

**Balancing art and commerce: How creative businesses use routines to navigate the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control**

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## **Preface**

The writing of this master's thesis was both challenging and rewarding. This process has not only helped me to grow academically, but also provided me with insights into how paradoxes can manifest in real organizational environments.

I would like to thank my first supervisor, Stephanie Koornneef, for all of her helpful insights and expertise throughout the thesis trajectory. I would also like to thank Brigitte Dekker for her engaged and insightful guidance. Without their guidance, this thesis would not have come to this result. While at times the writing of this thesis was filled with paradoxes, their guidance ensured both stability and creativity in this process. Furthermore, I would like to thank all the creative workers that I interviewed for their insights and enthusiasm when talking about their experiences.

Thijs Pol, 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2025

## **Abstract**

This study explores how creative businesses use their routines to navigate the persistently conflicting tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control. These conflicting tensions often coexist in creative businesses, yet little is known about how routines are used to navigate them. By combining routine dynamics theory and paradox theory, the research investigates how routines are adapted and performed in response to the conflicting goals. Through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with twelve creative workers from various companies, industries and roles, both self-employed and employed within larger businesses, five different strategies are observed: co-creation, selectivity, expertise, side-projects and coordination. These strategies differ in their understanding of the routines (ostensive aspect) and their performances (performative aspect), which highlights the dynamic and contextual nature of routines. The findings show that routines are not only sources of stability, but also sources of change as they are used to navigate the paradox. This research contributes to our knowledge of routines and paradoxes by uncovering their interaction in the navigation of the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Organizational routines are “repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors” (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 2). These routines can be viewed as sources of inertia, as they can create rigidities and inhibit innovation processes (Collinson & Wilson, 2006; Hannan & Freeman, 1984). Yet, organizational routines can also be sources of change, as variations within each routine can enhance creativity and innovation (Sonenshein, 2016). As Feldman (2000) observed in her research on organizational routines, variations within routines enable routines as sources of change. Actions in routines might not lead to the perceived outcomes, may create new problems, or create new resources or opportunities. In some cases, perceived possibilities for routine improvements can also lead to routine changes. This offers a new perspective on routines as sources of stability and change in organizations.

Organizational routines and creativity have often been viewed as contradicting terms by scholars (Gilson et al., 2005; Hannan & Freeman, 1984). Gilson et al. (2005) argue that routines create standardization, limiting organizational creativity. Hannan and Freeman (1984) argue that increased organizational routines result in inertia, decreasing organizational adaptability to environmental changes. While routines ensure stability and maintain current circumstances, creativity is associated with innovation and change (Sonenshein, 2016). In the past two and a half decades, a shift has taken place to a perspective where routines can be viewed as both enablers of change as well as sources of stability (Feldman, 2000; Feldman et al., 2021; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Salvato & Rerup, 2017). Routine dynamics theory shifted the unit of analysis from the firm and its routines to the routines themselves and the actions that shape them (Feldman et al., 2016).

Dividing routines into two different aspects – the idea of the routine as the *ostensive aspect*, and the actions that enact the idea of the routine as the *performative aspect* – allows us to understand the agency that people have in their understanding and performance of the routine (Feldman, 2000; Feldman et al., 2016; Feldman et al., 2021; Howard-Grenville, 2005). As individuals’ ideas of routines and actions within routines differ, organizational routines can change in each performance. Understanding this dynamic view of routines provides a basis for analysing how businesses navigate changing demands as routines are performed. The distinction between the ostensive and performative aspect makes it possible to deconstruct routines to individuals’ ideas of routines and the actions within routines (Feldman, 2000;

Howard-Grenville, 2005), creating a framework for examining how routines create stability and change in changing contexts.

While stability and creativity are inherent within organizational routines, conflicting tensions can be observed among co-existing routines in organizations. Here, actions within routines need to be coordinated with those in other routines that lead to conflicting outcomes (Geiger, 2022). External pressures are one source of tensions between organizational routines. Routines need to be coordinated to respond and align with external pressures, such as stakeholder demands. One such conflicting demand is the tension between artistic autonomy and commercial control (Banks, 2010; Gani, 2020; Huws, 2010). To better understand this conflicting tension, it is necessary to define these opposing forces and examine how they impact the creative industries.

According to Banks (2010), autonomy can be defined as “the capacity of individuals (and also institutions and organisations) to exercise discretion or apply freedom of choice” (p. 252). Artistic autonomy is a notion linked to artists’ expressiveness and freedom from commercial demands. Building on Eikhof and Haunschild’s (2007) work, artistic autonomy can be viewed as part of the artistic logics, where art is made for art’s sake (*l’art pour l’art*). The involvement with art is the most important legitimization of creative practices, producing art “with the primary intention of contributing to art as a greater good” (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007, p. 526). Artistic autonomy is important in the creative workers’ self-expression and recognition, but creative workers also need to adhere to commercial control to earn a living (Huws, 2010).

Commercial control can be understood by considering Eikhof and Haunschild’s (2007) definition of economic logics. These logics are defined by a strong market orientation. In the economic logics, the focus is on quantifying or assessing output quality to facilitate market transactions and maximizing cost efficiency. The most effective use of financial resources is ensured in producing practices. Intrinsic motivations may play a role in creating practices, but the main focus is on the market value. These economic logics do not only shape the financial goals of organizations, but also how control is enacted in practice to meet those objectives. This is what is referred to as commercial control. Examples of this control include budgets, client and subsidy specifications and deadlines as mechanisms of control. These constraints align creative output with market expectations and shape the creative process to align with market expectations. According to Røyseng (2008), the difference between the two tensions can be seen as a drive for authenticity in the shape of the ‘aesthetic perspective’, and commercial demands through a ‘business perspective’ with art that needs to be sold. She

illustrates this with theatre production, where the aesthetic perspective views the theatre as an artistic production, while the business perspective views this as a marketable product. This mutual dependence highlights the necessity of internal coordination within creative organizations to balance these paradoxical demands.

Businesses in the creative industries shape an extreme context where creativity and stability are both embedded in organizational routines, and they persistently face conflicting tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control (Banks, 2010; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Huws, 2010). As Smith and McKinlay (2009) argue, while all forms of labour require some level of creativity, the creative industries are distinctive as their success and profitability rely less on standardizing tasks and more on leveraging individual as well as collective creativity as a competitive advantage. Organizations with a strong emphasis on authenticity and creativity need to balance routines that deal with the drive for creative self-expression with routines aimed at commercial demands in order to make a living (Huws, 2010). Understanding these tensions requires theoretical frameworks that account for both routine adaptation and the management of paradoxes.

While the conceptualization of routine dynamics theory can be used to explain how businesses adapt routines in order to achieve sustainability and change, paradox theory offers complementary insights in exploring the constant tension between artistic autonomy and commercial control that creative businesses face. Paradox theory adds valuable insights into understanding how businesses deal with these opposing forces, as it does not view paradoxes as problems to be solved, but as tensions that are persistent and that should be managed over time (Schad et al., 2016). According to paradox theory, the opposing forces between artistic autonomy and commercial control can be embraced by organizations, balancing between the drive for creativity and commercial control by stakeholders (Smith & Lewis, 2011). By integrating routine dynamics theory with paradox theory, this research aims to explore how creative businesses use their routines to navigate the inherent tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control in order to achieve creative and economic sustainability.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

In the current literature on the paradox between artistic autonomy and commercial control, there have been multiple studies on how businesses deal with tensions between autonomy and control (e.g. Beirne et al., 2017; Busco et al., 2012; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Grabner & Speckbacher, 2016; Huws, 2010). Many of these studies focus on how both efficiency and

creativity can be managed in organizations. Yet, in these studies, there is little focus on organizational routines and how these may foster paradoxical tensions. Similarly, there have been multiple studies on how businesses can manage organizational routines that enable both stability and creativity (e.g. D’Adderio, 2014; Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Feldman et al., 2016; Sonenshein, 2016). However, these studies offer little focus on the managing of paradoxical tensions between autonomy and control. While research has already focused on uncovering the mechanics of internally conflicting routines, little is known about how organizational routines are used to navigate the changing demands of artistic autonomy and commercial control.

Combining routine dynamics theory and paradox theory provides new insights into how businesses navigate these contrasting tensions. This combination has already been applied by scholars to study how organizations deal with conflicting tensions (Rosales et al., 2022; Salvato & Rerup, 2017). Salvato and Rerup (2017) explored how organizational routines are adapted to manage conflicting internal goals. They identified internal regulatory actions – splicing, activating and repressing – that employees take to deal with conflicting goals in their routines. Similarly, Rosales et al. (2019) focused their research on internally conflicting routines, and when stability and change becomes salient within these routines. As Geiger (2022) commented on the research, the perspective that is used in this study conflicts with the very nature of routine dynamics theory itself, as stability and change are both outcomes of routines rather than paradoxical. Building on this idea, he argues that unlike tensions emerging from routine outcomes, paradox theory can be used to explain how routines help manage tensions that originate from conflicting internal and external pressures. This perspective allows us to understand how organizational routines evolve and are managed, and how these are shaped by persistent paradoxes between businesses and stakeholders.

