are abroad (Choudhury, 2020). Leonardi and his colleagues (2010) noted that employees can assume that their remote colleagues are hard to get in touch with and not effective. So, to transmit reliability and high performance, teleworkers have to be accessible, respond immediately as if they were on sight, and can't afford a bad internet connection (Leonardi et al., 2010).

As Popovici and Popovici (2020) warned, hiring remote freelancers intensifies managers' responsibilities, as they have to deal with different time zones, clarify the tasks better, communicate frequently, and supervise the process and the outcomes at a distance. It can cause a certain level of stress both for the managers and for workers. Intense and constant "virtual presenteeism" (Popovici & Popovici, 2020) can lead gig workers to increased levels of fatigue, burnout, headaches, and eyestrain (Beauregard & Basile, 2016).

The advantages and disadvantages of remote socialization and global communication from managers and remote creative perspectives are combined in Table 2 and Table 3.

Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective	Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective
Advantages		Disadvantages	
Creative experts build productive and reliable teams together (Zach Brooke, 2017).	Coworking spaces help network locally (Neff, 2012; Saxenian, 1999) and find new projects (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012). Not everyone needs colleagues around, some need quiet and silent environment with no interruption (Boell et al., 2016). It is very likely that co-locating creative freelancers collaborate (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2019). Pitching together is efficient, as if one wins, the others win by default (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019).	It is difficult to maintain socialization and knowledge sharing between coworkers (Baruch, 2000; Pyöriä, 2011).	Feeling of disconnection from the company and clients, of social and professional isolation (Pyöriä, 2011; Schwartz, 2018; Charlampous et al., 2019; Choudhury, 2020), lack of the community (Gregg, 2011) can be stressful.

Table 2. Socialization issues: perspectives found in the literature.

Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective	Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective
Advantages		Disadvantages	
Creative pool expansion — companies can invite talents from all over the world to work on their projects, making sure that each task is done by workers with appropriate skillsets, and it doesn't matter if they are abroad (Schwartz, 2018; Choudhury, 2020).	Possibility to work on several projects for different clients at the same time (Choudhury & Pritchard, 2019). Possibility to work from anywhere, traveling and remaining the source of income (Choudhury, 2020).	Managers responsibilities become more intense to deal with remote workers, as they have to clarify the tasks better, communicate frequently, supervise the process and the outcomes remotely (Popovici & Popovici, 2020).	Intense and constant "virtual presenteeism" (Popovici & Popovici, 2020) can lead to increased levels of stress, fatigue, burnout, headaches and eyestrain (Beauregard & Basile, 2016).

Table 3. Worldwide communication issues: perspectives found in the literature.

Still, as Sarah Choudhury concluded in 2020, the possibility to work from anywhere, traveling and remaining the source of income attracts more and more freelancers, especially young creatives. And usually young, highly educated freelancers are attracted by the possibility to work remotely from such metropolises and creative hubs as London, New York, Amsterdam, and Seattle (Lund et al., 2020).

3.5. Cost-effectiveness issues

Outsourced creatives are great sources of the specific skillsets that can be hired when needed straight away, without attracting investments in training for the employed teams (Foote, 2009). It happens because of the high level of competition, and freelancers tend to develop their expertise and knowledge in various or more specific topics (Choudhury & Pritchard, 2019) to compete for a project (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019). Hiring an outsourced creative worker company expects to get unique ideas with original implementation (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010).

As Connelly and Gallagher (2006, p. 99) mentioned in their study, organizations may accept a "mutual skill–cost containment strategy" — arranging valuable "specialized skills on an as-needed basis". Usually, it is a short-term agreement.

Having that, freelancers have the right to charge more for their specific skillset than salaried employees (Foote, 2009). Norbäck and Styhre (2019) recommended creating series of pieces of work to charge for each one and to earn more within the same task, and to avoid putting "all the eggs in one basket," which means avoiding relying on only one client.

Hypothetically, freelancers can achieve higher income than through employment (Bencsik & Chuluun, 2021), as they are their own bosses (Dvouletý et al., 2019) and they decide how much they can work and how much they want to charge. Also, costs reducing prospers in the creative freelancing fields, and anti-dumping community agreements work for employed creatives only (Werne, 2015). It's a big problem for creative markets as it devalues the professions and the work, and high-end freelancers have to stand for their price formation.

That's why managers face the difficulty of finding a good freelancer that is less expensive than an in-house employee, as they usually charge more (Foote, 2009). Managers have a dilemma whether they want and need to hire a freelancer, or they can just involve in-house creative employees with the fixed remuneration. Foote (2009) explained that it is easier for

managers to control their quality and meeting deadlines, so they can promise and provide clients with better service and expect workload consistency.

"On average and at the median, the incorporated self-employed earn more than comparable salaried workers" (Levine & Rubinstein, 2017, p. 965), even though they pay taxes and take all the responsibilities over financial operations on them. But usually, fierce competition over projects and the crisis in the media decrease the rates, making freelancers financially unstable (Örnebring, 2018). Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) in their study came up to the grave findings:

> Most creative work is project-based, short-term and irregular, with little job protection; workers are most often freelance with uncertain career prospects; earnings are slim and unequally distributed; social security, e.g. insurance, pensions and health protection, is limited; many workers are young and hold down multiple jobs.

Working with remote experts helps organizations reduce costs (Gregg, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2011), as there are less spendings on office equipment, smaller office space is needed, and rental costs become lower (Choudhury, 2020). Freelancers don't expect monthly income, benefits, and vacation pay (Choudhury, & Pritchard, 2019), so companies save on these spendings hiring a freelancer. Usually, creative associations don't establish the minimum payroll for freelancing, thus, contract workers can work all day long and still earn less than employees at the same companies (Werne, 2015).

Independent contractors have to take care of the things that usually companies take care of: steady flow of projects, consistency of income, and social security, they are lack of employees' benefits like paid vacation and parental leave, sick pays, retirement plans, unemployment allowance (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019). Cost-effectiveness-related advantages and disadvantages from managers and remote creative perspectives are combined in Table 4.

Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective	Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective
Advantages		**Disadvantages**	
Reduced costs for organisations (Gregg, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2011), as there are less spendings on the office equipment, smaller office space is needed, and rental costs become lower (Choudhury, 2020). No need to pay monthly income, benefits and vacation pay (Choudhury & Pritchard, 2019). Specific skillset can be hired when needed asap, no need to invest in training for the team (Foote, 2009). Unique ideas with original implementation (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). Independent experts sell their expertise (Evans et al., 2004), sharing their knowledge with the in-house team (Flinchbaugh et al., 2020), like giving master classes.	Hypothetical possibility to gain a higher financial income than through employment (Bencsik & Chuluun, 2021). "On average and at the median, the incorporated self-employed earn more than comparable salaried workers" (Levine & Rubinstein, 2017, p. 965). The possibility to charge more than a salaried employee for a specific skillset (Foote, 2009).	In-house creative employees quality and scheduling are better controlled to provide clients with better service and workload consistency (Foote, 2009), and the remuneration is fixed. It is difficult to find a good freelancer that is less expensive than an in-house employee, as they usually charge more (Foote, 2009).	Fierce competition over work and the crisis in the media decrease the rates, making freelancers financially unstable (Örnebring, 2018). "Bulimic patterns" of work and gig economy (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019) make income uneven from month to month. Common practice to pay per piece not per hour makes freelancers work more hours than they are paid for (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019). Struggling because of missing the in-house professional and training opportunities that employees usually have (Leslie et al., 2012) for free.

Table 4. Cost-effectiveness issues: perspectives found in the literature.

A distant relationship with the team may cause a struggle of missing the in-house professional and training opportunities (Leslie et al., 2012) that employees usually have for free. Freelancers need to invest their own money into training and additional education, and usually, the income is unpredictable, workers become responsible for updating their skills (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019). They called such a situation "gig economy" and "bulimic patterns" of work — either famine or feast (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019, p. 3), meaning that the work is seasonal and the amount of work can be overwhelming one month and the next month can be quiet with no work at all. They also mentioned the common practice to pay per piece, not per hour which makes freelancers work more hours than they are paid for.

3.6. Reliability issues

Scholars see the future of creative workers related to arts and media as less risky compared to other fields where technology can substitute humans (Degryse, 2016; Frey & Osborne, 2017), or where one handyman can take over another. Creative people have different styles and specializations, creative ideas are always needed, and companies have to seek them locally and abroad. So do creative freelancers, as they are always searching for new clients.

Gig workers must adapt to market needs, be flexible in terms of the tasks, be patient and highly client-oriented as they are "constantly hustle for work" (Cohen, 2015, p. 517). Their future tasks depend on the human factor and on relationships with clients (Yoganarasimhan, 2013). Such a pressure created the situation when gig workers have to sign "rights grabbing contracts" (Salamon, 2018, p. 14), allowing the employer to use and reuse the same material over and over without asking the freelancer permission or without paying extra (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019). To diminish risks and to prevent dumping and unethical behavior in the creative fields freelancers worldwide gather together and create cooperatives and associations (Cohen, 2016; Norbäck & Styhre, 2019; Bajard, 2020).

Such cooperatives of freelancers can be created not only to establish the code of rules or in order not to work alone, but also to create workplaces for freelancers. Flora Bajard (2020, p.1) called such workers "salaried entrepreneurs" and explained such cooperation of freelancers using the example of the Business and Employment Cooperatives (BEC) that exist in France:

> […] the BEC represents one of the highest levels of cooperativism: they are enterprises in which autonomous workers are salaried employees. […] in the BEC, self-employed people form cooperatives for shared services and also get paid by the cooperative, which produces invoices for their contractors and pays each member a wage (Bajard, 2020, p. 4).

These workers can't be considered self-employed anymore, but still, they are. De jure they are hired by the cooperation, but de facto they remain being freelancers as they work autonomously on their own projects, they choose the teams and the clients, they decide when to work and how much to earn (Bajard, 2020). Basically, it is an associate partnership model.

Bajard (2020) stated that joining the cooperation and becoming an associate partner help gig workers keep being independent and benefit from the state social security for employees at the same time.

Managers are cautious because of certain risks they take on their perspective. Connelly and Gallagher (2006) made a point in their study that the main threatening factor for companies while hiring a freelancer is the information security. They noted that the risk that a contractor may share company's confidential details with competitors is high, as they constantly change their clients and projects. It's impossible to expect a freelancer being loyal to the organization by default (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006), so any kind of confidentiality clause or signing non-disclosure agreement papers with a new contractor should be reconsidered as an insurance (Stephens, 2020). Connelly and Gallagher (2006) also mentioned that rehiring the same freelancers may reduce the risks of disclosure of the company information.

To provide clients with better and safer solutions, freelancers join their forces and organize agencies. Brooke (2017) remarked that small creative boutiques were trendy and had advantages, as they were more flexible than big companies can be. He also claimed that "small is also trustworthy, or at least less suspicious" (Brooke, 2017, p. 34).

Zach Brooke (2017) observed Erich & Kallman agency and realized that the founders took a lot of responsibilities themselves to hurry up the processes. The agency had only 6 backbone employees, and each one played several roles in campaigns creation. They could accept ASAP projects, act at speedlight, and deliver the final result within several weeks when big players needed months. Steven Erich, the agency managing director and the interviewee of Brooke, explained:

> That would be very difficult at a larger agency. It's doable, but it's very much against the normal process. Our process is very streamlined. We don't have a lot of people involved. We work with the best talent we can hire. And there's not a lot that can get in the way (Brooke, 2017, p. 34).

When there are a lot of simultaneous projects, the agency calls on the pool of reliable freelancers. The founders consider that "freelance is stronger than it's ever been, it's arguable there might be more talent outside of agencies than inside of agencies" Brooke (2017, p. 34).

Remote work phenomena seem paradoxical, and to make this paper as objective as possible comparison of the advantages and disadvantages from both hiring managers' and remote workers' perspectives is needed to see whether telework is ultimately a good or a bad thing (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). As Hipp et al. (2015, p. 367) claimed, 'nonstandard employment is not necessarily "bad" or "precarious". But it requires a certain level of entrepreneurial drive, networking, talent, and professionalism.

The advantages and disadvantages connected to the reliability of remote collaboration from managers and remote creative perspectives are combined in Table 5.

Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective	Manager perspective	Remote creative perspective
Advantages		**Disadvantages**	
To protect the confidentiality NDAs or other agreements can be discussed or signed (Stephens, 2020).	Freelancers worldwide gather together in communities and organizations (Cohen, 2016) to prevent unethical behavior and diminish risks.	Remote monitoring of freelancer performance is challenging (Allen et al., 2015).	Forceful signing the "rights grabbing contracts" (Salamon, 2018, p. 14), allowing the employer use and reuse the same
Rehiring the same freelancers may reduce the risks of disclosure of the company information (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006).	The cooperatives of freelancers can make them "salaried entrepreneurs" with a contract and social protection (Bajard, 2020).	Risks of the confidential information disclosure to the competitors (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006).	material over and over without asking the freelancer a permission or without paying extra (Norbäck & Styhre, 2019)

Table 5. Reliability issues: perspectives found in the literature.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research objectives

Remote work, associate partnership, and freelance are not new words in advertising and marketing fields, but the percentage of such collaborations is still low because of a lack of knowledge and positive case studies. More data is needed to fill the gap.

The creative, marketing, and advertising field had already been more flexible by 2020, but the pandemic fostered the implementation of the remote model. An unprecedented amount of studies on this topic have appeared in the 2020-2021 period due to the worldwide pandemic and widespread lockdowns, as it affected all the fields of private and work life of most people (Choudhury, 2020; Heaslip, 2020; Lund et al., 2020; Popovici & Popovici, 2020; Stef, 2020; Alexander et al., 2021; Elliott, 2021; Makarius et al., 2021; Puybaraud, 2021; Sako, 2021).

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the remote and freelance work for creative talents in the field of marketing, advertising, design, and video production. The research was carried out in the 2020-2021 period, which helps get the most insightful findings.

The main goal of this research was to create knowledge, to evaluate the level of interest and attitude towards the remote collaboration of creative professionals and their employers and clients, and, thus, to evaluate the attitudes towards this model among creative business owners, employees, and freelancers. The applied knowledge and practical experience of those professionals that have already implemented the remote work model are of the highest importance for this study.

This study's objectives also include the investigation of the advantages and disadvantages of the remote model. The pros and cons are related to the comparison of the remote model and the office-based work taking into consideration the following aspects:

- financial situation;

- communication;

- organizing the work process;

- the current situation with the remote work and the predictions about its future.

The findings presented the practical observations, subjective points of view of the experts who were directly involved in the creative working processes from all sides — freelancers, employees, and managers.

Examples from the professional experience and the differences between the processes of traditional creative agencies and remote partnerships were defined. The insights and behavioral patterns of all the parts involved in the creative process in the advertising field were also explored.

4.2. Methodological approach

The qualitative method was used for this social opinion study. The term "qualitative research methods" means gathering verbal and non-numerical data (Starr, 2014). It helps to collect comprehensive and various data to enrich the research with complex insights and different points of view based on practical problems and solutions (Lanka et al., 2021).

As Barnham (2015) explained, in order to understand why people behave in a certain manner researchers first have to understand what these people think, that's why quantitative and qualitative approaches are used side by side. Quantitative research seeks for facts using questions starting with "what?", a qualitative analysis helps to study motivations, mindsets, and opinions asking "why?" (Barnham, 2015).

Creswell (1994, pp. 1–2) stated that the qualitative approach is "...an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting".

Lanka and colleagues (2021) claimed that a quantitative analysis can't show the big picture as it doesn't take into account the social and personal aspects, thus, it limits the voice of the respondents and of the depth of the research overall.

To achieve reliable and honest results the researcher should be a good listener and observer with a high level of empathy, education, and creativity. "It requires interest, time, patience and struggle", as Mahmut Kalman (2019) noticed.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) paid attention to the fact that a researcher who follows the qualitative approach seeks for the level of interest in a topic, the opinions and attitudes to it, without trying to measure anything. The authors stated that such an investigation can only be done by collecting the stories from the practical experience of the participants, by observing them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). That's why the contributors' profiles have to be relevant to the study, and the richness of their experience is highly important for qualitative research. Lanka and colleagues (2021) claimed that the participants should be able to share relevant and valuable information that can be used in the study and that can give a beneficial impact.

The quality of the information is more important than the number of the participants (Lanka et al., 2021, p. 3): "data-rich and time-consuming aspect of qualitative data is one reason why sample sizes in qualitative research tend to be smaller in number", as it requires significant efforts to make a sample that is relevant to the study. Lanka and colleagues (2021) mentioned that a small amount of participants doesn't mean a lack of valuable content, and they quoted Creswell (1998) that the quality of collected data is usually high in spite of the small quantity.

Maria Norbäck and Alexander Styhre (2019) ran their survey by interviewing freelancers in a friendly and relaxing atmosphere and providing anonymity which helped them to gain honest,

trustworthy, and unvarnished answers and therefore to create a working guideline for freelancers. This manner was benchmarked for this study to break the ice with people, to shorten the time for getting into the topic, and to get reliable replies.

Zadik and colleagues (2019) ran both their surveys with the same respondents. This technique was adopted in this study while building one questionnaire for all the participants from different groups. It provided this study with consistency and saved time for elaborating the responses.

Norbäck and Styhre (2019) used a grounded theory-inspired approach, and in this study, the theory played a big role in understanding the problems and opportunities that have already been explored to build the questions around them in order to collect more practical information. The theory provides the basis in qualitative research to help with the validation of the subjective opinions and to adduce facts captured from the existing studies, both qualitative and quantitative (Lanka et al., 2021).

The qualitative method provided this study with the knowledge of practical implementation of the remote work model and its advantages and side effects from the respondents' points of view. It helped to gather the real-life insights, thoughts, and opinions based on the personal professional experience, external knowledge, and their own speculations, that were relevant to the study as they showed the attitudes to the issues raised even if there was no knowledge about the topic.

4.3. Instrument

The data collection was conducted via a questionnaire with open questions that helped to explore the topic of creating remote collaborations deeper. The questions were built the way to gather opinions about office-based or freelance employment, to ask for sincere opinions, and to share stories connected to professional life and the core of the questions. They were open, not specific, and unbiased, without pushing in any direction.

The questions were divided into two categories — remote collaborations and work with employed creatives — to collect attitudes towards each target group of the respondents to each working model. Responses were expected to be long and detailed, full of stories, case studies from the previous experience, real feelings, and attitudes. The full list of questions is presented in Table 6.

Office-based employment	Remote working collaborations
1. How do you think the work of agencies and creative companies has evolved in recent years in terms of working with creative units inside and outside the company?	
2a. What financial advantages and disadvantages exist for the agency and for the creative employee?	2b. What financial advantages and disadvantages exist for the agency and for the remote creative unit?
3a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the office-based creative working process?	3b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the remote creative working process?
4a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the relationships being inside the team with the colleagues and the superiors?	4b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the relationships being at the distance away from the colleagues and the superiors?
5. What kind of digital tools can be used to optimise the in-house work and/or remote collaborations?	
6. How do you think creative business market will evolve? Towards freelance, remote or office-based directions?	

Table 6. The questionnaire for this study's sample.

The data was collected mostly via written responses. The agreements were reached after a short introduction of the topic in the messengers, and the questionnaires in the editable documents on Google Docs were sent to the participants. Some neutral guidance with keywords was added to the questions to provoke memories and storytelling. Participants were encouraged to be more forthcoming, talkative, and go into details. Finally, they were limited by a comfortable deadline for them to be able to manage their time themselves.

3 respondents didn't speak English, in their case, there was an exception: their answers were collected during interviews in Russian via video conferences, then transcribed and translated to English.

Answers to the research questions shared the practical experience and insights of all the parts involved in the creative process. Freelancers, office-based creative employees, and managers were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of remote work from their professional perspectives, about their attitudes towards freelance and to employment for creative talents, about hiring opportunities and difficulties.

They shared their thoughts and predictions about the present and future of freelance and re-mote work and presented their preferences of the tools to improve the productiveness being at a distance. The responses were revised carefully, transcribed, and translated when necessary, and a content analysis was performed. The compilation of the opinions about each category and direct respondents' quotes are presented further, in the Results chapter.

4.4. Sample

Lanka et al. (2021) stated that qualitative approach sampling should be focused on significant and relevant "key informants in the field" (Suri, 2011, p. 65) to gain comprehensive information. In the case of this study, the respondents should have been chosen from highly professional experts in the field of marketing and advertising, as they had to have a broad mindset and rich experience.

The target audience of the investigation included three groups of creative experts:

• creative freelancers;

• employed creative units;

• managers and business owners.

To make the pool of the participants the certain criteria existed to include or exclude respondents to make the research precise:

- respondents should have been from the creative (marketing, advertising, design or video production, communication) field, or the client side, marketing or communication departments;

- respondents could be a combination of the groups (f.e., a freelance creative who hires other creatives, or an in-house creative unit who also acts as a freelancer);

- respondents couldn't be from the fields where they never deal with creative tasks.

The final sample was selected among the participants that were known and accessible to the researchers. In the process of contacting the interviewees we sought to ensure that their profiles were relevant and met the requirements of the investigation to expect valuable impact of each individual's experience. 18 professionals were contacted to participate in the research, 12 of them came back with affirmative replies. The return rate was 66,6%.

The fields of the representatives of the final sample are different, but all of them intersect:

- one brand manager works at a telecommunication company, ordering creative services for the brand they promote from advertising and creative agencies;

- one art group head is a manager at a product design and communication department in an IT company;

- one graphic designer and one art director do freelance for advertising agencies;

- the CGI artist does CG and motion for commercials;

- three senior creative copywriters, one art director and one account manager are agencies' employees;

- two people are creative agencies themselves.

All the respondents are kept incognito to prevent any conflict of interest, as they may cross at some point in their professional life even being from different countries and continents. To process the data analysis and to maintain anonymity, participants were coded with the

identification of their characteristics relevant to the study: profile, initials, function, and country (See Tab. 7).

Profile	Code	Initials	Function	Country	Age	Experience
Creative freelancer	F1	HB	Art-director	Belarus	33 yo	12 years
Creative freelancer	F2	EB	CGI-artist	Poland	32 yo	10 years
Creative freelancer	F3	DT	Creator	Germany	36 yo	17 years
Creative freelancer	F4	NK	Graphic designer	Belarus	27 yo	8 years
Employed creative	E1	AA	Senior copywriter	Russia	26 yo	7 years
Employed creative	E2	FA	Senior copywriter	Portugal	32 yo	12 years
Employed creative	E3	FS	Art-director	USA	35 yo	14 years
Employed creative	E4	AK	Senior copywriter	Belarus	35 yo	13 years
Manager	M1	VF	Managing creative director	Belarus	36 yo	15 years
Manager	M2	LS	Brand manager	Belarus	33 yo	12 years
Manager	M3	AB	Art group head	Belarus	34 yo	14 years
Manager	M4	OG	Account manager	Belarus	34 yo	9 years

Table 7. Profiles of the participants and the coding system.

Most of the respondents live far from the researchers, the geography of the participants is broad: there were people from Belarus, Poland, Germany, Portugal, the USA, Russia. All the communication was held online, no travels were required for any part.

4.5. Procedures

The reason to make a fully open-ended questionnaire was to identify the attitudes, insights, and vital points for respondents that were and, especially, were not covered in the literature review. It shows the importance of the study and the level of interest in the scientific society and provides the topics to investigate in further researches (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004; Garcia et al., 2004). There can be opposing views in open-ended question responses (Garcia et al., 2004), still, the general tendencies can be observed.

The sample consisted of 12 respondents, thus, no computer-assisted analysis was needed. The authors conducted and analyzed this qualitative research manually. They sent the forms by email, received the responses, and elaborated 9 written questionnaires. Also, they did 3 live interviews via Facebook Messenger, Viber, and Zoom video calls, recorded, transcribed, and then refined them.

Some topics were foreseen after reviewing the academic literature, and some insights that were not anticipated were discovered. The answers are generalized to get the common ground, the core of the opinions. The almost verbatim statements are presented in a form of short descriptors.

To use the illustrative quotations, the responses were translated to English when needed and proofread, spelling and grammar were corrected, slang and extraneous words were omitted. The authors also have reproduced the responses to narrate and to make clear conclusions with their own words.

As the questions were built to be broad, the keywords were added to suggest the topics to discuss and to let respondents a possibility to share more details than specific questions may allow (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004). The respondents live in different countries and work at different fields of the creative industry, thus, the answers were different but with common patterns, there were diametrically opposed opinions and word-for-word identical statements.

The respondents shared their answers to the open-ended questions with the responsible attitude, trying to be as complex and clear as possible. They came up with the case studies and unique examples from their experience, explaining their thoughts and narrow terminology they used. They were not only listing the pros and cons, but also explained "why". They tried to be both subjective and objective in their judgements and predictions, basing the opinions both on their insights, specific issues, speculations and common facts.

The responses were of different length: some people wrote complex sentences with 200 words per question, some got along with just bullets. However, the answers were complete enough

to be generalized to calculate who, which group of respondents and how many times each statement was mentioned. The frequency helps to see the attitudinal behaviour patterns of each group of the sample to extrapolate the findings to the creative market in general.

The findings are categorized repeating the structure of the questionnaire. Each thematic nucleus is discussed in details. The patterns and differences are identified, and rare but highly relevant to the topic insights are also mentioned as possible triggers for future researches.

5. RESULTS.

5.1. Remote work and freelance evolution

The first thematic nucleus was designated as "Remote work and freelance evolution". It was related to the opinions about the evolution of the remote and freelance work, the current situation around it and the predictions of its future development. It combines 2 research questions: #1 ("How do you think the work of agencies and creative companies has evolved in recent years in terms of working with creative units inside and outside the company?") and #6 ("How do you think creative business market will evolve? Towards freelance, remote or office-based directions?").

These 2 questions together covered the retrospective, current situation and anticipations about the future of the remote and freelance collaborations evolution. The questions required predictions and observations, and answers for both questions intersected in many questionnaires.