Commercial control involves external stakeholders that affect internal processes (Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). This means that these are tensions that originate from outside of the organization, and the internal coordination of routines needs to be adapted to these pressures. Inside creative businesses with multiple employees, creative teams need to coordinate their work with commercially oriented teams. Self-employed creative workers need to adjust their organizational routines to deal with both tensions of the paradox. So far, no research has studied how organizational routines that enable both creativity and stability, deal with paradoxical tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control. Therefore, the following research question was constructed: “*How do creative businesses use their routines to navigate the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control?*”

### **1.3 Theoretical and practical relevance**

This study advances our knowledge of both paradox theory and routine dynamics theory. Previous research on paradox theory has mainly focused on how organizations deal with persistent tensions (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). This research adds to our knowledge of paradoxes by using routines as the unit of analysis in the navigation of paradoxes. By examining conflicting demands for artistic autonomy and commercial control, this research generates new theoretical knowledge on how the paradox is navigated and managed through routines.

Second, this research contributes to routine dynamics theory literature. Current research on routine dynamics focuses mainly on the dynamic nature of stability and change in routines (Feldman, 2000; Feldman et al., 2021; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Salvato & Rerup, 2017). This study adds to the current literature on routine dynamics theory by emphasizing the role of paradoxes in routine evolution over time. Through analysing shifts in the ostensive and performative aspects of routines by the changing demands of artistic autonomy and commercial control, this research demonstrates how routines are used in organizations to pursue artistic and commercial sustainability.

Research on how organizational routines deal with the paradox also has practical implications. It can aid managers in understanding specific routine adaptations that creative businesses implement when balancing artistic autonomy and commercial control. This research provides managers with insights into how strategic responses to paradoxes influence ostensive and performative aspects of routines. Managers can identify similar challenges in their own organization and potentially apply similar approaches. Insights into individual contributions might also improve organizational performance, as increased insights into the mechanics of routine adaptation can provide employees with more reflective capabilities. This can aid employees in identifying their own agency in routines while navigating the paradox.

### **1.4 Outline of the thesis**

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces routine dynamics and paradox theory, focusing on tensions that creative businesses face between artistic autonomy and commercial control. Furthermore, it identifies the current research gap and provides this study's theoretical and practical relevance for the creative industries. The second chapter consists of the theoretical framework. Here, the primary concepts of routine dynamics theory and paradox theory are explained and integrated, examining the interaction between the

ostensive and performative aspects of routines with conflicting tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control. Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the thesis, providing insights into the qualitative research design, interviews and document analysis. Finally, the chapter clarifies the trustworthiness and ethics of the research. The fourth chapter consists of the results of the thesis. In chapter 5, the discussion, limitations, and recommendations for future research and theoretical and practical implications are provided, along with a conclusion. The final chapter contains the references and appendices.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical framework**

In order to get a clear overview of the theories that are used in this thesis, two primary concepts and their related sub-terms need to be explained: ‘routine dynamics theory’ and ‘paradox theory’.

### **2.1 Routine dynamics theory**

Feldman et al. (2016) define routines as repeating action patterns that are recognizable, performed by multiple individuals, and interdependent. In early research, routines were often seen as habitual processes of regular and predictable patterns of behaviour, that reinforce past knowledge and ensure stability (Hannan & Freeman, 1984; Nelson & Winter, 1982). By performing routines, organizational memory is created. Through repeated routines, organizational members remember how routines are enacted (Nelson & Winter, 1982). These routines create stability but are also viewed as causes of inertia (Hannan & Freeman, 1984).

Routine dynamics theory emerged in the early 2000s as a theory to challenge this dominant view on routines. Routine dynamics theory focuses on organizational routines as sources of change, instead of as sources of inertia (Feldman et al., 2021). The theory does not separate the people who perform the routines from the routine, giving the people who interact with routines more agency (Feldman, 2000). This agency has opened up the ‘black box’ of routines, as varieties in individual actions in different contexts can explain routines as sources of change (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). Routines can be thought of as sequences of interconnected ideas, actions, and outcomes. Ideas lead to actions, actions result in outcomes, and outcomes give rise to new ideas (Feldman, 2000). As individuals are able to recall past events, imagine future possibilities and adapt to present situations, they are able to perform

changes in routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Organizational routines are both temporal and changing in each performance of the routine (Feldman et al., 2016).

Routines do not only evolve and change because of new ideas, actions and outcomes, but can also change as a result of persistently contrasting goals. In her research on the replication of routines in an electronics organization, D'Adderio (2014) shows how individuals can use routines to deal with persistent conflicting tensions. In replicating organizational routines at new geographical locations, the electronics organization aimed to replicate existing routines exactly like they were at existing locations. Yet, these new geographical locations had different but similar sets of resources, where the routine template needed to be changed to function. The conflicting demands between replication and innovation were dealt with by individuals through creating specific sets of ostensive and performative aspects – referring to the idea and the enactment of the routines, which will both be further explained in the next paragraph – for both sides of the demands, assisting them in dealing with both sides of the tension. In creative businesses, the persistent conflicting goals of artistic autonomy and commercial control might similarly cause changes in the enactment of routines, as creative workers use and change routines so that they can accommodate both goals simultaneously.

### **2.1.1 Ostensive aspect**

Organizational routines consist of two distinctive and interdependent parts, the *ostensive* and *performative aspects* (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). According to Feldman et al. (2016), the ostensive aspect of routines consists of the enacted patterns of actions that constitute the routine. In creative industries, these may include routines such as hiring processes, scheduled team meetings and fixed steps in creative processes. Individuals use the ostensive aspect as a guide for their actions in the routines (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). This is our perception of the routine, which can be codified or taken for granted (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Perceptions of routines differ between individuals and their points of view. Ostensive aspects can never fully describe a routine, as contextual changes force the routine to be carried out differently each time (Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

The ostensive aspect also consists of artifacts. Artifacts can be defined as “objects that have work or cultural significance that can help you understand users and their environments” (Wilson, 2014, p. 25). These artifacts can be considered as ‘proxies of the ostensive’ (D'Adderio, 2008). These include standard operating procedures, rules and procedures,

software systems, and technological artifacts. Artifacts can help identify ostensive aspects of routines. Such artifacts also influence how internal routines are coordinated to deal with external pressures, as they create structures for routines but can also constrain creative autonomy (D'Adderio, 2010; Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013).

The ostensive aspects of routines in creative businesses are the pattern of actions that businesses use to deal with both sides of the conflicting tension (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Codified routines through artifacts and individuals' perceptions of routines shape the way in which businesses can navigate tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control. The ostensive aspect can both constrain and facilitate agency, as it risks limiting creative workers' artistic autonomy but also acts as a guide in the creative process (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). Employee perceptions of routines allow for flexible interpretations, which enable responsiveness to changing contexts.

New ideas on routines can give shape to routines through the ostensive aspect. As Bucher and Langley (2016) show in their study on reorienting routines, the ostensive aspect of routines can help individuals in sharing a new idea or concept of a routine, that can eventually lead to change in the performance of routines. Because the performances of routines themselves are strongly influenced by existing ostensive aspects, the changing of routines from outside of the routines themselves can be a difficult process.

### **2.1.2 Performative aspect**

According to Feldman and Pentland (2003), the performative aspect consists of the set of actions by people who perform the routine at specific places and times. In creative industries, this might include actions such as adapting to customers who can't handle strict schedules, adjusting the number of client feedback rounds based on contextual circumstances, or responding to emerging creative ideas by rearranging fixed rehearsal schedules in theatres. Actors in routines are highly interdependent. Because the actions of individuals are influenced by the context created by the actions of others, each routine is a collective performance (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013; Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Routines themselves are also highly interdependent (Deken et al., 2016; Howard-Grenville, 2005). They can interact through the traveling of human and non-human actors, new and improvised ways of connecting, and through new combinations of parts of different routines (Feldman et al., 2019). Agency is also provided to individuals. As one routine's performances create emerging consequences, other actors anticipate and respond to these routines, creating variation in their

own routines (Deken et al., 2016).

Even when the ostensive aspects of routines are highly detailed, participants still vary in their performance. For example, Blanche and Cohendet (2019) showed that the replication of the ostensive aspect of an existing ballet production led to a different performance of the ballet, due to different creative interpretations by choreographers and the performance of the ballet in a different context. Agency, different individual roles, and situational factors influence how employees interpret and act in routines (Feldman et al., 2016). This agency allows routines to be viewed as dynamic processes, where the actions of interdependent individuals influence how routines are carried out (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). Through this, both stability and change are enacted by routines. Over time, varieties of performances of routines can also lead to changes in the ostensive aspect as it changes individuals' ideas of the routine (Howard-Grenville, 2005).

Where the ostensive aspect of routines can generate variations in routines from new ideas about routines, the performative aspect enables individuals to create change from within routines. As Bucher and Langley (2016) found, experimenting with variations in performances of routines can eventually generate significant routine changes. As variations within performances of routines accumulate, managers can actively select and retain these variations, thus embedding them in the ostensive aspects of the routines like SOPs and rules and procedures.

Businesses adapt to changing contexts through different employee performances of routines (Feldman, 2000; Howard-Grenville, 2005). The way that employees perform routines can influence how creative businesses balance the demands of artistic autonomy and commercial control. Through the deconstruction of routines through the ostensive and performative aspects, the inner workings of routines can be examined (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013). Whereas routine dynamics theory can be used to identify routine adjustments, paradox theory contributes to this study by providing insights into the conflicting tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control.