The opinions about the way the remote work has been organized, about its scope of application and acceptance in the past are divergent, but with lots of similar points of view. Unsurprisingly, the group of freelancers showed enthusiasm about the remote work evolution. Employees are either sceptical or indifferent towards freelance, but they enjoy working from home.

E1 was one of the most remote-oriented as she has just switched from freelance to employment. Managers' attitude was surprising. Most of them showed curiosity, flexibility, open-mindedness towards hiring a freelancer or remote collaboration and indifference to the location of the worker as long as the work is done successfully.

Most of the respondents connected the drastic increase of the remote work arrangements with the global pandemic COVID-19, but still they had observed the level of office-home flexibility long before.

The opinions converged on several issues, especially on the personal feelings towards the remote work (most of the respondents enjoyed working from home) and on the acceptance of the hybrid model (home and office mix) as a future work arrangement for the creative industry. The insights and categories that were mentioned and discussed are presented in Table 8.

Thematic nucleus	Categories & insights	Descriptors & citations	Free-lancers	Emplo-yees	Mana-gers	To-tal
Remote work and freelance evolution	The creative industry was flexible before COVID	"I started working with remote teams and freelancers before it got popular" (M1). "[…] the agencies' methods and practices from the 70s, 80s, 90s [hadn't] changed deeply" (E3).	F1, F2	E1	M1	4
	COVID accelerated the raise of remote work and freelance	"There were no significant changes after their employees started work remotely" (F1). "The productivity didn't decrease with the employees being remote, so there is no need for them to come back to the offices" (F3).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E2	M1, M2, M3	9
	Freelance is a new normal	"Freelancers with stronger portfolios and experience level will be more demanded than previously" (F2). "Freelance is a solid reason to get a residence permit" (F3).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E2	M1, M2, M3	9
	Freedom of being re-mote	"I'm so happy working remotely! I expected that I would not be able to distance from the team, that it was a stupidity, but now I see it was the best decision!" (E4). "I'd rather be self-employed than an employee" (F3, F4).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E4	M2, M4	8
	Hybrid model is the future	"One thing is clear — everything is now moving towards hybrid freelancing and remote work" (M2). "I would like to work both with internal and external teams" (M3).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E2, E3, E4	M2, M3, M4	11

Table 8. Thematic nucleus #1 and the insights related to it.

5.1.1. The creative industry was flexible before COVID

This topic is controversial, as the respondents have different experiences: some of them have been successful freelancers for years, some claim they would never become one, some have

worked with freelancers, some have never had a chance and a need to hire one. Before the COVID pandemic, the remote work option was not very popular.

The common notion that everyone shared was the fact that freelancers were hired rarely and mostly for small projects. "Last decade managers hired freelancers only when they needed a specific skillset […] for the projects" (F1).

Contacts of freelancers with special expertise were shared virally among managers and on social media. LinkedIn and Facebook are effective for looking for new coworkers and for sharing recommendations. Word-of-mouth has always existed. None of the freelancers from the research sample has ever looked for a job themselves, they all have been recommended to their clients, or their portfolios have been persuasive and sold them. As all the communication went online, so did the word-of-mouth:

> I feel lucky that I have never looked for clients, they all come to me because of word-of-mouth. One ex-colleague of mine always mentions me in her posts on Facebook, and this is how the agency and several clients have found me (F4).

M1 had started working exclusively with remote teams and freelancers before it got popular, long before COVID times. M1 is a creative director and head of her own agency. She likes the freedom this approach of hiring freelancers gives: "you don't need to pay a salary or to fire anyone, you just don't send the next brief if anything goes wrong!" (M1).

F2 example shows that not only small projects are freelancers' fiefdom. He belongs to the film industry and is occupied with European and Hollywood big projects, but still participates in commercials creating to get distracted from the routine of big long-term projects. He is optimistic about freelance work in the creative industry. He said that during the last few years he had seen mostly freelance-based agencies' teams, and "each of those freelancers had huge experience and was hired per project" (F2).

F2 didn't specify the scale of those agencies he communicated with, but classic advertising agencies' processes and approaches still exist. M4, the agency's account manager, doesn't have big experience in dealing with freelancers. All the team of the M4 agency works remotely for more than a year, thus, it is not the distance that stops M4 from such a collaboration:

> I don't see any barriers to hiring a freelancer, but there is only one criterion: whether the agency team can cope with the task or an extra specialist is needed for the project. From my experience, usually, the agency team can deal with everything I need (M4).

The award-winning E2 and E3 have worked for big network agencies in Brazil, Europe, and the USA, and shared their confusion. E2 was surprised that "before March 2020, the agencies I worked for preferred to work in person, and, ironically, these agencies see themselves as modern and trendsetters." E3 stated that "from what I've heard and read about the agencies' methods and practices from the 70s, 80s, 90s, nothing had changed deeply" until the pandemic started. Global network agencies have certain styles and pools of clients and maintain their ways of life and their comfort zones. This fact shows that even a creative company as an institution doesn't mean to be flexible. E4, a senior copywriter in an agency, supports the established order of things: "no one works as a freelancer at our agency, I can't imagine a reason to hire one."

5.1.2. COVID accelerated the raise of remote work and freelance

In March 2020 the whole world faced the COVID pandemic. It changed everyone's lifestyle and forced people to work from home. This experience of working remotely has brought flexibility and open-mindedness to e-work to the next level. It happened in almost every market and field, and the creative industry had to adapt to the new reality like all the others.

E2 stated unequivocally that "there is no doubt that after the global lockdown generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, there was great flexibility in the work". F1 claimed that the situation with working from home "has drastically changed since the beginning of the COVID

lockdown period". The companies owners understood that "there were no significant changes after their employees started work remotely" (F1), and "that the productivity didn't decrease with the employees being remote, so there is no need for them to come back to the offices" (F3).

> The heads of our agency don't hurry us up to go back to the office as they see that the level of productivity is the same, if not higher. When I work from home I feel better responsible for deadlines, as the quicker you finish a project more hours of free time you have (E4).

M2 is a brand manager who deals with creative teams, and she comes from the creative side of the advertising process. She is positive and hopeful, and expects changes in the creative industry: "finally, creative companies can begin to justify their "free in spirit and body" status."

F1 observed that creative companies now realized that they didn't need many full-time employees, that it's easier to hire freelancers per project and rotate them. M1 observes the changes in the corporate mindsets towards remote and freelance work:

> COVID played a great role in this shift, accelerated it, and made even the most conservative structures revise their attitude to freelance and remote cloud teams and become open to this experience (M1).

Interesting observation: the creative workers see a global pandemic as an opportunity:

- "Now, after the COVID, we expect some real changes" (E3);

- "COVID helps a lot" (F2);

- "In some way, the closed borders opened the new perspective" (F1);

- "COVID helped me to move to another country and to become more open-minded" (E1).

While other businesses have been damaged by the pandemic, creative freelancers got a chance to develop their work and to find more projects.

5.1.3. Freelance is a new normal

With the ubiquitous remote work acceptance, internet coverage, and open-mindedness to online meetings freelancers are in higher demand now. F2 is sure that "freelancers with stronger portfolios and experience level would be more demanded than previously". However, the demand can go ahead with the development of employers' flexibility. Despite the specifically freelance profile, "still sometimes I have to reject "full-time only" proposals, as I only want to work remotely"' (F4). F3, a freelancer living in Berlin, deals only with the clients who accept his working from abroad:

> I have never faced the situation when clients rejected working with me due to my distant location or due to difficulties with remote communication and with payments for my service. I'm blessed that I never look for clients, they come to me with recommendations, so they know what they're getting into (F3).

E2 believes that the agencies' teams will increase according to the demand. "In other words, the freelancer market will grow and stability in advertising agencies will decrease" (E2). E1 affirms the previous statement: "soon creative offices will become smaller but the agencies will be bigger in a sense of the number of coworkers." F2 thinks that "only small core teams of management and accounting would be in office" and that the full-time collaboration in the creative field is outdated:

> The usual structure of the working pipeline where everyone has to be employed and on-site doesn't make sense anymore: selection of members of the team per project gives more flexibility not only for the clients' budgets but for the employers as well (F2).

Freelance is a new normal not only for the creative industry but also at the governmental level. "Freelance is a solid reason to get a residence permit", said F3. He is a Ukrainian living in Berlin with a Freelance Creative Director residence permit. No specific expertise is mentioned in the papers in order not to narrow down the possibilities. F3 explains that "during COVID crisis every opportunity had to be taken":

> I do video production and shoot commercials for local clients, I run mobile photography online classes at Airbnb experiences, I do dog photography, as I always wanted to, so I'm having fun. I still do advertising projects, but small and simple, not to get stressed anymore (F3).

The fact that the German government has such an option as a freelancer visa has attracted F3 to move, to live, and to pay taxes there.

5.1.4. Freedom of being remote

When the lockdown started in 2020, it didn't affect freelancers the way it affected employees, new remote work arrangements seemed challenging. E4 didn't want to become separated from the team, but now she loves working from home and considers it the best decision:

> It's difficult [to be an employed advertiser] with a baby. My son is in kindergarten already, so it is easier, but when he gets sick… The remote option makes you go through everything, though. By the way, I'm so happy about working remotely! I expected that I would not be able to distance myself from the team, that it was stupid, but no, now I see it was the best decision for our agency and for me to go remote!

F1 shared the expectation "that the world will never be the same considering the attitude towards the remote work". Most of the respondents agree with F1:

> The years of the pandemic and numerous lockdowns have taught the whole world that everything is possible and can be handled online and remotely, flexibility and mutual convenience are respected, and remote is not a problem anymore (F3).

The fact that the physical location doesn't matter anymore is mentioned by M4 and E4. They predicted the end of everything offline that can easily go online. 'Online pre-production meetings? We could not even imagine such a thing before the pandemic started! (E4). They explained the inconvenience for all the parties of a commercial shooting process:

> We had to organize PPMs so that everyone — the clients, creative team from the agency, producers, film crew, actors, and so on — could gather all together at some location at a certain time to discuss the commercial shooting (E4).

After several online pre-production meetings, all the parties agreed on the convenience and speed of making decisions. "And now, even when the pandemic is finally over, PPMs will never ever be offline anymore, they will all be handled online" (M4).

F3 also said that "once you go freelance, overcome the fear of dying poor and the "find a normal job" advice, and there is no turning back."

> I can't imagine myself working full-time at any kind of agency or a company. My latest 2 years were such a carousel, it was so difficult and exciting at the same time, so I don't see myself in any office right now, working from 8 to 17 (F3).

Financially stable freelancers can get addicted to the feeling of freedom. The necessity to go back to office work may even scare and push to the direction of legal self-employment:

> I don't want to go back to the office. I haven't legalized my freelance yet, as I may act like a stay-at-home mom. But when my maternity leave is over, yes, I will start in on the self-employment process. All these taxes, paperwork seem so difficult and scary to me, but I will delve into that to keep working from home, I will find some algorithms to handle it (F4).

E4 doesn't see herself as a freelancer, but she enjoys the freedom of working from home. Almost everyone mentioned the comfort of being remote, one way or another. Both F4 and E4 are moms, and they love the possibility of spending more time with their babies.

Remote work can affect personal life positively and negatively. Freelancers are not new to remote collaborations. F3 enjoys his life here and now and doesn't exclude the possibility of changing his current lifestyle:

> Maybe I will change my mind later, who knows. But for now, I value my freedom and flexibility, and all the boring bureaucracy can be delegated to someone else not to burden myself (F3).

Employees seem more careful about remote work. E3 anticipates the possible challenges ahead, and questions rhetorically: "how much will work invade our personal lives? What are the boundaries of these two sides? And, most important, how can we deal with that?".

5.1.5. Hybrid model is the future

The complex future of the creative industry was predicted by M2, strategist, and brand manager. She claims that "one thing is clear — everything is now moving towards hybrid freelancing and remote work." E2 elaborated by stating that "there will also be a mix between face-to-face work and remote work, fixed teams, and temporary teams."

> I believe that this [pandemic] period has taught the companies owners and the governments that people work better with a certain level of flexibility, so more freedom will be given to employees, such as remote days, 3–4-day office work weeks, and more open-mindedness will be expected from managers (F3).

M2 considers the hybrid model as obviously the nearest future for several reasons she presented. Firstly, the creative industry "was able to test remote work processes well during 2020 and realized that work can be done without compromising the result" (M2). "I think agencies will offer a different range of options so the employee can pick, choose and even suggest the way they want to work" (E3).

Secondly, "in the context of accelerating marketing cycles, clients are demanding an increasingly flexible and fast response from creative contractors" (M2). The conservative big global agencies that E2 and E3 have mentioned above have to learn how to adapt.

Thirdly, "a new generation of employees of the creative field do not see themselves in the same profession until the end of their days" (M2). They would rather try new things.

> It is becoming normal to change not only the place of work but also the specialization. Today I'm here, tomorrow I'm there. Today I am a designer, and tomorrow I want to cut woods in the middle of nowhere in a Norwegian village. And this is normal. Today the world gives them such an opportunity (M2).

And fourthly, "the freelance market is becoming more stable and regulated" (M2). She added that "there are no longer those fears from the 2000s that suddenly an unknown freelancer can let the whole team down" (M2).