## **2.2 Paradox theory**

In their influential work on paradox theory, Smith and Lewis (2011) define paradoxes as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (p. 386). As business settings become more dynamic, fast-paced and competitive and internal organizational processes become more complicated, they argue that these paradoxical

demands can become progressively more salient and persistent in organizations. Paradox theory has increasingly been used as an approach to study how organizations can manage competing demands simultaneously. This focus on both sides of paradoxes creates long-term sustainability (Hahn et al., 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Paradox theory states that persistent conflictual tensions should be balanced with ‘both/and’ and not ‘either/or’ approaches. Favouring one side of the paradox can resurface and intensify tensions over time (Rosales et al., 2022). As both sides of a paradox are intertwined, one side of the paradox cannot exist without the other (Smith, 2014). Tensions of a paradox sustain over time and are not problems that can be solved (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

In paradox literature, four sources of organizational paradoxes can be identified: learning, belonging, organizing and performing paradoxes (Hahn et al., 2017; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Learning paradoxes stem from attempts in organizations to build on past knowledge while also embracing new ideas (Smith & Lewis, 2011). This paradox is a result of tensions between stability and change or exploitation and exploration, and manifests in different organizational short-term and long-term orientations (Schad et al., 2016). Belonging paradoxes stem from tensions between the individual and the collective, and between conflicting priorities, responsibilities and memberships (Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Organizing paradoxes stem from competing tensions between organizational processes and outcomes (Smith & Lewis, 2011). These competing tensions are a result of inherently conflicting tensions between organizational units (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Performing paradoxes are the result of different stakeholder pressures, resulting in conflicting goals and strategies (Smith & Lewis, 2011) and originate from contradictory internal and external demands (Schad et al., 2016). While these sources of paradoxes are well established in literature, it is still unclear how they influence the use of routines in navigating the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control by creative businesses. Understanding this relationship is especially relevant for creative businesses, as they persistently have to find a balance between these tensions in order to remain artistically and commercially sustainable.

### **2.2.1 Organizational paradoxes**

According to Smith and Lewis (2011), paradoxes manifest in organizations through persistent contradictory goals, which lead to tensions and inherent complexities. Building on the

research of Jarzabkowski et al. (2013), organizations initially navigate competing strategic demands by first responding with defensive strategies and, over time, adopting active responses through their organizational structures. After responding with defensive and active responses, paradoxes become embedded in organizational routines, influencing strategic decision making. As the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control is inherent to creative businesses, strategic responses are embedded in organizational routines. Both sides of the paradox are subjected to contextual changes, and organizational routines can be adjusted to dynamically adapt to these changes.

When adopting a paradox perspective, organizations can pursue several goals in addition to financial sustainability. Research by Hahn et al. (2017) shows that organizational goals, such as environmental and social concerns, can be viewed not as means to increase financial sustainability, but as organizational goals themselves. With a paradox perspective, multiple goals can be pursued without putting one above the other. Similarly, Jay (2013) shows that hybrid organizations, which combine the logics of government bureaucracies, business firms and non-profit firms, can use paradox theory not only to maximize profits but also pursue societal goals such as climate change. For creative businesses, the use of a paradox lens can similarly aid in pursuing both the artistic drive as well as commercial goals. When pursuing both goals, financial sustainability and artistic freedom can be complementary goals, without one being a means to achieve the other.

Previous research suggests several strategies in response to paradoxical tensions. Examples of strategies that are mentioned in paradox theory are temporal and spatial separation of the paradoxical tensions (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989), embracing paradoxical tensions (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011), balancing the opposing poles (Schad et al., 2016) and the juxtaposing of conflicting goals (Hahn et al., 2017; Lewis, 2000; Schad et al., 2016). Whereas in these studies the unit of analysis is the paradox, in this research the unit of analysis is shifted to the routine. In the managing of routines, potentially new processes can be uncovered that businesses use to deal with the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control. The context of creative industries might also uncover previously unknown strategies that are used to balance this specific paradox. This shift offers a new perspective on how organizations navigate paradoxes through their routines.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, an overview is provided of the used research approaches to answer the research question: how do creative businesses use their routines to navigate the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control? First, the research design is explained. Then, the methods of data collection are clarified. Thereafter, the data analysis and quality of the research are discussed. Finally, the chapter will go into the ethics of this research.

### **3.1 Research design**

According to Myers (2009), researchers use qualitative research in order to understand people and their actions, and to gain an understanding of social and cultural contexts in which they live. This is necessary for this research, as its goal is to understand how people in creative businesses use routines in order to balance the demands of artistic autonomy and commercial control. In order to understand why phenomena occur in organizations, it is necessary to talk to people about it (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017; Myers, 2009). By having conversations with people, or by reading what they have written, it is possible for us to understand what they are thinking and to explain their actions. This allows for an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics within creative businesses. As currently little is known about how creative businesses use routines in navigating the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control, an exploratory research design was used (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). The use of qualitative research is a fitting approach for not very well-established topics in literature, as it helps us understand people and their broader contexts (Myers, 2009).

The unit of analysis in this research is the organizational routine. These routines are understood through their ostensive and performative aspects (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Routines are studied as structures that are dynamic and are adapted by individuals in order to deal with paradoxical tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control.

### **3.2 Data collection**

Multiple data collection techniques were used for this research. This increases both our understanding of the phenomenon, as well as the validity of the research (Carter et al., 2014; Johnson, 1997). The research methods that were applied are interviews with employees and document analysis. By using multiple research methods, method triangulation was applied

(Carter et al., 2014).

### 3.2.1 Semi-structured, in-depth interviews

This research aimed to understand how creative businesses use routines to navigate the paradox between artistic autonomy and commercial control. To do so, it was first necessary to identify these routines and the employed strategies. This was achieved by interviewing twelve employees from different businesses in different creative industries. The use of interviews was favoured over a case study approach, as this study addressed a broad research question and focused on businesses in the creative industries in general and not one specific industry. The time constraints of a master's thesis also favoured the conducting of interviews over case studies.

Interviews were conducted with twelve creative workers from a variety of sectors and roles. Interviewees included seven creative workers at businesses with multiple employees and five self-employed creative workers. A detailed overview of participants is provided in Table 1. The performed interviews were semi-structured and in-depth, allowing for predefined questions combined with open-ended questions on new issues or topics that emerged (Wilson, 2014).

Purposive sampling was used, so that employees were selected who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon and were most beneficial to the study (Gill, 2020). These employees were the most relevant for this study, but locating these information-rich participants can also be difficult. Snowball sampling was also performed, as interviewed participants also shared contact information of other creative workers who were relevant and willing to be interviewed (Noy, 2008). Interviews were discontinued when the point of saturation was reached, in order to guarantee quality of the data (Saunders et al., 2017).

**Table 1**

*Interviewee functions, types of organizations and experience.*

Interviewee	Function	Type of organization	Experience
1	Self-employed graphic designer	Graphic design studio	Founded own business in 2020 (5+ years)
2	Frontend and app developer	Creative digital bureau	Has been employed at the company since

			2021 (4+ years), in current function for 6 months
3	Business leader	Multidisciplinary stage	Employed at the company since 2025 (5 months)
4	Fashion designer	Global sports brand	Employed at the company and in current function since 2020 (5+ years)
5	Self-employed filmmaker	Film production studio	Founded own business in 2013 (12+ years)
6	Self-employed creative worker specialized in making explainer animations and illustration	Animation and illustration	Founded own business in 2013 (12 years)
7	Co-owner	Creative agency	Co-founded own business in 2017 (7+ years)
8	Artistic and business manager	Theatre	Founded theatre group in 2009 (16+ years)
9	Director and artistic leader	Theatre	Founded theatre group in 2009 (15+ years); director of a theatre since 2024 (1+ year)
10	Theatre maker and owner	Theatre	First directed in 1984 (41+ years); owns theatre since 1996 (28+ years)
11	Self-employed media composer and music producer	Music production studio	Founded own business in 2019 (6+ years)

12	Self-employed graphic designer	Graphic design studio	Founded own company in 2005 (20+ years)
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### 3.2.2 Document analysis

In addition to the interviews, the websites of the creative businesses were analysed. These websites were used to gain information on the companies' creative and commercial goals and also provided additional information on the activities of the businesses. These websites were not coded due to their highly artistic and unstructured nature. However, they were used to enhance, verify or contradict the insights that were obtained in the interviews.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used in order to apply structure as well as flexibility during the coding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research method examines data to discover recurring patterns and meaningful themes, generating new perspectives and understandings of themes (Naeem & Ozuem, 2023). The thematic analysis was performed according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases. First, in order to get acquainted with the data, the data was transcribed, read and re-read, and lists were created with initial ideas about the content of the data. Then, initial codes were generated. Overarching themes were created through the initial codes in tables. After that, the themes were reviewed and refined. These themes were defined and given a name. Finally, a report was produced in which all the themes were fully worked out, and a final analysis and write-up was conducted. The six phases of thematic analysis are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Phases of thematic analysis (adopted from Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

### **3.4 Quality of the research**

In order to preserve the quality of the research, trustworthiness is important. Four criteria of trustworthiness can be identified that qualitative researchers must consider: dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Anney, 2014; Bitsch, 2005).

#### **3.4.1 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability of the findings over time. This occurs when participants confirm that conclusions, interpretations and recommendations accurately reflect the data that

they provided (Anney, 2014). Triangulation was applied to increase the validity of the data (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Anney, 2014). Furthermore, peer examination was applied as the thesis supervisors and academic peers read the research and provided feedback. Finally, by using a code-recode strategy, data was coded, reread and coded again in order to understand patterns in the data better, increasing consistency (Anney, 2014).

### **3.4.2 Credibility**

Credibility entails “whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants’ original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants’ original views” (Anney, 2014, p. 8). This refers to the internal validity of the research (Bitsch, 2005; Gunawan, 2015). Data triangulation was applied by using different data sources in order to enhance the data quality (Anney, 2014). Member checking was also applied by sending the interview transcripts to participants to reduce biases (Anney, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015).

### **3.4.3 Transferability**

Transferability entails the degree of transferability of the research to other contexts or settings (Anney, 2014; Bitsch, 2005). This refers to the external validity and generalizability (Bitsch, 2005). Providing a ‘thick description’, by delivering detailed descriptions of the methods and context, increased the replicability of the research (Anney, 2014). This enables comparisons between this context and other contexts in future research, increasing transferability.

### **3.4.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the confirmability of the research findings by other researchers (Anney, 2014). This means that the research findings are clearly derived from data and not from the researcher’s biases (Anney, 2014; Bitsch, 2005). This was done by keeping a reflexive journal to be able to reflect on the data collection and analysis. This way, the integrity of the research was maintained by the data and research process, and not by the researcher (Bitsch, 2005). Triangulation was also applied to increase confirmability (Anney, 2014).

### 3.5 Research ethics

In research, there are many ethical principles to consider. While performing interviews, it is important to inform people about the objective of the research, and what will be done with the findings (Myers, 2009). Interview participation was anonymous, voluntary and involvement in the research could be terminated at any moment. Consent for interviews was also asked beforehand, and participants received a consent form before the interview took place. In the interviews, language was also used in a way that was understandable to participants (Bailey, 2007).

After participation, interviewees were given a transcript of the interview. This provided interviewees the opportunity to verify that information was recorded accurately and gave insights into what personal data is utilized in the research (Wiles, 2013). Participants were also given the opportunity to make minor changes to the transcript before giving consent. Finally, no plagiarism or misconduct was involved in the research process.

## Chapter 4: Results

This exploratory study identifies several strategies that creative workers use in their routines in order to navigate the persistent tensions between artistic autonomy and commercial control. All interviewees mentioned that they have to navigate the conflicting demands in one way or another. These conflicting demands can be observed between the creative worker and the client, as interviewee 1 explained: *“Yes, in the end you do your artistic thing with a commercial purpose. And not doing your commercial thing with an artistic purpose. [...]. But then I have to put my artistry aside for a while because you do have a professional relationship with somebody”* (interviewee 1). This tension can also be observed between an artistic product and the audience that the creative business wants to attract, as interviewee 3 explained: *“Then, of course, within the organization of the foundation you still have the cultural tension of how do you make sure that your activities are commercial enough? That people do come to the activities?”* (interviewee 3). Furthermore, this tension can also be observed when creative workers face deadlines and budgets, as interviewee 7 explained: *“So in that is freedom, creative freedom, but also so again responsibility and commitment is baked in. [...]. You sign that you're in the lead and that you're responsible, but you also sign that we're going to service that client and that we're going to meet deadlines and that we're going to stay within budgets”* (interviewee 7). Finally, this tension can be observed between creative

processes and subsidy applications, as explained by interviewee 8: *“But the application didn't say I was going to write songs. But I was going to do it. So then a kind of tension arises. How am I about to justify this to the grant maker?”* (interviewee 8). These examples illustrate that, although the source and form of the tension may vary, the paradox between artistic autonomy and commercial control remains a recurring tension for creative workers.

A division has to be made between creative businesses that produce products directly for clients, and those which create more autonomous work with broader audiences in mind. The first four strategies mainly focus on creative business that take on direct commissions from clients, as artistic and commercial goals are directly negotiated with these external stakeholders. The fifth strategy is employed by both categories of creative businesses. Section 4.2.1 focuses on the fluidity of creative routines, specifically on routine dynamics. 4.2.2 focuses on creative businesses that create products in a more autonomous setting, with broader audiences in mind. Here, tensions from commercial control arise more from subsidies, market expectations and business image.

#### **4.1.1 Co-creation**

One strategy used to navigate artistic autonomy and commercial control is by structurally involving the client in the creative process. Rather than viewing clients as external pressures, they become an integral part of design and decision-making routines. This represents a strategy of integration, where creative workers actively balance both artistic and commercial goals within the same process. This way, creative workers make clients part of the process, distributing their attention across both sides of the paradox. As interviewee 1 explained, this strategy prevents artistic or commercial goals from overshadowing each other in the process: *“Because I always try to involve that client as much as possible in the process so that I don't create something in my enthusiasm, give it and then people think yes, this is not at all what I want”* (interviewee 1). This structural involvement of clients can take shape as scheduled meetings on fixed days like biweekly scheduled meetings or as feedback moments during specific steps in the creative process. In addition to the personal involvement of clients in routines, artifacts are used to support this alignment. Artifacts such as mood boards, templates, and design software also play an important role in aligning client expectations. These provide structure to the process and visual expectations for clients but also leave room for interpretation and flexibility.

With this strategy, the ostensive aspect of the routine, the understanding that the

creative worker leads the process and the steps leading to the finished product, stays the same. However, the performative aspect shifts, as the performance of the routines is influenced by frequent dialogue with the client and making adjustments. As interviewee 1 explained: “*So what I do is always start with a rough sketch. Then I show it. Then people give me back what they think of it. Then I process that and process it out to a kind of first draft. Then I get feedback again. Then they can provide input. And then I often deliver a first final product. Then they can dot the i's there one more time and so on*” (interviewee 1). This shows that it is a constant back and forth between the creative worker and the client, co-creating the finished product. Instead of resolving the paradox, it is being reframed as a collective process where artistic goals are negotiated within commercial constraints.

However, this form of integration also introduces new tensions that require further navigation. Too much client involvement in creative processes can also create new tensions, as creative workers can feel like their autonomy is being restricted. For example, this can result in the client nitpicking or micromanaging the creative process. As interviewee 2 explained, involving someone with distance to the creative process, for example a project manager, can help the creative worker and client with aligning their visions: “*I often get very carried away myself in such a nitpicking process. Then I start nitpicking myself. But then it is nice to have a project manager present. Who says. Guys, come on. Let's get back to the core.*” (interviewee 2). Client involvement in rigid creative processes can also cause issues in the coordination of creative work with multiple clients. As interviewee 6 mentioned: “*So the moment a client can't handle the planning very well and, for example, responds much later than planned, everything goes down the drain for me. Because then I have these other customers who are still going ahead*” (interviewee 6). In this case, mirroring the flexibility of the client and responding when the creative worker has time works as an effective strategy to counter clients who cannot deal with rigid creative processes.

Compared to other strategies such as side-projects, which separate artistic autonomy from commercial work in time, co-creation addresses both sides of the paradox within the same routine. Involving clients in the designing and decision-making routines demonstrates how co-creation, rather than top-down control, becomes a performative response to the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control. While the structure of the creative process remains the same, the creative process is constantly being adjusted by interaction with the client. This makes co-creation a strategy of integration and ongoing negotiation, rather than avoiding the paradox. As shown, too much involvement can create new tensions, which creative workers have to respond to by showing flexibility but also boundaries.

### 4.1.2 Selectivity

Another strategy that creative workers employ is the selective engagement with clients or projects based on the degree of artistic autonomy that they offer. As multiple interviewees mentioned, creative processes can become ‘automated work’ when little space is left for their own creativity. This strategy differs from others by addressing the paradox before it occurs. Rather than managing tensions during the routine, creative workers filter them out in advance through project selection. This is a strategy mentioned by both self-employed and employed creative workers.

For self-employed creative workers, the performance of this selection is very context dependent. As interviewee 5 mentioned: *“Yes, well, quite honestly, if I had a basic income and could just do what I wanted to prove it, I probably wouldn't have taken such a job, let's face it”* (interviewee 5). This indicates that not only artistic preference, but also economic stability plays a role in the ability to select clients or projects. Interviewee 6 added that experience also enhances this selectivity over time: *“So having gained more experience in the profession. So having met more different clients and being able to estimate more and knowing which way something is going to go”* (interviewee 6). Thus, sufficient economic security and experience influence the adaptability of this strategy.

The pre-emptive selection of clients or projects is also structurally embedded in businesses with multiple employees. As interviewee 7 mentioned: *“And it also sometimes happens that we simply dismiss clients. Or not engage with a client in advance. Because they don't fit with us”* (interviewee 7). This filtering of clients or projects is also performed by account managers, as interviewee 2 explained: *“Yes, for the projects we take on we do pay very close attention to that. I think that filtering does sit at the beginning of the project phase. So the account manager is already doing a good job of that if all goes well”* (interviewee 2). In some organizations, creative workers even indicate personal preferences before they are assigned to clients or projects, as explained by interviewee 7: *“Our designers indicate who they want to work for, what kind of work they would like to do, and then we go and find the clients with that”* (interviewee 7). This ensures that creative workers are matched to projects that involve their own artistic goals, aligning their artistic interests closely with customer demands. Here, the paradox is structurally managed within the routine by aligning client selection with personal artistic goals, rather than managing tension during the creative process itself.

Routines also shift dynamically as selectivity in projects changes over time. Reflecting

on past experiences in working with specific customers or certain types of projects influences decisions in creative workers' current artistic and commercial decisions. As interviewee 1 stated: *“And then I'm copying pasting, but then putting my own sauce over it. And I find that a lot of work for very little satisfaction. So I don't really do that kind of thing anymore”* (interviewee 1). This shows that the strategy of selectivity also has a performative aspect. It is not only a fixed part of the routine but continuously shaped through experience and reflection. Thus, through the performance of routines, creative workers change their routines based on perceived possibilities for more artistic autonomy.