> This still can happen, but the institute of reputation and the availability of any information reduces such stories to a minimum, to the level of the permanent office employee failures (M2).

Managers' points of view vary. M3 would like to work both with internal and external teams. "I want people to feel comfortable as long as the work done. If they provide with good results working in a pajama from home, it works for me" (M3). M4 doesn't think she will hire a freelancer for a big project any time soon, as the agency team's skillset, knowledge, and talents are enough for the tasks the agency gets due to its specialty. M2 is positive about all the possible changes in the agencies. She says it's interesting to observe where the market goes and what new ideas can be generated in unusual mixes of freelancers and agencies.

M1 shares the optimism of M2 and thinks that the "mix of different experts" can bring "innovative and unique creative products and solutions". But M1 is also "a bit pessimistic […] that there will appear huge platforms that might "uberize" creative services as well". In this case, major clients will have their teams and platforms, and "minor and local clients will use the services of aggregator publisher's platforms" (M1), killing the nature of creative work. E2 shows pessimism as well; "currently, traditional advertising agencies are losing space to consultancies, startups, and houses (agencies created within the client's business)."

5.2. Financial advantages and disadvantages of employment and freelance

The second nucleus is called "Financial advantages and disadvantages of employment and freelance" as it describes the financial strengths and weaknesses of being a freelancer or an employee. This thematic nucleus is the combination of two research questions: #2a ("What financial advantages and disadvantages exist for the agency and the creative employee?") and #2b ("What financial advantages and disadvantages exist for the agency and the remote creative unit?"). E4 captured the essence by comparing employees and freelancers: "I am employed, but I work remotely, thus, I feel like I am a freelancer, but with a stable salary."

Almost all the respondents agreed that employees are secured financially and freelancers are unstable. The development of these opinions led to several categories to discuss (Table 9):

- creative workers have to choose between stable salaries and risky freelance opportunities;

- freelancers are more cost-effective for creative agencies than employees, and remote work reduces spendings for all the parties;

- freelancers can be hired internationally, global collaborations can reduce costs and open new horizons for all the parties — creatives, agencies, and clients.

Thematic nucleus	Categories & insights	Descriptors & citations	Free-lancers	Emplo-yees	Mana-gers	To-tal
Financial advantages and disadvantages of employment and freelance	Stability of employees	"Employees receive guaranteed salary regardless of the workload" (F1, F2, F4, E1, E4, M1, M3) "In my opinion this type of work is more related to love and vocation than to the search for stability" (E2)	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E4	M1, M2, M3, M4	10
	Possibilities of freelancers	"Paying per projects in total can turn out to be more expensive than paying a salary" (M1) "Freelancers' earnings always unstable: one month can be profitable, another month can pass with no income at all" (F4)	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E2, E3	M1, M3	9
	Freelancers are cost-effective for companies	"Freelancers are cheaper when companies need a specific skillset" (M3) "No need to pay a full salary to an employee that is needed few hours per month" (F1)	F1, F2, F4	E1, E2, E3, E4	M1, M2, M3	10
	Remote work reduces expenses	"Companies save on the office rent, but electricity and water bills go up" (E4) "Less money on public transport, taxi, gas" (M3)	F1, F2, F4	E1, E3, E4	M1, M3	8
	Remote work opens financially attractive labor markets abroad	"Companies can find high qualified workers from the other regions that cost much less in comparison with locals" (F1) "Remote workers can locate in a less expensive city or country and save money on commute" (E3)	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E3	M1, M3	8

Table 9. Thematic nucleus #2 and the insights related to it.

5.2.1. Stability of employees

The first category and the reaction of all the respondents to the question about the financial differences was predictable. "Employees receive guaranteed salary regardless of the workload", said M1, and almost everyone else agreed. F4 went into more details about the process and remuneration: "Employees receive their monthly wage that doesn't vary with the number of projects, comments, and edits, so, I think it is definitely less than freelancers' earnings." F4 says that freelancer has a full right to charge extra in case of unstoppable flow of edits, and employees will keep processing the infinite number of comments without bonuses.

However, bonuses do exist for employees, as well as "perks, medical insurance, financial support in case of emergencies" (F1, M3). Companies take care of their employees, contributing to the best of their ability — they may follow the governmental laws or just have people-oriented policies.

Some agencies provide employees with free training, conferences, and courses (M3), some suggest days off or one travel per year (M3), profession-related books and agency branded clothes can be gifts as well (M3). M3 said that companies are made this way the person should have this feeling of being cared about: "everything is made for you, you just do your job and get your salary twice per month." This is what stability looks like for most of the respondents, but not for E2 and E3.

"In my opinion [creative] work is more related to love and vocation than to the search for stability" (E2). E2 and E3 are unpredictably pessimistic about employment. "Advantages of creative employment? Actually, I don't see any," said E3. Both of them are employees of good big agencies, and their insights are not as positive about the stability of employees, on the contrary, they question it.

> Advertising agencies are essentially service providers. This means that in the marketing chain, advertisers are at the end of the process. But they are the first to suffer from instability (E2).

"Traditionally, when an agency loses a big client, it needs to reduce the size of its staff," E2 explained the lack of job security in the creative industry. When "payment flows are reduced, and it may lead to difficulties with paying salaries" (F4), and it is a problem of big teams.

> There is a certain medium-term flexibility in how the team approaches the client portfolio. When a pitch for a big client is lost, [a manager's] head hurts about what to do with the team and how to feed those hungry mouths (M2).

"It is difficult to increase the salary," M3 touched on the topic of promotion. "It is called "a glass ceiling," when an employee's career grows to a certain point and can't jump over the barrier" (M3).

> It often happens in small agencies due to a little number of vacant positions, as the CEO often acts as account or creative director, but also in the big companies, where all the "delicious" positions are occupied forever, and nepotism flourishes (M3).

"Also, usually women are paid less and rarely promoted," M3 said. The priorities of creatives are different, some would aim to achieve high revenue, others value non-material benefits.

Creative employees who don't want to take side projects usually have financial stability and/ or family support. E4 never takes freelance projects, she says "I like my job, my agency's clients, and the salary is totally enough to me."

> I don't need extra money, I'm good financially, and I cherish my rare free time. I don't want to waste it on working more. It should be something extremely interesting to persuade me to take a freelance project. I used to do it when I was on my maternity leave in order to keep being on my toes, not to step out of the profession for 3 years, and not to forget the clients' names (E4).

The others wish they earned more, and they are sure it is possible in the creative industry, but it depends on the market:

> Wages used to be higher 20 or 10 years ago. However, the area of agency creativity continues to be a sector that pays well, especially if we look at markets like Dubai and the United States of America (E2).

M1 came up with the conclusion for the cost-effectiveness of employees: "it is cheaper to have an internal resource in case the company needs those employees working full time," as managers "can make people work for non-monetary perks." These bonuses cost nothing to the company but make employees satisfied without extra money being paid to them.

5.2.2. Possibilities of freelancers

Workload and payment situations are different for each freelancer and remote creative unit. E2 shared the opinion that "sometimes people who work independently get more money than an employee from a fixed location." As M2 said, "the financial question is twofold and it depends on the quality, professionalism, and self-management of these units." She believes that self-employment "is less stable for a creative person and requires administrative skills in addition to creative ones" (M2). A creative talent should also be a good producer and traffic manager to cope with the tasks, deadlines, and constant workflow. It takes precious time from creative minds and requires extra skills and patience.

> But this also allows us to make this market more competitive and pumped. Good specialists will always have offers, more opportunities to earn more and make a better and more diverse portfolio. (M2)

"Freelancers' earnings are always unstable: one month can be profitable, another month can pass with no income at all" (F4), and "it is hard to pay bills without projects" (F2). F1 made a list of disadvantages a freelancer faces:

- "No financial support in case of emergency or sickness" (F1)

- "Have to buy equipment, have to pay for equipment, software, llicense for the apps, furniture, stationery, pay electricity and water bills" (F1)

- "Have to pay taxes and do all the paperwork by themselves" (F1)

- "All the education at their own expense" (F1).

The earnings of freelancers are unpredictable, but their "price per hour is higher" (F1), which is explained by unique expertise and taxation. "It is better for a freelancer to charge per hour than per project, especially when there is not a lot of work to do", F4 said. She straightened out her point of view: "Hourly wage is a good insurance: in case of dozens of comments appear in the process, final work time calculation can bring good money (F4). Freelancers "either charge all extra work or simply don't take it" (M1).

"Freelancers and remote workers can participate in different amount of projects at the same time" (F2). It provides them not only with different sources of income but also with professional growth possibilities and challenges. "The clients rotate, someone comes, someone leaves, but I always have projects to do" (F4).

"Sometimes freelancers create pairs to work on small projects, and for a client, it is still cheaper than hiring an agency" (F4). F4 also mentioned the way freelancers can collaborate: associate partnership: "there are agencies like Pentagram where all the workers — from juniors to heads — are all venture associate partners and work for profit participation" (F4).

> The percentage of interest of each worker is established due to his or her input in each project. Such a model lets creative teams earn more money as associate partners than as employees because the percentage of creative work time is usually higher than that of the management (F4).

The model has a lot of potentials and has been tested by Pentagram since 1972. But it is still not very popular due to possible unethical behavior of the management:

> Here is a threat for creatives: the management may suggest profit sharing to save costs when the agency has small revenue, but when a big and expensive project comes, the managers may change their mind and try to switch creatives back to monthly salaries in order not to pay a lot of interest (F4).

The possibility to share profits of each project adds value to such collaborations and provides the ground for long-term relationships. "Venture creative workers are interested in doing their job in the best way to earn as much as possible at their projects" (F3).

5.2.3. Freelancers are cost-effective for companies

The most of respondents agreed that freelancers are advantageous for creative companies, they are convinced about freelancers' cost-effectiveness: "small agencies (10–20 people) can benefit a lot from hiring freelancers, it is cost-effective for them" (F4).

> "In financial terms, there is one big advantage for creative companies: they do not need to spend the budget on salaries of permanent employees when projects are planned to be made like a piecework" (M2).

"It is cheaper to hire a freelancer for a specific skill set" (M3), as there is "no need to pay a full salary to an employee that is needed for few hours per month" (F1). Managers are also free from paying the employment bonuses: "no paycheques for sick leaves, holidays, etc." (F1), and "[…] there is always a young and wild copywriter or a designer for a lower price" (E1). F4 is convinced that "working with freelancers is more economical for agencies than keeping everyone employed":

> For example, summer is a dull season for the agencies: if there is a project, the approvals can take forever as clients are on vacations, and the budgets are not that big. So, the payment flows are reduced, and it may lead to difficulties with paying salaries (F4).

F4 gave another strong argument to the employee salary-related issue: "freelancers usually charge post factum, after the project is completed" (F4). The project can last several months, and freelancers are paid after the final paycheque from the client if there are no other arrangements.

There are certain financial risks, of course. Creative companies "may lose money if a freelancer disappears or does the job poorly, fixing such situations requires extra costs" (M3). That's why "someone in the company should be responsible for all the financial and paperwork work with the freelancers specifically" (M3), usually account managers are supervisors.

[…] it's an extra headache to discuss every payment with every freelancer — especially if there are several freelancers in the project at the same time. Some people charge per hour, some per project, which can lead to confusion (E1).

Management can refuse to take more responsibilities in favor of experiments. However, M2 is sure that everything is possible and not difficult on the way to the best result:

Yes, there is a nuance in extra paperwork, but if you have a strong administrative unit and you are a modern agency in a modern country, then don't even think about these problems (M2).

Overall, freelancers and agencies have mutually beneficial relationships: the first ones charge their fees for not being employed, second ones enjoy the cost-effective collaboration.

5.2.4. Remote work reduces expenses

E2 and E3 see only advantages of remote work both for workers and for companies. Remote creative workers "can choose a more distant and less expensive city/country to live and work from" (E3). Living in happening cities can be costly, but remote option lets people choose more comfortable places: physically, psychologically and financially.

Creative companies can save on the office rent and bills going fully remote, because usually "the rent of a building or a working space requires investments" (E3). They don't need big offices or offices at all (E4), and there is no need to spend money on designing creative workplaces, equipment, furniture, stationery (M1, M3), and snacks (F1). Agencies can even save on additional operating staff: "janitors, securities, secretaries" (E3).

My agency rented several big offices, but then because of the COVID everyone started working from home and the rent was paid in vain. So the owners of the agency rented one small office instead. Now, if we all decided to come back to the office suddenly, we wouldn't be able to find a place to sit, and I'm not even talking about these 1,5-2 meters of safe distance (E4).

When there is no need to come to the office, remote workers "can save money on business lunches close to offices in the fancy downtown" (E3). But the most discussed issue related to

the reduction of spendings is the fact that remote workers "spend less with no commute" (E3, E4, M1, M3). "Less money is spent on public transport, taxi, gas," M1 noticed.