This strategy illustrates how the selection of projects is used as a way to manage artistic autonomy. Making a selection in projects is an embedded, ostensive part of the routine. However, the performance of this routine is dynamic, as the selection of clients or projects becomes part of the performative side of routines guided by the desire to preserve artistic autonomy, but also economic stability and personal experience. Compared to all other strategies, which address the paradox during the process, selectivity is an avoidance strategy, performed in advance of the process. Creative workers adjust their choices in future projects based on contextual circumstances, influencing how routines are performed, and which projects are accepted.

#### **4.1.3 Expertise**

A third strategy that creative workers employ involves guiding clients through the creative process using artistic expertise. Rather than directly resisting the influence of clients, creative workers use their artistic expertise to steer clients in making decisions that align with their own creative goals. For example, interviewee 2 explained: *“Actually the most important thing then is that you make him feel, this sounds a little lame though, but that you make him feel that he has made the choice, when actually you had already done that for a long time”* (interviewee 2). This steering can also be applied by choosing what to leave out, as interviewee 5 explained: *“So with that you already have the power to make what you filmed very much your own thing. [...]. With doing nothing or not bringing it into the video, the problem is already actually solved”* (interviewee 5). This strategy differs from co-creation by appearing mutual, while the creative worker retains control over artistic decisions. With this strategy, the creative process remains a process of co-creation on the surface, even though the creative worker subtly steers the client in a direction to maintain artistic control over the creative routine, while still meeting the commercial demands of the client. The ostensive

aspect of the routine – the structural involvement of the client in the creative process – remains the same, while the performance of the routine shifts to give the creative worker more autonomy and agency.

The use of artistic expertise can also be applied by integrating new artistic methods in the creative process, without informing the client of the fact that these are new to creative workers. With this strategy, the creative worker gets to experiment with new artistic approaches to a creative process, without the clients being aware that these are new to the creative worker. As interviewee 6 mentioned: *“If obviously that also fits the client and they think that's cool, then I just incorporate that into that assignment. So then during that assignment, I'm going to learn that. And of course those extra hours that I put in are just for myself, but then I've made a combo between something commercial and learning something new for myself, so to speak”* (interviewee 6). In this case, the creative worker uses the creative project as a place for artistic experimentation, while still meeting commercial expectations.

Through this approach, the paradox is not avoided or mutually managed but steered through subtle influence and professional authority. This strategy shows how creative workers guide clients through routines by maintaining control and relying on their own artistic expertise. By subtly presenting creative decisions as client choices or integrating new artistic approaches without disclosing them, creative workers are able to maintain artistic autonomy, while also meeting commercial demands. This shows a performative adaptation of routines, where creative workers adjust them to maintain their artistic autonomy in creative processes.

#### **4.1.4 Side-projects**

A fourth strategy that is employed by creative workers is by finding non-commercial side-projects where they have full artistic autonomy. While paradox theory posits that persistently conflicting tensions cannot be resolved with an either/or perspective, several interviewees bypass this tension. This strategy differs from the others by separating the conflicting demands rather than integrating or avoiding them. They do so by engaging in side-projects alongside their usual routines, where they can have (almost) complete artistic autonomy. This can be viewed as a performative act within otherwise ostensive routines, as they emerge spontaneously alongside usual routines. For example, interviewee 1 reflected: *“Then I have to put my artistry aside for a while because you do have a professional relationship with somebody. And then maybe I'll just draw a little bit more in my spare time”* (interviewee 1). This illustrates that artistic needs may be fulfilled through independent creative activities

when creative work with clients restricts artistic freedom. Similarly, interviewee 6 explained: *“In the ideal world I have free time enough to just fill in or apply that full artistic expression myself. And then out of that comes a little film or art or a work. And then I’ll submit that to a festival, for example. [...]. There is zero commercial interest in it. It’s really just something you make for yourself”* (interviewee 6). This shows that these side-projects are not just creative outlets but also act as a way of artistic self-expression without commercial control.

This strategy can also be applied in direct collaboration with a client, but on a voluntary basis. As interviewee 5 mentioned: *“that’s another voluntary project I did. [...]. And so I do that sometimes to be able to find that creativity again in projects. And that I can really make my own thing for an organization”* (interviewee 5). Even though a client is involved, these side-projects have no financial incentives, but are purely engaged in to increase the feeling of artistic autonomy. This makes the strategy flexible. It can occur both independently and in client relationships, as long as the creative worker retains artistic autonomy.

Over time, this strategy can also become part of a new routine understanding. As interviewee 11 explained: *“But now I just schedule little moments for myself. Or I happen to be playing the piano and then an idea comes to me and I record it. [...]. And the routine of, if I’m playing something for myself, to record that right away when it comes up. It can also be in between working on other projects”* (interviewee 11). What begins as a deviation in the performance of a routine, becomes embedded in a new understanding of the routine. In this way, the strategy is not only a performative creative outlet next to commercial routines, but also a potential enabler of routine transformation.

These side-projects can be understood as performative deviations from the ostensive understandings of routines. While the ostensive aspect prioritizes creative work with commercial control in order to sell the creative products, creative workers perform actions alongside their usual routines in order to maintain the feeling of artistic autonomy. By developing or collaborating in creative projects with no commercial purpose, they redefine their boundaries of creativity within the context of their routines. In contrast to other strategies, which manage the paradox within client interactions or avoid it before it takes place, side-projects create a place with full artistic autonomy outside of them. Over time, these side-projects can contribute to fundamental changes in the ostensive aspect of routines.

#### 4.1.5 Coordination

In creative businesses with multiple employees, artistic and commercial goals are often managed through coordination within team-based routines. These routines offer employees a moment to check in with colleagues, ask for advice and align priorities. Rather than being strict routines, these routines are also enacted with a degree of flexibility, as team meetings can be held at scheduled times but also when employees feel the need for them. This reflects both the ostensive aspect, as team meetings are routinely scheduled in advance, as well as the performative aspect, as the navigation of artistic autonomy and commercial control also needs flexibility. This strategy differs from the other more individual-focused strategies by using shared coordination to navigate the paradox collectively.

Interviewees 4 and 7 illustrate this rigidity as well as flexibility in the scheduling of team meetings. As interviewee 4 mentioned: *“Twice a week. And if there are things urgent or things like that, we can always squeeze in an extra one when everybody is available”* (interviewee 4). Here, the meeting twice a week is an ostensive routine, but emergent factors also cause the need for performative actions. And as interviewee 7 mentioned: *“And to guard creativity, but also guard commerce, we have a Monday morning meeting. [...] And then we split up again and continue and small groups and meetings, separate meetings with each other are planned again. That space is always there”* (interviewee 7). Here, the scheduled meetings offer a moment where everybody meets, but the subsequent meetings are held performatively with smaller teams to increase the businesses’ adaptability to contextual situations. This shows that coordination allows for both structure and flexibility, so creative businesses can adapt their focus depending on contextual circumstances.

Within teams, there can also be a temporal separation in the balancing of the paradox. As interviewee 3 explained, her programmer has full artistic autonomy to come up with artists that fit within a certain theme: *“When my programmer is choosing the artists we're going to collaborate with. Then basically the sky's the limit. [...] So she makes that program. Then we funnel that together into something that can also be financial slash commercial”* (interviewee 3). Later in the process, commercial interests and financial possibilities are discussed with the business leader and company director, and the ideas are worked out and trade-offs are made. Interviewee 4 also illustrated a temporal separation in the balancing of the paradox: *“But it is the case, for example, when I have designed something. Then before it's put out to the supplier at all, we always discuss it with marketing. So our business-to-consumer department. With sales, so our business-to-business department. Further with the purchasing department and*

*our manager. [...]. And I take that feedback with me. And I go back to the drawing board with that”* (interviewee 4). That same process repeats after the sample is received, until a product is created that everybody is content with. By separating roles and timing, this strategy allows creative workers to begin with full autonomy, before bringing in coordination later to also align commercial goals.

This strategy shows how fixed routines provide structure, while ongoing coordination and problem-solving also happens in smaller teams. Coordination within team-based routines provides a framework for collaboration, while flexibility is maintained for informal or spontaneous coordination when necessary. This balance between routinely scheduled and performatively emergent meetings reflects the dynamic use of routines to manage paradoxical tensions. Unlike individual strategies that avoid or separate artistic and commercial demands, coordination deals with them together, spreading them out over time and across different roles.

#### **4.2.1 Routine dynamics in the creative industries**

Creative workers' routines are dynamic in their performance. Routines can change as a result of reflective processes and evaluation, previous success or failure, a change in artistic or commercial goals or by changing contexts like company growth or subsidy changes. While routines may appear stable, their performance often differs to meet contextual demands.

As many interviewees mentioned in one way or another, creativity can't be pushed. As interviewee 7 described: *“We can come up with something in advance at the table with a client, but you can just during the process put a line vertically instead of horizontally and you have a completely different outcome. So it is also by experience, flow, prompting, inspiration, influence. Magic is born, so to speak”* (interviewee 7). While a general ostensive routine may exist, the performance of the routine is often very dependent on emerging creative ideas or new opportunities. Interviewee 4 described this flexibility in her routines: *“Because especially here in the office you have a lot of distractions, and then I really go and work at home for a couple of days. And then I'll have the drawings done in no time. But it just has to be finished. And then how that happens. That's up to me”* (interviewee 4). In this case, the ostensive aspect is the expectation that she finishes her drawings in time, but in her performance, she is allowed flexibility to be able to deliver creative products.