> Being remote saves not only time but also the gas for the car. When I come to the office three times a week instead of two, I already feel the unpleasant raise of the gas consumption! (E4)

E4 mentioned a downside of the global work-from-home situation: "energy and water bills at home raised." This is the moment when the companies' responsibility of organizing decent workplaces now rest on the shoulders of their remote employees. If freelancers had been ready for the office-at-home situation after the pandemic lockdown started employees had to invest in their home offices. "I don't want to go back to the office; I'm sitting now on my lovely comfortable newly-acquired chair, I genuinely don't want to go back" (F4).

5.2.5. Remote work opens financially attractive labor markets abroad

The balance of cost-effectiveness for remote workers and companies goes beyond the countries borders. "If freelancers want bigger income with no pauses, they need to work hard looking for more new clients at the highly competitive market" (F3).

At the same time, companies "can find highly qualified workers from the other regions that cost much less in comparison with locals" (F1, F2, M3). M3 also added that such "an opportunity of hiring workers from different regions helps to decrease the burn rate" (M3). The burn rate means the cost of the whole production process that has to be lower than the price of the project to get profit.

The opportunity of working from home can provide with stable income if the market is more profitable than the local one. "I hope that I will have more payable clients and profitable projects with my agency in Moscow than in my homeland Belarus" (F4).

Freelancers pay their taxes themselves, so for the company, a big item of expenses can be avoided. The issues with foreign payments may arise, especially for those who work for

another region with different laws and rules. E1 was a freelancer in the past, and she had problems with money transferring:

> I didn't have a foreign card. For example, Russian agency paid me with Russian rubles and I couldn't open Russian card in Belarus so had to use my friend's card for transactions. That was annoying (E1).

F3 is from Ukraine, lives in Berlin with a freelancer residence permit, and has to prove his necessity of living in the European Union by paying taxes. "I have to do more projects here in Germany to prolong my residence permit, but I also work for clients from Ukraine, USA, Europe" (F3).

> I have to have a certain flow of money to be able to prove my activity to the authorities and to pay a flat tax. I need to accept payments in euro to show my income to the tax office, so non-European clients may pay to my PayPal Business or Revolut Business accounts, it is usually convenient for them and good enough for the tax officer (F3).

The taxation system in a new country with its laws and subtleties can be confusing for foreigners who come to live and work as freelancers. "To deal with local tax officer and paperwork freelancers in Germany hire tax advisors" (F3). F3 shared his experience: "I deal with one tax advising agency that works specifically with freelancers, they do all the tax support, it is very convenient" (F3).

5.3. Creative working process features

The third nucleus is identified as "Creative working process features" and it combines the issues that remote workers, freelancers, office-based employees, and managers face daily working together. The collaborations of all these groups have many benefits and drawbacks, and there is no one and only perfectly working model. In this thematic nucleus, the answers concerning questions #3a ("What are the advantages and disadvantages of the office-based

creative work process?") and #3b ("What are the advantages and disadvantages of the distance-based creative work process?") were analyzed.

The respondents looked at the creative process from different perspectives and angles. They mentioned different insights from their experience that matched, in some ways they disagreed. Almost all of them agreed on the point about freelancers being sources of unique expertise and on the point about easy managerial control in the office. Also, they agreed on the point about remote work flexibility, and the most laconic statement was formulated by F4: "The location doesn't matter, people matter". The compilation of the responses and the categories discussed are presented in Table 10.

Thematic nucleus	Categories & insights	Descriptors & citations	Free-lancers	Emplo-yees	Mana-gers	To-tal
Creative working process features	Work from anywhere	"The location doesn't matter, people matter" (F4). "No need to leave home countries to collaborate internationally" (E2).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E3	M1, M2, M3, M4	10
	Office-based features	"An opportunity to participate in big projects creation as a lot of people are involved in each one" (M3). "Easier to control the process" (M1, M3, M4).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E2, E3	M1, M2, M3, M4	11
	Remote work features	"The good thing is being able to manage [one's] own time" (E2). "Working from home requires a good organization of processes on the part of management, tracking progress and synchronization" (M1).	F1, F4	E2, E3, E4	M1, M2	7
	Freelance work features	"Freelancers work 24/7" (F2). "Freelancers can choose and decline projects" (F1, F2, M1, M3).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E2, E3	M1, M2, M3	10
	Reasons and risks of hiring a freelancer	"Freelances are the source of unique expertise" (F1, F2, F4, E2, E3, E4, M1, M3). "Freelancers are hired for small projects" (E2, E4).	F1, F2, F4	E1, E2, E3, E4	M1, M2, M3, M4	11

Table 10. Thematic nucleus #3 and the insights related to it.

5.3.1. Work from anywhere

"The location doesn't matter, people matter" (F4). Either agencies and employees are noticing that all the creative work can be done from wherever they are.

> Since March 2020 it has become easier to work remotely for advertising agencies and clients anywhere in the world without having to leave the home country (E2).

"There is an opportunity to hire people from different regions and have a more diverse team and views from the other perspectives" (M3). F1 made an example: "freelance designers can work with companies from all over the world, f.e., creating art for Netflix working in Belarus." "Creative teams from Spain can work on campaigns for an Australian agency without leaving their houses; things like that couldn't be imagined before" (E3).

"Employers discovered the opportunity to hire the professionals from all over the world, build new processes and policies and became more open-minded for freelancers" (M1). Now "the agencies can hire a team from other continents," E3 says. F1 thinks globally:

> […] during the last years the borders for hiring professionals from other regions have been erased. In case you can work with your employees remotely why not trying professionals from other countries? (F1)

"Hiring people with different mentalities enriches the project result as local creatives can bring local insights into the work" (M3). E1 is Belarusian, former part-time freelancer, and she got a job offer scrolling social media being abroad:

> I was one of those freelancers who found a job scrolling Facebook. My current Russian agency decided to do an experiment and try to hire freelancers from other countries. They hired me and a couple of others from Ukraine and Poland. Together we added fresh international experience to the projects and created a lot of good campaigns. I think that freedom played its role. Now I finally arrived in Moscow and I have no problems with going to Belarus sometimes and work from there (E1).

Most of the respondents agreed that creative people don't have to be on-site, they can work from anywhere — they just need a stable and fast internet connection and equipment.

The Moscow agency I work for has an unusual business model. They have 20 employees, and they don't have any office. All the workers live in different countries: in Italy, Ireland, Russia, Belarus, etc. They don't need any hub to gather together, video calls are enough for the communication. Sometimes they organize events together or come together for a grand opening of a big project, but that's it (F4).

"If they work from the places where they feel comfortable and productive, why would they need an office?" (F4). F3 is convinced that creative offices can become coworking spaces to come in need: "to do a presentation, to print whatever, to brainstorm, to have bonding parties on Fridays. But they are not needed daily anymore". M1 is confident that "clients don't care much about the office of the contractor anymore":

Clients are interested in the case study, expertise, and creativity. No need to show the clients how hard the team works in a hip office with a coffee machine and a pretty secretary at the reception desk (M1).

E3 said that "the future is a mix of working from home, from the office or from wherever the employee and employer will be comfortable with." F3 totally agrees and shares his experience:

My experience shows that clients don't care where I work from: from the office or from the beach, as long as I do my job properly and meet the deadlines. Thanks to the pandemic, more people have changed their mindset and realized that remote creatives deliver the same quality and KPIs wherever they are (F3).

Creative freelancers also mentioned that "creativity needs changing the surroundings to boost the inspiration" (F3). Traveling and visiting places can trigger ideas and imagination.

I don't have one specific spot to work from, I like changing places. A shabby coffee shop, a cozy park, a noisy bar — every place can inspire, but overall, it's all about the city around, it's about the atmosphere of the location (F3).

"The fact that travel is more available now triggers the creative development of more people, giving birth to new talents around the globe" (F3). He also added that there is no necessity to go far to get inspired. "Even domestic tourism lets people see places, cities, cultures, diversity, and this visual experience affects their creativity" (F3).

Work and travel combination is often called "workations" (M2). For freelancers, it is a normal order of things, but it is also common to office-based employees. Workations force employees to keep being in touch and alert even during the statutory annual leave, and it obliges workers to travel with their laptops and attend virtual meetings.

> I remember my friend and I were on vacation in Sao Paulo, and she had to do some work in a museum. She paid the entrance ticket, got a sudden call, sat on a bench, and was writing scripts while I was enjoying art. We left, and she didn't see a single artwork there as she had to be staring at her phone (F1).

It affects the work-life balance, as people can't release the tension, can't pause their thinking about work, and relax, as they are constantly working. And "relaxation is highly important for creativity (E2).

5.3.2. Office-based opportunities

The office-based work process involves the team and all the equipment in one place "with a moodboard and whiteboards with stages of the project" (M3). It has various obvious advantages, such as "an opportunity to participate in big projects creating as a lot of people are involved in each one" (M3). F1 mentioned that "famous clients almost always hire agencies to work on big and important projects, and it is an opportunity to enrich employees' portfolios."

Teamwork not only helps to bring big ideas to life but also creates an environment to learn from each other. F2 noted that "teamwork maintains the creative vibe, workers can share knowledge and get inspired by each other." M3 said that "work in an agency is a good start for young professionals, as they can be mentored by senior colleagues who share their experience." "Working in pairs in person is easier and more dynamic," E2 said.

> There is an opportunity to get to know the other sides of the projects, learn more about the professions involved in the process and eventually become an expert in different fields with the possibility to switch one's profession (M3).

"Active participation of all team members at each step of the project is easier to achieve when the team is in the office" (E2). M3 went all the way from a designer in an agency to a client side due to networking within the professional community, participation at all the stages of project creation, and observation. "I do not design anymore, now I'm hiring designers to do the job I used to do" (M3).

"The creative environment, stylish interior design, and the synergy of creative people working together support the creative vibe and flow," M1 said.

> One of the reasons why people like creative agencies is the cool and laid-back atmosphere and the ideas can be boosted by the creative surroundings, as everything around can stimulate the imagination and can trigger an idea (F3).

E2 noted that there is "an excessive intervention in creative solutions by the internal team" sometimes. Too many people are involved in the project, too many people share their points of view, and it is hard to come to a compromise. M1 mentioned that "inner competitions between teams and creatives provide professional growth."

"Direct contact with the team" (E2) and the fact that everyone works side by side makes "the decision-making process is faster due to having all the responsible people at arm's length" (M4). All the managers, M1, M2, M3, and M4, mentioned that in the office "productivity is expected to be high as the management can control the working process."

> We work remotely, but we have a working schedule when we have to be available. Of course, we can ask for permission to go offline for a while — to bring the kid somewhere, f.e. But the rest of the time we are available. Freelancers can just say "sorry I can't right now, bye," so I think that of course employed team is easier to manage (E4).

Managers see control as an advantage, but for an employee, it can be nerve-wracking: "I hate it when everyone can see my screen and stand behind my back! It is so stressful," F4 said. M3 agreed with this statement, saying that "noisy open spaces make it difficult to concentrate, and people always stare at each other screens behind their back," which is irritating.

> For me, it is good when an office is more like a coworking space that creates somewhat like a routine to change the environment. I liked to come earlier than everybody and leave the last one so that I could work on my freelance projects (F4).

E2, M1, and M3 mentioned "creating a routine" as both an advantage and a disadvantage. They said that "routine is a proper condition for working process and a killing condition for creative process" (M1). E2 said that the routine helps to maintain work-life separation, "to switch between work and life contexts" (M1), but M3 said that "doing the same job all the time may cause boredom and burnout".

> Everyone works from home now, but creative teams may book the day and time and come to brainstorm together in the office. I come once a week to the office when I need to change the environment. Designers don't come to the office as it is not very convenient for them to walk around with their iMacs (E4).

F1 said that "even in case there is no work, workers still should come to the office". Sometimes "creative employees have to do a job that is not connected to the list of their responsibilities because someone has to do it" (F1).

M3 claimed that there are "very rare top career opportunities due to lack of vacant places, occupied top positions by the owners of the agency, gender discrimination". Also, the process of firing employees is difficult (M3), especially in small agencies with small teams.

5.3.3. Remote work features

In 2021 the question of remote work is as vital as never before. M2 thinks that the choice of an office-based work or remote work "highly depends on the type of personality of the creative employee and this is the basic factor":

> For some, the office is a place with its own rituals and regulations and therefore allows you to work more efficiently. But for someone, there are a lot of distractions: to drink coffee, network, hang out in the smoking room and discuss a new movie (M2).

M1 is sure that "working from home requires a good organization of processes on the part of management, tracking progress and synchronization".

> But even if working in an office allows you to do these in an increasingly natural way, there are some nuances: employees tend to adapt more to the pace and rhythm of each other's work in the office than on the remote work (M1).

Remote work took employees closer to the freelance lifestyle. "The good thing is being able to manage [one's] own time, wake up later, and have more time with the family", E2 said.

> I can plan my day myself, I can do nothing staring at the ceiling and doing my stuff, I can work nights or mornings, no one cares as long as I meet deadlines (E4).

"In a home-based context, many employees complain about anxiety attacks and excessive workload; this is a point that needs improvement', said E2. Indeed, for an office-based and teamwork-oriented employee going remote is a stressful moment. E2 continued:

> Working remotely makes it harder to grow professionally apparently. It happens for a few reasons: the amount of work is much more intense, the monitoring by team leaders is distant and there is no endomarketing (E2).