This flexibility also applies to the creative products that are made. As interviewee 4 mentioned: *“You have to deviate sometimes don't you? [...]. This is where we want to make*

*sure we're going to sell from that, so then you do use what you already know. But you also have new products. And that's where you have to be creative. Because you don't always want to sell the same thing either. You also have to stay innovative"* (interviewee 4). This shows how past experiences and reflection influence the way in which routines can be adapted, and when they remain the same.

Flexibility in routine performance can also be applied to the performance of the creative work. Interviewee 8 mentioned that he wanted to make a song program to play in theatres, but as he is not known for singing songs, theatres didn't accept his song program: *"So that was very difficult to get into theatres. Then we thought, how about we play in living rooms. Or in gardens. So we wrote an appeal on Facebook. [...]. Within a week and a half we had ten bookings"* (interviewee 8). This shows how the performance of routines in creative industries can be highly fluid. While the song program could not be played in a traditional setting, the reimagining of the performance at people's own homes shows a flexible and opportunistic approach. Even though this is not a routine change in the traditional sense, it shows how new patterns of routines may emerge from a combination of new creative ideas as well as the necessity for commercial control.

#### **4.2.2 Subsidy-driven routines: navigating commercial rigidity and artistic autonomy**

An interesting phenomenon occurs between artistic and commercial goals when subsidies are involved. Here, government institutions are important stakeholders, adding politics, subsidy requirements and long-term planning commitments to the commercial control side of the paradox. As interviewee 8 mentioned, subsidy application routines are very context-dependent and can change without the creative workers having any influence on it: *"At least the political wind in Gelderland changed. And Gelderland no longer wants to support projects the way we make them. So at one point, a lot of Gelderland also fell away. And that was kind of a bummer"* (interviewee 8). This political interest influences the balance that creative businesses need to strike between artistic autonomy and commercial control, as a change in subsidies also changes how much income the businesses need to have to remain sustainable. However, too much income can also decrease the number of subsidies, showing the fine line on which the businesses need to balance. As interviewee 9 explained: *"But as soon as you could support yourself because something you're going to make is incredibly successful, then you don't get a subsidy anymore. So that's also kind of that your feathers get clipped, but you have to fly, so to speak"* (interviewee 9). Thus, too much commercial success also creates new

paradoxical tensions that need to be managed.

Interviewees who work in theatres mentioned that subsidy applications have to be applied for years in advance. These have to be as specific as possible to increase the possibility of the subsidy being approved. However, too specific subsidy applications can create tensions because they can get in the way of emerging artistic processes. In this situation, commercial routines are rigid and have to be performed years in advance, but the performances of artistic routines are very emergent. As interviewee 8 mentioned: “*So in 2023 I write something I'm going to do in five years. That's madness. It doesn't actually work that way at all, of course. It does work that way for a civil servant and it does for a committee. But I still don't know what the hell I'm going to come up with five years from now*” (interviewee 8). These subsidy applications can restrict the creative worker’s autonomy to such an extent that interviewee 10 even stopped applying for them: “*[theatre name] doesn't want a subsidy. [...]. Not for what you want me to do. I don't feel like going on payroll*” (interviewee 10). In this case, the requirements for the subsidies were restricting the interviewee’s artistic autonomy to such an extent that the decision was made to not apply for them at all.

These examples show that routines do not only change because of new ideas of routines or different performances of routines, but that creative workers also have to find a strategic balance between artistic autonomy and commercial control. Political shifts, long-term planning and application requirements for subsidies shape routines in ways that restrict artistic autonomy rather than increase it. This can result in creative businesses adapting their routines to fit within these frameworks. For others, these restrictions can even lead to them not applying for subsidies at all. In all these cases, the performance of the subsidy application routine becomes a conflict between the need for commercial control and the expression of artistic autonomy.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and recommendations**

### **5.1 Discussion**

This research has shown how creative workers navigate the persistent tension between artistic autonomy and commercial control not by viewing it as a problem that needs to be solved, but by navigating it through their daily routines. This supports paradox theory’s notion that such tensions are persistent and should be managed with ‘both/and’ approaches (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Each of the five observed strategies offers different ways of navigating this paradox in

practice.

This study contributes to routine dynamics theory by focusing on how routines are performed and adapted. Routines are shaped through the interaction between their ostensive and performative aspects, aligning with Feldman and Pentland's (2003) research. The ostensive aspects, such as structural feedback rounds, scheduled team meetings and fixed steps in creative processes, provide shared understandings and structure for the creative process. The performative aspect creates space for flexibility in routines to be able to adapt to contextual circumstances. For example, in the strategy of co-creation, routines remain structured around client involvement, but the performance is adjusted in response to the specific needs of each individual client. Similarly, in the strategy of side-projects, deviations from commercial routines can over time become embedded as new ostensive understandings of creativity.

The study also contributes to paradox theory by showing how paradoxical tensions are managed not just conceptually, but also through organizational and individual routines. Rather than focusing on either artistic autonomy or commercial control, creative workers use both/and strategies that shift across roles (coordination, sometimes combined with temporal separation), within the same interaction (co-creation and expertise), entirely outside of commercial control (side-projects), or avoiding paradoxical tensions as much as possible beforehand (selectivity). This reflects previous findings on paradox management like the embedding of strategic responses to paradoxes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013) and temporal separation (Poole & Van de Ven, 1989). However, this research also shows how these strategies take shape through routines in specific organizational contexts. Shifting the unit of analysis from the paradox itself to routines also expands on paradox theory. This shift highlights how routines can be used when organizations face persistently contradicting tensions.

The findings also suggest the manifestation of different types of organizational paradoxes (Hahn et al., 2017; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011) in creative work. The tension between artistic and commercial goals mostly reflects a performing paradox, where different stakeholders expect different outcomes. Furthermore, the strategy of coordination shows how organizing paradoxes are navigated within team-based routines. While previous research has often focused on how organizations respond to paradoxes through broad strategic responses (e.g. Hahn et al., 2017; Jay, 2013), this research adds to this by showing how routines offer ways for individuals and teams to manage these tensions in their daily practices.

Finally, this study shows that routines do not only provide a structure to navigate routines, but also how these are shaped by the paradox that they manage. As D’Adderio (2014) and Feldman et al. (2016) note, routines are shaped by both human agency and situational factors. The findings show how variation in performance allows routines to remain stable while adapting to new pressures, supporting the notion of routine dynamics theory that routines are both a source of stability and change. This research demonstrates that creative businesses use routines not to avoid or resolve paradoxes, but to actively manage them. This adds to routine dynamics theory by showing how ostensive and performative aspects interact in paradoxical contexts, and to paradox theory by showing how tensions are managed through routine performances. Together, these insights show how routines offer flexible ways for creative workers to navigate the paradox, rather than resolve it.

## **5.2 Limitations and future research**

Despite the contribution of this research to existing theoretical knowledge about routine dynamics theory and paradox theory, there were also limitations. While interviews and document collection provide valuable insights into routines, a case study with observations may provide deeper insights into how creative businesses use routines to navigate the persistent tension. This may also show a more temporal view of company routines, as interviews capture perceived routine changes over time. Observing these changes through a longitudinal study might provide more detailed insights.

Conducting interviews with multiple employees at the same creative business, who work on opposite sides of the paradox, would also add additional insights. This would provide more in-depth insights into differences in the ostensive and performative aspects of routines, as individual differences may be observed. Sadly, no organization provided multiple employees for interviews. The findings of this study are not reduced in their validity due to these limitations, but in future research it is important to take these into account.

Based on the findings and limitations of this research, several directions for future research are suggested. Future research could include a case study to examine the performance of routines longitudinally. Micro-processes and small adaptations can be uncovered through more direct observations of routines, allowing for an even better understanding of the navigation of the paradox. Interviewing multiple employees at the same organization could also uncover differences in shared versus individual ideas and performances of routines. The paradox could also be explored in other industries, to uncover

how organizations outside of the creative industries navigate between creativity and commercial control

### **5.3 Theoretical and practical implications**

The findings of this research contribute to existing literature on routine dynamics and paradox theory and provide practical insights for the navigation of the paradox by creative businesses. Existing research shows that routines are dynamic in nature (Feldman, 2000; Feldman et al., 2021; Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Salvato & Rerup, 2017). Persistent paradoxes, like artistic autonomy and commercial control, are embedded in these routines, with creative workers constantly adapting and adjusting routines to navigate the paradox. Routines evolve as a result of these paradoxes, adjusting to the organizational context. Deviations in performance result in changes over time in the ostensive aspect, guiding creative workers in their routines.

Previous research often analyses paradoxes at an organizational level (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). By using routines as the unit of analysis, strategies are uncovered that are used in navigating the paradox. This provides insights into how creative workers handle paradoxes in their daily practices. The navigation of the paradox is not only embedded in the ostensive aspect of routines but also enacted in performance, being influenced by factors such as economic stability, experience and political changes.

This research can be used by managers to aid paradox navigation. The flexible use of team routines should be encouraged to align employees' goals. Employees should also be encouraged to engage in side-projects to maintain a feeling of artistic autonomy. This can also be provided by matching them with clients or projects that align with their creative goals. Creative workers should be allowed freedom in their performance of routines to reach commercial goals. This includes working in environments that foster creativity and productivity, or encouraging them to use their expertise to steer client expectations.