While some employees went remote and felt the lack of professional growth, others experienced freedom and flexibility. E4 shared her experience of working remotely:

> We save so much time on the things like commuting. There is no need in wasting hours just drive somewhere for a meeting, especially if it is at, let's say, 11 pm. No one wants to go somewhere for work at night, but attending an online meeting from home seems alright at almost any reasonable time (E4).

"I can be wrong, but I think that with remote work option many creatives stopped taking freelance projects, as their main need of being away from the office is met", E4 said.

> We don't discuss with the colleagues if anyone does freelance projects, but I know that one copywriter helped his friend with naming and logo. As it is for the friend, my colleague's attitude was "you don't pay me, so no comments accepted". (E4)

F4 explained her attitude towards office-based and freelance work, and why she chose the second option:

> I noticed that in the office I actually work 4 hours out of 8. The other half is for chit-chatting, drinking coffee, checking social networks, going all together for lunch… But at home it is different and compact: I don't waste my non-working time on checking social networks as all my pauses are devoted to my daughter, to household work, to having lunch with my family, to grocery shopping, and so on. Also, I don't have to spend time on a commute (F4).

5.3.4. Freelance work features

Even though "freelancers work 24/7" (F2), F1 mentions their freedom and flexibility: "holidays can start at any moment." Freelancers can plan their projects and earnings and work the way they need to be able to go for a vacation or a workation, taking all the projects with them, if they wish. E3 is sure that freelancers have "more work opportunities, and they save time as they don't have to commute."

F2 and E2 said that freelancers plan their working time themselves. M1 said that "freelancers can organize their days and workplaces however they want, having the freedom to choose their own schedule, rhythm, and place of work." F1 stated that the process doesn't matter: "freelancers can work the way they want: taking bath, traveling abroad or walking a dog."

> For creative employees the phrase "till the end of the day" usually means "5–6 pm" as the managers want to send the files to the clients before the workday is over, even though, usually the clients open these files only in the morning of the next day. As a freelancer I made this "end of the day" phrase actually mean "before midnight", and I have more time to work, chill, and do my stuff during the daytime (F4).

However, the flexibility of the schedule is relative. "Sometimes clients need freelancers to work at the weekends, evenings" (F1), "work-and-life balance is not that well balanced due to workations, night shifts, weekend deadlines, etc." (M1). E3 said that "limits between [freelancers'] work and personal lives are hard to define."

F2 also mentioned that freelancers "can choose projects," M3 supplements this phrase with the fact freelancers "can decline projects they dislike: both financially and emotionally" (M3). M1 added the fact that freelancers "easily switch between tasks and contractors," and she enjoys the "flexibility in terms of choosing a proper creative for a project or a project itself." Hiring freelancers and acting like one is in line with her activities, as M1 is an agency herself.

E4 thinks that a freelancer can easily take projects from different agencies, so they are less loyal to each one, don't share the pride of its success. F1 shared her opposite experience of being an employee in an agency and a freelancer at the same time: "it is impossible sometimes to take an offsite job due to the legal commitment."

> I appreciate those agencies that let their employees do freelance if they want or need to do them. I worked at such an agency, where freelance was forbidden, and whenever there was a pause between projects we had to come up with "ideas for festivals" — basically to make us work nonstop. It doesn't work for me; it is a mockery of a working process (F4).

This is a controversial moment in office-based collaboration when a creative unit wants or needs to take a freelance project for personal reasons. Especially if it doesn't interfere with actual work.

> I think that if an employee needs to do some freelance job, it's just a matter of adequacy, mutual trust, and meeting the agency's deadlines. It seems fair to me to work on freelance projects in the pauses between the agency' projects (F4).

Finding a side job doesn't mean a successful collaboration, as bureaucracy can ruin the agreement. Paperwork is one of the freelancers' responsibilities, and it requires resources.

> I had my headache as a temporary freelancer. Some agencies didn't want to work with me because I wasn't officially a freelancer. I worked in an agency but sometimes could work on projects outside my agency. And every time people from other agencies needed to create a special contract with me and usually, it took a while (E1).

Despite E1's problems with assignments without legal registration, M4 doesn't see any extra difficulties in dealing with freelancers from the management side:

[There are] all the same formalities when you hire any third party, same paperwork. But some creative freelancers are not legalized as self-employed entrepreneurs, and a contract with an individual leads to more taxes paid by the agency. But it doesn't matter (M4).

M1 noted that, unfortunately, "freelancers gain no fame": "there are not that many freelancers that win awards — it's expensive in the first place" (M1) to apply solely. Also, she said that agencies usually hide the fact they work with freelancers from their clients, thus, they don't include freelancers' names in the credits. This can be unpleasant for ambitious creative talents and for those who want to add projects to the portfolio.

5.3.5. Reasons and risks of hiring a freelancer

"Agencies can build real diverse teams, for example, and pick the right team to work on some very specific briefs," E3 said, and F2 completed the picture by saying that it is possible to hire "better specialists per task." E3 claims that freelancers are "less expensive, and they can be hired from anywhere to work anywhere."

Agency does a full cycle of creative work, "and if a client needs only some simple and quick branding without a strategy, supervising, copy and so on, a freelancer is the best choice" (F4). Freelancers make agencies more flexible.

Your client changed his mind and no longer has a weakness for "font" games, but was carried away by TikTok videos? You can quickly adjust to any market or client conditions (M2).

M2 has a very direct opinion on collaborations with freelancers. "Creative companies no longer have regulated structures according to the so-called canons, they have become more flexible in their processes and, accordingly, in their creativity" (M2).

This means that, for example, there are no longer those inveterate creative pairs or "couples" who walk like two Twix sticks, who grow old and dream of dying in one day. Yes, these are fairly stable creative units within the whole team, and everyone knows what result to expect from them. Yes, a good one, yes, the client likes it, but yes, every time it gets further away from the freshness and at one moment it starts to stink like yesterday's socks (M2).

Most of the respondents said that freelances are the source of unique expertise. However, E1 and E4 think that freelancers don't do big commercials and they are mostly hired for small pieces of work.

> I personally do fewer small creative tasks and just give them to freelancers. My mission is just briefing, controlling, and checking them. And it's working fine. It's faster and more effective (E1).

> I think my agency can hire freelancers for specific needs — to help with pitching a new client or to help with art-direction vision and expertise that no one in the agency has. Or media managers who work with bloggers, as we don't have that many digital projects to hire one (E4).

E2 doesn't agree with the "small projects only" notion: "it is not impossible to build big projects working from home but discipline is needed" (E2). M1 totally agrees with E2: "freelance needs a harsh self-organization and great efforts at managing the process."

M3 shared the experience of hiring freelancers: "the way remote workers organize their days can be challenging for companies, thus, managers have to be very flexible."

> But the flexible approach of forming a team individually for each project (which was also prompted by the widespread transition to remote work), is fraught with the danger of uncertainty. But only in this way a creative company can give itself a chance for some extraordinary result (M2).

M3 shared her bad experience with remote employees and freelancers that benefited from not being fully monitored: "they dawdle, having implausible tales about sick cats, dead relatives, bad internet connection, broken computers and so on" (M3). F1 supported this statement about the lack of control by saying "managers cannot 100% rely on remote workers".

There are no guarantees that "a freelancer [won't] switch to another project and [a manager] can lose a key creative specialist" (M1). M4 is sure that there is a risk of wrong interpretations of feedbacks, and that freelancers are not that strict in terms of deadlines and can disappear as he or she doesn't belong to the agency and doesn't share its responsibility.

> Working with freelancers (especially new people) is always a little bit risky. [One] can't fully control and navigate people if they are not the employees. My agency faced a lot of situations when a freelancer ruined the task or disappeared from the horizon at all. For freelancers [the situation] is the same: every time they need to be careful about an agency to work with (E1).

M1 is positive about the changes in the freelancers' unethical behavior: "fortunately the idea of a freelancer being a guy that works over your project furtively in his office and disappears with your prepay is hopelessly outdated."

> Freelance is a certain way of conducting creative services, and the reputation and the name are even more important, as freelancers cannot hide behind the back of their manager. So they have to be even more responsible and accurate to maintain the image of a reliable contractor (M1).

Even though it is common to think that freelancers are not very reliable workers, M1's experience is positive. The way she looks for new contractors is word-of-mouth, and it is hard for disreputable workers to get good recommendations. "The risk of getting stuck with an unreliable designer or copywriter is low as never", M1 said. Image and reputation should be impeccable to survive in the competitive market.

5.4. Nature of communication in the office and at a distance

The fourth thematic nucleus is named "The nature of communication in the office and at a distance." Opinions on quality communication, the importance of teamwork, and the necessity of socialization were analyzed. This nucleus inherited three research questions: #4a (What are the advantages and disadvantages of the relationships being inside the team with the colleagues and the superiors?), #4b (What are the advantages and disadvantages of the relationships being at a distance, away from the colleagues, superiors, clients?) and #5 (What kind of digital tools can be used to optimize the in-house work and/or remote collaborations?).

These three questions investigated different approaches of maintaining fruitful communication, advantages, and disadvantages of being remote and in an office. Some respondents said they couldn't imagine the worklife without teamwork, the others don't need socialization and feel better at a distance from the team. Some of them feel anxious being alone remotely, and others enjoy the silence without distractions and coffee talks. The categories, insights, and quotes of the respondents are collected in Table 11.

Thematic nucleus	Categories & insights	Descriptors & citations	Mentioned by			Total
Nature of communication in the office and at a distance	Interpersonal relationships and teamwork in the office	"Brainstorming is better in the office and in personal communication in general" (E1, E2, E3, E4, F2, F3, M1, M3). "Less chance of misunderstanding" (F2, M4).	F2, F3	E1, E2, E3, E4	M1, M2, M3, M4	10
	Backbone team is a must	"The office is a bonding thing" (F3). "I think that agency has to have its backbone team" (E4).	F1, F3	E1, E4	M1, M4	6
	Remote communication features	"Independence from other team members" (M1). "Any planning becomes long-term" (F2).	F1, F2, F3, F4	E1, E2, E3	M1, M2	9
	Necessity of socialization	"At our age, making friends is possible almost only at workplaces" (E3). "I don't need socialization with colleagues" (F4).	F1, F3, F4	E2, E3, E4	M3, M4	8
	Digital tools for remote collaborations	"Editing with the shared screen saves time on receiving comments and rendering big files and fastens the process of approval" (F4). "Nothing can replace real touch" (M1).	F1, F2, F4	E1, E2, E3, E4	M1, M2, M3, M4	11

Table 11. Thematic nucleus #4 and the insights related to it.

5.4.1. Interpersonal relationships and teamwork in the office

Face-to-face communication has its unquestionable strengths and weaknesses. E2 sees more advantages than disadvantages. He stated that "processes are faster when working in person, everything is done in real time" (E2). F2 is sure it is easier to communicate in the office, the decision-making process is faster offline than remotely, and there is "less chance of misunderstanding." F1 agrees with this opinion: "one can just go and ask people the question and get the answer immediately." M1 also noted that "feedbacks are shared instantly," and M3

said that "it is easier to track the work process in the office." Also, M3 sees an advantage in solving all the issues that happen during the working process in person, as they become available. E3 believes that face-to-face communication helps to create real and meaningful connections. "Things are better resolved, and interaction becomes less formal and more comfortable when in person," E3 stated.

"Some people prefer to brainstorm together, on-site, so they can actually see each other" F3 said. E1 thinks that "brainstorming is better in the office and via personal communication in general" and considers it her personal advantage of office-based work. "When I'm on Zoom, especially with my camera off it's easy to get distracted and I can't focus properly," E1 said.

However, F4 enjoys doing brainstorming sessions online, if it is convenient for all the participants. F4 doesn't see any difference in the speed of the communication offline and online.

> Creative teams in the offices react quickly, share ideas that pop up immediately. But it can be done with video conferences easily too, with video calls and sharing the screens and so on. So, for me, communication is absolutely the same (F4).

Most of the respondents see positivity in face-to-face meetings. F1 believes that "personal interaction helps to build the relationship and helps to work better as a team." Teamwork helps creative employees "to learn from their stronger colleagues" (M1). E3 stated that "meeting and seeing people in person is much better." He explained his statement: "I feel that agencies can make better connections when in person, for example, activities, presentations, speeches, happy hours, etc" (E3).

> On the contrary, meetings with clients are better online. Earlier if there were problems with projects creative teams had to go to the client's office or to call by phone. Now if there is any problem — we suggest "let's meet in Zoom." Online working process allows us to keep in touch with clients faster and more efficiently (E1).

Big teams and spacious offices can be inconvenient for creative workers. F1 stated that "too many people in open spaces create a lot of noise so it can be difficult to concentrate." F4

agreed with the previous statement: "for me the smaller the agency the better: otherwise lots of people walk around, try to talk, distract from work, or stare at my screen." They value harmonious coexistence, and it is not easy to achieve. "Spending time on shoptalks and distracting communication lead to entropy" (M1) and affect the whole communication negatively.