If economic stability is provided, self-employed creative workers can also embed the selectivity of projects into their routines to maintain autonomy. Experience also aids self-employed workers in this process. Engagement in side-projects can also help them artistically express themselves alongside commercial routines. Overall, this research shows that organizational routines are not rigid practices but fluid, constantly being adjusted in response to context.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to explore how creative businesses use routines to navigate the paradox of artistic autonomy and commercial control. Five strategies were observed. Co-creation, where clients are integrated as much as possible in the creative process, distributes the creative worker's focus across both sides of the paradox. The strategy of selectivity involves filtering projects based on their perceived artistic autonomy, avoiding projects with too much commercial control. Expertise entails the steering of the creative process in a way that allows creative workers to maintain artistic autonomy, while also meeting commercial demands. By engaging in side-projects, creative workers are able to fully pursue their artistic goals alongside their commercially oriented routines. Finally, with the strategy of coordination, a framework is provided for collaboration, while also maintaining flexibility to be able to respond to contextual demands. These five strategies highlight the dynamic nature of routines, which are continuously adapted by creative workers in order to navigate the persistent tension between artistic autonomy and commercial control.

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## **Appendices**

A: Interview questions Dutch & English

B: Consent form Dutch & English

C: Codes

C: AI usage

## **A: interview questions Dutch & English**

### **Interview Questions Dutch**

Goedemorgen/goedemiddag en bedankt voor uw participatie. Mijn naam is Thijs Pol en ik ben masterstudent Strategic Management aan de Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen. Ik doe onderzoek voor mijn Masterscriptie naar het gebruik van routines in creatieve bedrijven om conflicterende belangen tussen creatieve vrijheid en commerciële controle te kunnen balanceren. Deelname aan het interview is volledig anoniem en persoonlijke en zakelijke gegevens zullen niet genoemd worden. Het interview zal ongeveer drie kwartier duren. Mocht u tijdens het interview vragen hebben, dan kunt u deze te allen tijde stellen. Gaat u er mee akkoord dat dit interview opgenomen wordt? En heeft u vooraf nog vragen?

Allereerst zal ik beginnen met wat algemene vragen over u en het bedrijf waar u werkzaam bent.

#### **Kunt u mij iets vertellen over het bedrijf waar u werkzaam bent?**

De volgende vragen richten zich op het gebruik van routines met betrekking tot spanningen tussen artistieke vrijheid en commerciële controle. Routines worden in mijn onderzoek gedefinieerd als “herhalende en herkenbare patronen van onderling afhankelijke acties, uitgevoerd door meerdere individuen”.

#### **Hoe ziet een typische werkdag voor u eruit, en welke routines volgt u hierbij?**

In mijn onderzoek wordt artistieke vrijheid gedefinieerd als de vrijheid van een creatieve werker om kunst te creëren dat artistieke uitdrukking en de contributie aan kunst in het algemeen als voornaamste doel heeft. Commerciële controle wordt gedefinieerd als de marktgerichte kant van kunst, waar marktwaarde en financiële doelen nagestreefd worden, om de kunst om te zetten in producten die kunnen worden verkocht.

#### **Hoe ervaart u in uw routines de balans tussen artistieke autonomie en commerciële controle?**

#### **Heeft u veranderingen ondervonden in de manier waarop uw organisatie (of u als zelfstandige) creatieve en commerciële belangen balanceert?**

#### **Gebruikt u strategieën om de conflicterende belangen tussen artistieke autonomie en commerciële controle te balanceren?**

**Is er nog iets wat u graag zou willen toevoegen over uw ervaring met deze spanningen of over uw werkwijze in het algemeen?**

Hartelijk dank voor uw tijd en medewerking aan dit onderzoek. Nogmaals wil ik benadrukken dat deelname aan dit interview volledig anoniem is. Persoonlijke gegevens en bedrijfsinformatie zullen niet met derden worden gedeeld.

Ik zal u ook na uw deelname een transcriptie van dit interview sturen. Zo krijgt u de mogelijkheid om te controleren of alles correct is vastgelegd, en welke persoonlijke gegevens uit het interview wordt gebruikt. U mag ook kleine aanpassingen voorstellen aan het transcript voordat u definitieve toestemming geeft voor het gebruik van dit interview.

Mocht u geïnteresseerd zijn, dan kan ik mijn eindresultaten met u delen. Mocht u na dit interview nog vragen hebben, dan kunt u mij altijd bereiken via dit e-mailadres:

[thijs.pol@ru.nl](mailto:thijs.pol@ru.nl).

**Interview Questions English**

Good morning/afternoon and thank you for your participation. My name is Thijs Pol and I am a master's student in Strategic Management at Radboud University in Nijmegen. For my master's thesis, I am conducting research on how routines are used in creative businesses to balance the conflicting interests of artistic freedom and commercial control. Participation in this interview is completely anonymous, and no personal or business information will be mentioned. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask them at any time. Do you agree to this interview being recorded? And do you have any questions before we begin?

To start, I'd like to ask a few general questions about you and the business you work in.

**Can you tell me something about the company you work for?**

The following questions focus on the use of routines in relation to the tensions between artistic freedom and commercial control. In this research, routines are defined as "repetitive and recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple individuals." In larger organizations, this often involves coordinated actions among several people. However, for independent professionals, routines may also refer to the consistent steps you yourself repeat in your creative or business processes.

**What does a typical workday look like for you, and what routines do you follow?**

In my research, artistic freedom is defined as the freedom of a creative professional to create art with artistic expression and contribution to art as the primary goal. Commercial control refers to the market-driven side of art, where market value and financial goals are pursued in order to turn art into sellable products.

**How do you experience the balance between artistic freedom and commercial control in your routines?**

**Have you experienced any changes in the way your organization (or you as an independent professional) balances artistic and commercial interests?**

**What strategies do you use to balance the conflicting interests between artistic freedom and commercial control?**

**Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with these tensions, or about the way you work in general?**

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this research. Once again, I would like to emphasize that your participation in this interview is completely anonymous. Personal and company information will not be shared with third parties.

After the interview, I will send you a transcript so that you can verify whether everything has been accurately recorded and review any personal data used. You may also suggest minor corrections before giving your final consent for the use of this interview.

If you are interested, I would be happy to share the final results of my research with you.

Should you have any questions after the interview, feel free to contact me at: **thijs.pol@ru.nl**

## **B: Consent form Dutch & English**

### **Dutch**

#### **INFORMATIE OVER HET ONDERZOEK**

##### **Inleiding**

U bent uitgenodigd om mee te doen aan een wetenschappelijk onderzoek van de Radboud Universiteit. Voordat u beslist of u wilt meedoen aan dit onderzoek, krijgt u uitleg over wat het onderzoek inhoudt. Lees deze informatie rustig door.

##### **Waarover gaat het onderzoek?**

In dit onderzoek bestudeer ik hoe bedrijven in de creatieve sector routines gebruiken om conflicterende belangen tussen artistieke autonomie en commerciële controle te balanceren. Aan de hand van interviews en documentanalyse wil ik er achter komen hoe stabiliteit en creativiteit hand in hand gaan in routines, en hoe deze aangepast worden om te kunnen voldoen aan de permanente druk die op creatieve bedrijven uitgeoefend wordt om aan beide kanten van het paradox te kunnen voldoen.

##### **Wat wordt er van u verwacht?**

In dit onderzoek wordt u geïnterviewd door Thijs Pol, masterstudent Strategic Management aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. Als u toestemming geeft, wordt er een geluidsopname van dit interview gemaakt om de nauwkeurigheid van het onderzoek te waarborgen. De opname wordt gebruikt als onderzoeksdata. Een interview duurt ongeveer 45 minuten. In het interview zal ik u vragen stellen over uw rol binnen uw organisaties' routines en conflicterende belangen tussen artistieke autonomie en commerciële controle die u tegenkomt op uw werk.

##### **Vrijwilligheid**

U beslist zelf of u deelneemt aan dit onderzoek. Uw deelname is vrijwillig. U mag altijd nee zeggen. U hoeft geen vragen te beantwoorden waar u liever geen antwoord op geeft, en u kunt op elk moment tijdens het onderzoek uw deelname stopzetten en uw toestemming intrekken. U hoeft niet aan te geven waarom u stopt. U kunt tot twee weken na deelname ook uw onderzoeksgegevens en persoonsgegevens laten verwijderen, door een mail te sturen naar [thijs.pol@ru.nl](mailto:thijs.pol@ru.nl).

##### **Wat gebeurt er met mijn gegevens?**

Uw deelname aan dit onderzoek is vertrouwelijk. Alle onderzoeksdata worden bewaard op de beveiligde servers van de Radboud Universiteit, volgens het protocol van de universiteit. Dit protocol is in lijn met de Algemene Verordening Persoonsgegevens (AVG).

Opnames worden gewist zodra het gespreksverslag klaar is. De aantekeningen van het interview worden gepseudonimiseerd, wat betekent dat het nagenoeg onmogelijk is om de data naar u terug te herleiden. Wij doen dit door alle informatie die naar u als persoon leidt te verwijderen uit de onderzoeksdata (zoals uw naam, contactgegevens of enige vermelding van andere personen) en te vervangen door een pseudoniem.

De lijst met deelnemers en pseudoniemen wordt versleuteld en opgeslagen op een beveiligde omgeving, waar alleen de onderzoekers van het directe onderzoeksteam toegang toe hebben. Zodra dit is gebeurd werkt de onderzoeker alleen nog met de gepseudonimiseerde data, die tevens zullen worden gebruikt voor wetenschappelijke artikelen en presentaties. De gepseudonimiseerde data worden niet gebruikt voor andere onderzoeken, tenzij u hiervoor expliciet toestemming geeft. De aantekeningen zullen voor tien jaar worden opgeslagen op het Radboud netwerk om wetenschappelijke integriteit te waarborgen. De lijst met deelnemers en pseudoniemen wordt aan het eind van het onderzoek gewist.