M4, E4, and E2 mentioned that a friendly, respectful, and professional atmosphere is highly important for teamwork. F2 is also persuaded that "team-building features help to foster a good working climate," helping to create relationships among unconnected and different coworkers. M1 sees a disadvantage of office-based work in the necessity of being in the same space with people one hasn't chosen to be with or doesn't even like. Workers "have to be nice with people they may dislike," M3 stated.

E2 said that "the downside [of the communication in the office] only happens when there is a bad working environment". M3 added that "bad relationship or distracting people can slow down the mutual work".

M1 blames on human factor for the destructive communicative moments inside creative teams. Creative people are impulsive and sensitive, and "working together side by side fuels conflicts, jealousy, intrigues instead of working" (M1). M2 believes that conflicts and fights are a part of a creative process and that everything is resolvable.

> When we talk about working in an office, a "fire" can break out of the blue — someone ate someone's yogurt, did not share power over the air conditioner, someone just does not like someone and that's it. In the online work of the team, conflicts usually come out due to misunderstandings and miscommunication. And these things are not so difficult to solve with the right management (M2).

Team building is the task for managers or HR teams if they exist in the agencies. They should observe the atmosphere in their teams and apply preventive measures. Rare conflicts are not destructive as long as they don't become a pattern.

5.4.2. Backbone team is a must

A creative office is not just a workplace, "it's a bonding thing," F3 stated. And his point of view was shared by all the creatives who chose employment. M1 said that offices of agencies create the think tank, the "synergy of experience and vibes," helping the team evolve and grow professionally. "Proven teams are more effective and show the better result," M1 claimed, and this solidarity of in-house teams is possible when they are all tight-knit and have figured each other out during the years of working side by side.

M1 also mentioned that "sharing the responsibility with the team and superiors" is important for productive teamwork. It means the significance of the feeling of the union, of not being alone in the working process, and that mistakes that can occur along the way don't mean punishment for one person. E1 agreed with this point: "good atmosphere and teamwork allow sharing opinions and fixing problems with projects before they appear."

> In general, the opportunity to be a part of a team makes a person more confident. If something goes wrong all the team shares the failure equally. The sole creative unit probably takes all mistakes more personally (E1).

M4 supported this point of view with her opinion: "when coworkers know each other very well, know strengths and weaknesses of each other, and when they are all deep into projects the results are better." She also thinks that if the team is solid "it is difficult for a freelancer to blend in" (M4). M3 agrees with M4: "it is quite difficult to integrate new people into the working process." E4 was very definite about her choice of employment, she didn't see freelancers becoming close-knit. "I think that agency has to have its backbone team," E4 said.

> Because an agency is made of people who work there, and each agency has its unique style that is only possible thanks to the people who match this style, who bring this uniqueness to it (E4).

Also, E4 is sure that only teamwork can build a certain level of love and loyalty to a creative company as a brand. "I am proud of my agency, I love to support it and to hate other agencies," E4 said and laughed. M4 completely agrees: "Teamwork, solidarity, and support of

the colleagues are the core strengths of every agency." She is sure that healthy atmosphere maintenance and team building are two of top priorities of a creative company management.

M1 supported this opinion by saying that "the manager should be proficient in soft skills and communication to provide that social glue between team members." At the same time, M2 is certain about the fact that "both good and strong relationships are built faster and more efficiently in the office." She wonders "what could be better than a physical smoking room, where you can solve any problem and task?" (M2). M3 suggested a format for team building offline gatherings: "a whole day workshop regarding some particular question" that can happen once per month or quarter and reduces the lack of daily face-to-face interactions with teammates. M3's suggestion can work for freelancing units as well, and E1 practiced this format being a freelancer with the agency she eventually started to work for as an employee.

5.4.3. Remote communication features

Employed respondents shared their experience of working remotely, their points of view were fresh and relevant, as they were not used to telework. "The biggest advantage of working from a distance is that, theoretically, one can have more autonomy over one's own time," E2 stated. E1 presented her opposite opinion: "disadvantages of the remote work is a huge amount of online meetings, more than ever, as less personal communication leads to more misunderstandings." E3 agreed: "every interaction becomes an online meeting", and it takes more time than a quick face-to-face discussion. E2 said that "…[remote] processes can take a little longer than usual." F2 thinks that online communication slows decision-making and approval processes down. "Any planning becomes long-term," F2 complained. One of the reasons that can affect the speed of the process is the time zones difference among the parties.

> Remote work goes 24/7, at least due to the time zone differences. Making calls convenient for all the participants requires certain flexibility, as such moments extend beyond the working time (F4).

F3 confirms the ease of such meetings arrangements: "if there is a time zone gap, the hours of availability for checkup calls and presentations should be discussed, and that's it." He said

that he didn't have any strict schedule, "so I can easily attend a call at 2–3 am, or wake up earlier in the morning, it's not a problem for me" (F3). F4 admits that it might be a problem for some people, but she doesn't mind. "Everyone is adequate, flexible and tries to find the better compromise for the colleagues," F4 said. She also said that this flexibility helps her work in her own rhythm and to dictate her rules easier:

> I prefer distant communication better: I can take a pause to think. A pause is good to calm possible conflicts down, to find proper words, to think over an idea patiently as long as I need. Brainstorming sessions at the office are stressful for me, I get anxious and paranoid, I can't think fast, I need time. Actually, I don't understand this rush. I have noticed that even the strictest deadline can be postponed for one more day, it is better for all the parties than finishing the project asap losing the quality (F4).

Such a level of empathy reduces the number of conflicts "but adds frictions on the issues of the work itself," M2 said. M2 is sure that those frictions and issues "are easy to solve" and that such a process is "important for achieving good results in creative work." F2 noted that remote work allows to "keep relationships professional and less emotional". M1 considered "low emotional involvement" to be a big advantage, but at the same time, it leads to "low connection and loyalty" (M1). M3 said that "when there is no emotional involvement, there is no place for conflicts." F1 said that remote work helps avoid "other people's drama." E3 said that one of the advantages of remote work is "avoiding dealing with someone one doesn't like." E2 stated that "communication needs to be more careful so that all stakeholders can be in tune." Talking about the necessity of building strong and respectful relationships, M2 stated that "online remote work should inherit a good emotional background of offline communication inside the team":

> The team can do some kind of "exercises" or "rituals": f.e., drinking coffee in the morning via zoom and talking about non-work topics, playing online games, watching concerts and lectures, etc.

M1 and F2 saw "independence from other team members" (M1) as a strong advantage, as it gives "more responsibilities and freedom for decision-making" (F2) which leads to professional growth. However, as M1 said, distant communication makes the "connection with the working team and the client weak."

5.4.4. Necessity of socialization

"Social life" is the main advantage of the office-based work mentioned by E2, the agency employee. Freelancer F1 mentioned the same statement but with the opposite context: "social life takes a lot of energy and is time-consuming." This contrast illustrates the employees' and freelancers' different attitudes towards socialization.

M4 complained that the beginning of the COVID lockdown and switching to work from home was challenging for her. She got used then, but now she misses her office and the team: "offline communication is of high importance to me." "I know that some agencies keep working remotely, but people gather together in the offices on Fridays for drinks," F3 said. Employees need face-to-face contact, their relationships are more complex offline. And being hired during the lockdown may be struggling for newbies. E4 shared a positive example:

> I think it is difficult to be a remote newbie in an agency. I would never take such a risk. Seeing people, communicating, blending in is important to me. However, I have a new colleague of mine, she joined us during the lockdown, and she blended in easily by casually starting to make jokes on Skype from the day first. And she managed to prove herself professionally even remotely. It would be difficult for me, it definitely depends on the person. Maybe it is a skill that can be developed with practice (E4).

"It is difficult to create non-working relationships and blend in the team spirit online only," F1 said. M3 suggested making "small talk calls in order just to chat." F1 also mentioned the problem that freelancers and remote newbies may face: "team workers may not define you as a part of the group, not accept in the "pack". It can happen due to being frightened of substitution with a remote expert, such an insecurity "makes employees work better," M3 said. M3 added that "without team spirit, workers cannot fully be in the creative process."

Most of the freelancers among the respondents appeared to be introverted. They stated that they didn't need socialization with colleagues, and there was no problem in terms of work for them. Some people feel better in the office surrounded by people, the others don't mind being alone, they even pursue such an opportunity of work-related lonesome.

I am quite an introverted person, not in despair for parties, noise, and talks around. If I really need some buzz and distraction, I'd rather go grab coffee with my friends or go for a walk with the daughter to a playground and talk to mamas there, yes, this is my new amusement park. My parental leave finishes in the spring of 2022, and I don't want to go to the office, I'd rather stay home (F4).

E3 shared the opinion that "freelancers lost real connections with the agency, its culture, and colleagues; they don't create meaningful connections." At the same time, F3 confessed that he didn't even remember "how to talk to people at a water cooler, how to be diplomatic and polite with those who irritate."

I feel better alone at home. I don't miss teamwork, absolutely no. I am a loner type, an introverted person, I don't really need communication and talks. Some people are addicted to being surrounded by other people, for me it is not a problem to work alone, actually, it's even more interesting to me. (F3)

While freelancers enjoy their silent independence, employees cherish the possibility of being surrounded by the people they like personally and admire professionally. E4 shared her attitude towards her team:

Our team is the best out of those I have worked with. I love my colleagues, I feel at home there, and we are a big family. I have never laughed that much before. We gather together with the team at least once a month in order not to forget how we all look like (E4).

E4 said that even working from home they were constantly together all day long texting on messengers, and organized offline parties and small get-togethers as they missed each other's company. The cohesion of views and lifestyles is highly important for employees, and, as E3 said, "at our age, making friends is possible almost only at workplaces".

5.4.5. Digital tools for remote collaborations

The moment when out of a sudden almost everyone had to experience remote work, lots of tools gained new waves of popularity. "As experience has shown, we do not need any fundamentally new tools," M2 said. She continued: "We have already had all the tools for a long time: programs for integrated project management, messengers, e-mail and electronic

document management services" (M2). The respondents shared the digital tools they use daily for work to communicate and manage tasks remotely and in the workplace (Table 12).

Categories	Mentioned tools	Reasons to use	Mentioned by	Total
Video conference tools	Zoom	"To see people face to face and to present creative work to clients" (M1) "To share the screen and to do group videoconferences" (F4)	F1, F4, E1, E3, E4, M1, M4	7
	Google meet		F1, F4, E2, E4	4
	Microsoft team		F1, F4, E1, E3, M2, M3	6
Messengers	Skype	"For instant discussions" (M1) and "for chit-chatting with colleagues" (E4) "To have a quick chat to solve problems that can occur or to ask questions" (F1) "To contact clients faster than via email" (F2, F4, E4)	F1, F2, E2, E4, M4	5
	Telegram		F2, F4, E4, M1, M2, M4	6
	Whatsapp		F2, F4, E2, M1	4
	Viber		M4	1
	Facebook Messenger		E2	1
Project management and collaborative tools	Bitrix	"Task managing tools like jira, trello, etc. help to see the scope, to organize workflow, to track tasks and employees" (M3) "To manage time and see deadlines, to visualize progress of each project" (F2) "Tools like Figma let several designers work on one project online together" (F1)	E4, M4	2
	Slack		E1, E2, M3	3
	Jira		M2, M3	2
	Trello		E2, M3	2
	Miro, Basecamp, To do ist		E1	1
	Figma		F1	1
	Shotgun, FrameIO, Cerebro		F2	1
Tools for sharing references	Pinterest	"To create moodboards" (M3)	F4, M1	2
	MindMap, PureRef	"To collect and share visual ideas" (F1)	F1	1
Internal documentation	Confluence, Notion	"To share project info with teams" (M3)	M3	1
Cloud storage	Google disk, Google docs	"To keep, share and edit materials and documents online" (M1)	M1, M3	2
	Dropbox, Yandex.disk		M1	1
Mail	Corporate or Gmail, f.e.	"To send correspondence and files" (M1)	F1, E1, M1	3
Calender	Outlook, f.e.	"To plan and organize meetings" (F1)	F1, M1, M2	3
Project scripts and tools	Python, Expressions, Macros	"To speed up the workflow" (F2)	F2	1
Own appications	Internal corporate tools	"For security and confidentiality" (E4)	E4	1

Table 12. Digital tools the respondents use in their work.

Such popularity of video conferences is caused by the fact that "working remotely lacks the team spirit, so it is important to have video calls to see teammates and to chat a bit before meetings," M3 stated. Such a connection "helps to let the relationships in the group work

evolve," F1 said. At the same time, M3 noted that with "a lot of online work meetings there is no time to actually work."

Zoom is a leader of this poll, E3 said that he opted for Zoom because "it is easier to use and has fewer connection problems." E1 said that Zoom paid plan was better due to infinite hours for video calls and no need to restart a call every 40 minutes. F4 prefers video conferences because of the possibility to share the screen and send files during the video call. This way she can make changes and edit her design files as the call goes along, everyone can see the changes and give comments and approve immediately. "Editing with the shared screen saves time on receiving comments and rendering big files and fastens the process of approval" (F4).