Mocht u desondanks klachten hebben of problemen ondervinden dan kunt u altijd contact opnemen met de onderzoeker. Ook kunt u een klacht indienen bij de [vertrouwenspersonen voor academische integriteit](#) ([vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl](mailto:vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl)) of met de Commissie Wetenschappelijke Integriteit van de Radboud Universiteit ([m.steenbergen@bjz.ru.nl](mailto:m.steenbergen@bjz.ru.nl), 024 3611578) Bestuurlijke & Juridische Zaken.

Als u vragen of klachten heeft over de verwerking van uw persoonsgegevens, raden we u aan om deze eerst te bespreken met de onderzoeker. U kunt ook contact opnemen met de Functionaris Gegevensbescherming van Radboud Universiteit ([mijnprivacy@ru.nl](mailto:mijnprivacy@ru.nl)). Of u kunt een klacht indienen bij de [Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens](#).

### **Toestemmingsverklaring**

Als u aan dit onderzoek wilt meedoen, vragen we u een toestemmingsverklaring te ondertekenen. Door uw schriftelijke toestemming geeft u aan dat u de informatie heeft begrepen en instemt met deelname aan het onderzoek.

### **Heeft u vragen over het onderzoek?**

Als u meer informatie over het onderzoek of het bewaren van onderzoeksgegevens wilt hebben, kunt u contact opnemen met de uitvoerend onderzoeker:

Contactgegevens onderzoeker

Naam	Thijs Pol
Titel	Masterstudent
E-mail adres	<a href="mailto:thijs.pol@ru.nl">thijs.pol@ru.nl</a>
Telefoonnummer	

### **Toestemming**

Ik heb uitleg gekregen over het doel van het onderzoek.

Ik heb vragen mogen stellen over het onderzoek.

Ik neem vrijwillig aan het onderzoek deel.

Ik begrijp dat ik op elk moment tijdens het onderzoek mag stoppen als ik dat wil.

Ik begrijp hoe de gegevens van het onderzoek bewaard zullen worden en waarvoor ze gebruikt zullen worden.

Ik stem in met deelname aan het onderzoek zoals beschreven in het informatiedocument.

Daarnaast geef ik toestemming voor (s.v.p. aankruisen wat van toepassing is):

**Ja**   **Nee**

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | maken van audio-opnamen  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | het intern opslaan van audio-opnamen voor een periode van 10 jaar om wetenschappelijke integriteit te waarborgen |

Naam deelnemer:

Datum:

Handtekening:

Naam onderzoeker:

Datum:

Handtekening:

## English

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

#### Introduction

You have been invited to participate in a scientific study at Radboud University. Before you decide whether you want to participate, you will receive an explanation of what the study entails. Please read this information carefully.

#### What is the study about?

In this research I study how creative firms use routines to balance conflicting interests between artistic autonomy and commercial control. Through interviews and document analysis I want to find out how stability and creativity go hand in hand in routines, and how these are used to deal with the permanent pressures that creative firms are put under to satisfy both sides of the paradox.

#### What is expected of you?

In this study, you will be interviewed by Thijs Pol, master student at the Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen. If you consent, an audio recording of this interview will be made to ensure the accuracy of the study. The recording will be used as research data. An interview will take approximately 45 minutes. In the interview I will ask you questions about your role within your organizations' routines and conflicting interests between artistic autonomy and commercial control that you encounter in your work.

#### Voluntary participation

You decide whether to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. You may say no at any time. You do not have to answer questions you would rather not answer, and you can stop your participation and withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You do not have to indicate why you are stopping. You can also have your research data and personal data deleted up to two weeks after participation, by sending an email to [thijs.pol@ru.nl](mailto:thijs.pol@ru.nl).

#### What will happen to my data?

Your participation in this study is confidential. All research data will be stored on Radboud University's secure servers, according to the university's protocol. This protocol is in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Recordings are deleted as soon as the interview report is finished. The interview is pseudonymized, meaning that it is nearly impossible to trace data back to you. I do this by removing all information leading to you as an individual from the research data (such as your name, contact information, or any other mentioned individuals) and replacing it with a pseudonym.

The list of participants and pseudonyms is encrypted and stored in a secure environment to which only the researcher has access. Once this is done, the researcher will only work with the pseudonymized data, which will also be used for scientific articles and presentations. The pseudonymized data will not be used for other studies unless you give your explicit consent. The notes will be stored on the

Radboud network for ten years to ensure scientific integrity. The list of participants and pseudonyms will be deleted at the end of the study.

Should you nevertheless have complaints or problems you can always contact the main researcher. You may also file a complaint with the Scientific Integrity Confidential Advisors ([vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl](mailto:vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl)) or with the Radboud University Scientific Integrity Committee ([m.steenbergen@bjz.ru.nl](mailto:m.steenbergen@bjz.ru.nl), 024 3611578) Administrative & Legal Affairs.

If you have questions or complaints about the processing of your personal data, we recommend that you first discuss them with the research team. You can also contact Radboud University's Data Protection Officer ([mijnprivacy@ru.nl](mailto:mijnprivacy@ru.nl)). Or you can file a complaint to the [Data Protection Authority](#).

### Consent Statement

If you want to participate in this study, we will ask you to sign a consent form. Your written consent indicates that you have understood the information and agree to participate in the study.

### Do you have any questions about the study?

If you would like to know more about the study or storage of the research data, please contact the Main researcher:

Contact details researcher

Name	Thijs Pol
Title	Master's student
E-mail address	<a href="mailto:thijs.pol@ru.nl">thijs.pol@ru.nl</a>
Telephone number	

### Consent

I have been informed about the purpose of the study. I was able to ask questions about the study. I am participating in the study voluntarily. I understand that I may stop at any time during the study if I wish. I understand how the data from the study will be kept and what it will be used for. I agree to participate in the study as described in the information document.

In addition, I consent to (please check the appropriate box):

**Yes**   **No**

- making audio recordings
- storing audio recordings internally for a period of 10 years to ensure scientific integrity

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

## C: Codes

**Table 3**

*Codebook.*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
Aligning goals in teams	Routines or moments where team members coordinate artistic and commercial goals.
Artifact	Standard operating procedures, rules and procedures, software systems, and technological artifacts
Artistic and commercial demands are met simultaneously	Instances where both artistic autonomy and commercial goals are satisfied.
Artistic autonomy	The ability of creative workers to make artistic decisions autonomously.
Artistic vision	The creative worker's own artistic vision of a creative process or product
Balancing paradox	Navigation of the tension between artistic autonomy and commercial control in general
Navigating strategy	Specific routine or approach used to manage the paradox
Client influence	A client directly influences the creative process
Client interaction	A client interacts with the creative business in the creative process
Client relationships	Ongoing coordination between creative business and client
Commercial control	Market demands affecting artistic autonomy
Creative expertise	Creative workers use their creative expertise to steer the creative process with clients
Creative process	Steps in creating a creative product
Creative work	Referencing the creative worker's profession
Financial constraints	Economical constraints influence the performance of routines
Flexibility in routine performance	The ability to adapt routines to organizational and contextual needs

Intuitive balancing of competing goals	Creative workers navigate the paradox intuitively, with a low degree of codification of routines
Intuitive practices	Creative workers use intuitive feelings in their navigation of the paradox
Involving clients in routine	Clients are structurally included in routines, resulting in co-creation
Limited codification of routines	The ostensive aspect of routines is loosely or not documented
Side-projects	Creative workers search for side-projects with no commercial incentive to be able to express creativity
Ostensive aspect	The perception of the routine, which can be codified or taken for granted
Performative aspect	The set of actions by people who perform the routine at specific places and times
Personal values or goals influencing professional choices	Individual beliefs influence how artistic or commercial decisions are made within routines
Rigid routine	A routine is well-structured and difficult to modify
Routine adaptation	A routine as adapted to navigate changing organizational needs
Routine change by artistic goals	Changing artistic goals resulted in a routine having changed
Routine change by commercial goals	Changing commercial goals resulted in a routine having changed
Routine change by failure or success	Previous failure or success in the performance of a routine resulted in a routine having changed
Routine change through evaluation	A routine is adjusted through a reflective process
Selecting projects aligning with personal goals	Creative workers strategically choose projects that fit with their own personal interests, filtering out those which conflict with them
Shared ideas vs. individual interpretation of routines	Tension between the understanding of routines between individuals and the collective

Spatial or team-based separation of tensions	Artistic and commercial goals are divided across spaces or people
Subsidy tension	Creative businesses experience a tension between artistic autonomy and subsidies
Temporal separation of artistic/commercial focus	Artistic and commercial goals are divided across time
Tension between artistic autonomy and commercial control	The persistent tension between artistic autonomy and commercial control is experienced
Tensions in client relationships	Client involvement or expectations result in tensions
Use of tools to support coordination	Software or practices that support the navigation of the paradox

## **D: AI usage**

All interviews were transcribed using the Microsoft Word automatic transcribe function. These transcriptions were then carefully checked manually for accuracy and corrected where necessary. After obtaining permission from interviewees for the transcripts, these were then translated into English using DeepL and then carefully reviewed and adjusted where necessary to ensure accuracy to the original meaning.