M1 said that she tried "to provide as many video calls with my teams as possible — visual contact is extremely important." While video conferences are still the top choice, some people tend to use them with their cameras off. M2 shared her experience and opinion on this topic:

> At the dawn of widespread remote work, everyone was very actively using video conference tools, such as zoom. But over time, everyone concluded that this is not so necessary in daily routine work. My morning sleepless face without "magic" makeup is unlikely to inspire someone to do their job better. But an effectively conducted audio call definitely will (M2).

This method is widely accepted during serious calls: colleagues and clients turn their cameras and microphones off as a courtesy, to keep the internet connection fast and not to let sudden noises interfere with the conversation. But this silence has a downside, and E4 talked about it:

> I hate online presentations. Everyone turns cameras off and mutes their mics, and I have to share creative concepts to the silent black screen without any reaction. When the presentation is live, one's charm, jokes, and persuasiveness can sell even a weak idea, but video presentations kill this magic. Now I even prefer to send presentations to clients and then just reply to the questions instead of presenting ideas online (E4).

E1 is related to E4's opinion. She stated that she preferred to do "important and strategic meetings face to face: it helps to focus on problems better and creates more personal involvement" (E1). For quick communication, most of the E4's agency's clients prefer Telegram and Zoom, but some of their clients use their own developed programs:

> Banks are the most difficult to communicate with, every time there is a new tool preference. For security reasons they have their own not very user-friendly apps, and every meeting goes with a new interface, and it takes time to understand how to share the screen or to mute (E4).

F1 said that usually "freelancers don't have an opportunity to use internal company tools such as documents on clouds and servers, use specific own messengers or participate in closed chats" due to safety and confidential reasons.

Half of the respondents named Telegram their day-to-day tool for work-related communication. The popularity of this app in this study is explained by the fact that half of the respondents are connected to Belarus, where Telegram is widely spread. F4 said that she used "Telegram to work with Belarusian clients and Whatsapp to communicate with clients from Russia and European countries." Skype was called "old-school" by M4, but E2, E4, and M4 still use it for internal communication. "We have different chats for different occasions, and we have a feeling we sit all together as the chatting never stops," E4 said.

Task managing tools are used by the respondents, but not everyone benefits from using them. It depends on a person. While F1 and F2 claimed about using several planners to organize their projects, to track progress, and to meet deadlines, E4 complained about the necessity of having an extra task to do:

> My agency uses Bitrix, the creative team hates it, but the managers insist on using it. I always forget to stop tracking my projects. I think it's useless for me.

E1 was still looking for a good task application. She said that "tools like Miro are the best, Basecamp and To do ist are okay" (E1). She also thought that her agency should have switched from using email to "a more convenient tool — Slack, for example" (E1). E2 had no preferences for job templates and tools. He preferred a balance between face-to-face and remote work and communication, according to each project.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of the results

The widespread of remote work has increased the level of flexibility of creative work arrangements, and it seems like all the stakeholders from all sides of the creative process understand the advantages and disadvantages of these changes, as they managed to experience the remote work option whether they wanted it or not.

This thesis includes 2 parts. The first part is dedicated to the review of the existing empirical evidence on this topic, theories, concepts, and models in the correlation with the problem of the study and the research questions. The second part of the thesis represents the research of the attitudes towards the remote and office-based models of work from the creative employees', freelancers', and managers' perspectives. Taking into consideration the fact that existing studies don't cover the specific aspect of remote collaboration in the creative industry complexly, the qualitative analysis with findings based on the practical experience of the respondents contributed to the theoretical approach in the first part.

The issues and tendencies found during the literature review were confirmed during this research. Still, there are many speculations around the inexperienced moments. For example, creative employees that have never freelanced don't understand the freelance work scales and possibilities, and vice versa, self-employed creative talents tend to distance themselves from employment options in the nearest future. While E4 was skeptical about the freelance work and its benefits for the agency, her colleague M4, the manager from the same agency, was nothing against hiring freelance contractors. All the freelancers stated that remote work lacks a team spirit, proper communication, and socialization, but at the same time, all of them cherished their self-employed statuses.

As the respondents of this research were divided into 3 equal target groups, despite the relatively small sample, certain behavioral and cognitive patterns can be observed. Tables 8–12 help to make conclusions about the relative homogeneity of opinions between different

profiles. It seems obvious that those topics that are known better by one of the groups are solidly supported by most of this group's representatives. It is interesting to observe the statements that are supported by most of the freelancers and the managers, whilst the employees are skeptical about those statements, and vice versa. For example, all the freelancers claimed that new order of things opens new foreign horizons for global collaboration, and only half of the managers and half of the employees shared the same thought.

The literature review was generalized to streamline five issues of remote work with its advantages and disadvantages for workers and managers. The issues included Productivity, Cost-effectiveness, Reliability, Worldwide connection, and Socialization. The research revealed key statements from the empirical data.

Concerning the Productivity issue, F3, F4, E1, and E4 shared their experience of the possibility to work better from home without distractions. This insight confirms the numerous statements about increased productivity (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gregg, 2011; Bloom et al., 2015), in comfortable surroundings (Baruch, 2000; Fonner & Roloff, 2010). E1, E2, and all the freelancers also stated that freedom and flexibility of time management helped them achieve better work-life balance, which correlated to the studies about the ways autonomy and work process based on the personal productivity cycle (Morgan, 2004; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Pyöriä, 2011) improve work-life balance and increase satisfaction from work (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gregg, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2011; Bloom et al., 2015).

Regarding the Socialization issue, all the freelancers confirmed the notion that not everyone needs colleagues around (Boell et al., 2016), while all the managers came up with the difficulty to maintain socialization between coworkers (Baruch, 2000; Pyöriä, 2011).

Worldwide communication issues were almost cited by the respondents from the scientific articles. Most of the respondents stated that freelancers could work on several projects for different clients at the same time (Choudhury & Pritchard, 2019) and that they could work

from anywhere (Choudhury, 2020). They also claimed that companies could invite talents from all over the world, confirming findings from the several studies (Schwartz, 2018; Choudhury, 2020) that were reviewed in the first part of this research.

The cost-effectiveness issue brought the solidarity of both respondents and the scholars (Gregg, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2011; Choudhury & Pritchard, 2019; Choudhury, 2020) on the fact that freelance workers are cheaper for companies to work with than with employees due to several factors. The respondents also stated that freelancers are hired for their unique and specific skillset (Foote, 2009; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010) and that they can charge more than an employee (Foote, 2009).

Regarding the issue of Reliability, the respondents were more optimistic. Even though they agreed on the point that monitoring freelancer performance is challenging (Allen et al., 2015), they believed that reputation and word-of-mouth recommendations were the main strong deterrent that prevents companies from being let down by a freelancer.

The common conclusion about the remote work option was a compromise of the mix of both models. Even though the freelancers wouldn't change their 100% remote work for the hybrid model, they agreed that for the whole creative industry this is the best solution that gives freedom of time management and a decent level of socialization.

Practical implications

The empirical and practical data convergence leads to a conclusion that freelance and remote collaborations have sufficiently entrenched in the creative industry. Now the question about working with freelancers or remote partners sounds not "to do or not to do?" but "how to do?". This thesis touched on five issues that all the parties involved in the creative process can face: Productivity, Cost-effectiveness, Reliability, Worldwide connection, and Socialization. All the issues revealed advantages and disadvantages of remote creative work, but there was

no clear superiority of employment or freelance, companies, and creative workers can choose a model that works the best for them. The understanding of the issues helps to determine this choice. Creative workers may vary their activity from being employed to self-employment and back, experimenting with the level of freedom and independence, and managers have the opportunity to hire the best professionals at the local market and abroad and act accordingly to their statuses. Thus, guidance for managers was presented.

Firstly, all the parties should keep in mind that an agency, a project, a campaign are made by people and their talents, not by fancy offices and equipment. Invest in people, not in things. People are the most valuable resource, their brains and hands are their working tools, and their mental and physical health should be supported and burnouts should be prevented.

Freelancers can implement their skills globally, employees don't have to be attached to one location, and managers can save money on offices and equipment to invest in workers instead to improve the quality of work. If creatives are more productive working remotely, adequate conditions should be created. Open-mindedness to hiring creatives from different regions brings diversity and freshness to the work process and relieves tension.

The thesis noted that the level of productivity didn't decrease when people started to work remotely, but on the contrary, the autonomy may increase the quality of work. This fact was proven by the literature and the stories of the participants of this research. It means that creative professionals can self-organize their work in the most efficient way, they only need equipment and freedom of time management.

Not everyone needs colleagues, office life, and socialization at a workplace. Freelancers choose to live a solitary work life themselves, and their choice should be respected. Knowing that remote collaboration with freelancers can be more energy-saving and cost-effective for all the parties, the empathic hybrid model can balance the in-house teamwork with the outsourced. Still, offline communication can't be skipped, the team-building process should include real-life meetings from time to time for all the contractors.

Most of the participants of this research claimed that they see the hybrid model as a future or working collaboration. Also, almost all the respondents stated that stability and salary are the biggest advantages of creative employees, and freedom is the main benefit of freelancers. These two concepts are not in the same category, they don't contradict, hence, the golden mean can be found, f.e., in long-term collaborations under contracts or associate partnerships.

There are certain risks that both the empirical approach and the qualitative research confirmed, but the practical experience of the respondents was positive. Trust, but verify. Word-of-mouth, recommendations, portfolio, and reputation act as insurance from a bad experience with a new contractor. This notion works on both sides, as freelancers should choose clients carefully. The level of insecurity is high, a good strategy is needed to choose the best companies to work with. The perfect match happens when the interests of both sides of the process are aligned.

Freelancers and creative employees tend to change their status due to the situation in the creative market. This situation partly depends on managers as they decide who to hire for a project, and the more certainty, the less turnover is in the industry. Briefly, pieces of advice for managers on how to deal with remote contractors are the following:

1) be empathic: invest in people, not things;

2) become flexible: let creatives work the way they contribute the most productively;

3) inspire confidence: find a way to provide remote workers with the feeling of stability;

4) choose cautiously: trust but verify;

5) think global: look outside the box, hire with no borders.

The hiring process in the creative industry needs to become more creative as new opportunities evolve and refresh the market. This evolution brings diversity to the next level, and global collaboration becomes the new normal. Managers should better keep up with the advances and opportunities which the creative industry provides them with already.

Constraints

There are several constraints in this study. First of all, there is a lack of literature related to marketing and communication creative workers in the academic society. The gap makes the topic ample without precedents. However, new materials about remote collaboration have been appearing in large numbers since the beginning of 2020, and the global pandemic has forced almost everyone to experience remote work. Nevertheless, creative freelancers represent the majority of the target audience of this study, and nothing has changed drastically for them since the lockdown started. Hence, more specific literature about creative freelance remote work and creative associate partnership should appear to have a big picture.

Another constraint is the sample. It should be bigger, thus, more resources are needed to elaborate more questionnaires. Focus groups were not chosen for this study due to the difficulty of arranging a meeting for a big group of busy professionals. Even an online video conference requires a certain level of flexibility from the participants from different countries and different time zones. Another reason for not using focus groups is the fact that they don't seem a reliable source for the research due to a high possibility of influencing the participants.

The third constraint is time limitations. Live personal interviews are time-consuming as they require an uncertain planning process and transcribing the recorded responses. The necessity to complete a questionnaire that consists of 9 open questions can make potential respondents refuse to do it or silently disappear. It can happen because they can't allocate several hours of their precious and rare free time to write complex and detailed answers. Thus, it takes time to talk respondents into participation and then to wait till they find time to dedicate to this work.

One more constraint is the subjectivity of the study, as this is qualitative research, and human factors can mislead this study. The open question structure is criticized for being «too ambiguous» or «too generalized» (Lenger, 2019). At the same time, the qualitative approach is advantageous, mostly because of the little predictability and the intricacy of human behavior that can affect the result (Simon, 1992).

Suggestions for future research

Future research may focus on one of the aspects of this study to elaborate on it profoundly. For example, the topic of digital nomadicity of creative employees can be investigated to understand the reasons for the workers to work from abroad and for the creative companies to let their employees work from anywhere.

An opposite suggestion for a future study topic can be a research of reasons why creative freelancers refuse to be employed and choose self-employment without leaving their home country or without trying to find foreign clients to work for. This topic will discover the motivations for creating home offices and for neglecting office socialization.

Future research can also be dedicated to a topic of associate partnership and profit-sharing as a model of a long-term collaboration with creative freelancers. It will help to understand the motives of collaborating this way and the benefits and drawbacks it gives to all the stakeholders.

Also, future research can develop the current study by increasing the number of participants. The target groups can remain the same, but the sample can become bigger. In this case, the authors recommend future researchers reorganize the questionnaire in order to shorten the number of open questions or to conduct live interviews only with all the respondents. Ideally, the participants should represent as many countries and regions as possible to provide the study with the global picture. It will require more time for the research, but the scientific community will benefit a lot from it.

Finally, a quantitative study should be carried out in the future to obtain more accurate data for the universe of professionals. The quantitative analysis will help to see the problem more objectively and to have the possibility to take measurements and therefore generalize and extrapolate the results of the study. An online questionnaire should be adapted and targeted to all the groups of the target audience and should not include open questions, only pre-written hypotheses should be suggested.

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