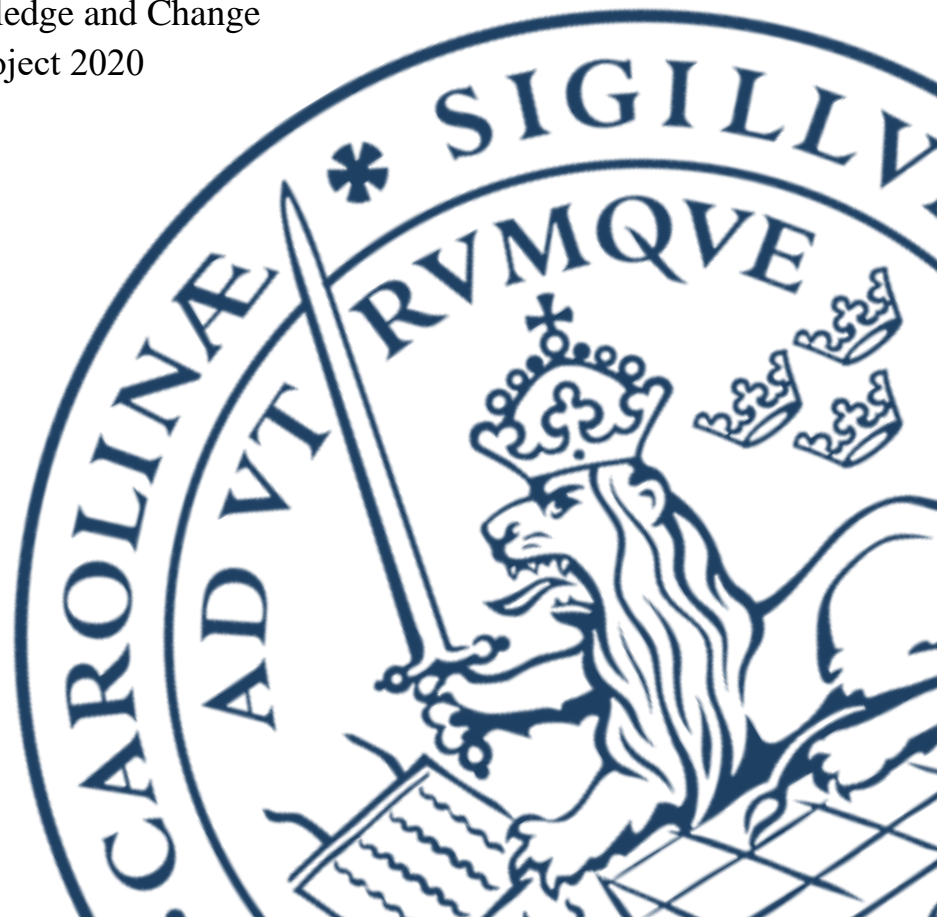# How can organizations affect the working conditions and work experiences of freelancers?

A case study in the Danish publishing industry

Kjeld Ivar van den Heuvel & Sofie Svendsen Jensen

Abstract

The working conditions of freelancers are widely debated as the flexibilization of labor markets has resulted in more insecure labor. On one side of the debate, flexibilization of the labor market in the cultural industries is seen as an important driver of economic growth. This optimistic perspective emphasizes that individuals can develop themselves in creative and autonomous careers. The other side of the debate is critical towards freelancing and flexible labor markets, as they argue that it is exploitative and freelancers endure high levels of precarity and isolation. The aim of this study is to gain insight into what role organizations can play in affecting working conditions and work experiences of freelancers in cultural industries. On the basis of ten interviewers with both employees and freelancers working for a major Danish publisher, we have found that organizations may not be able to fundamentally change the hardships of freelancing, however they can, make significant improvements towards freelancers' working conditions and work experiences. In particular, we argue that they can improve on four areas: the experienced precarity, as well as the experienced isolation, the inclusion into the creative process and recognition of freelancers' work. Overall, our research provides insight in the consequences of flexible labor markets and what this means on an organizational level in the cultural industries. Ultimately, we seek to advance the practical understanding of freelancing and offer insights that could potentially help organizations that work with freelancers.

Keywords: freelancing, cultural industries, organizational studies, publishing, flexicurity, working conditions, working experience, precarity, autonomy, isolation, creativity, recognition

Acknowledgments

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1   Introduction

In recent decades Western societies have seen major shifts in their economies. The decline of blue-collar work, the rise of globalization and rapid technological development have significantly changed how European citizens live and work, whereby the cultural sectors have become a major part of economic regeneration and staying competitive (Hislop, Helms & Boshua, 2018; Morgan & Nelligan, 2018). New economic policies, introduced in the last 30 years, intended to balance flexibility and security, popularized the term flexicurity, and directly caused a rise in freelancers (Wilthagen, 2007). According to the European Commission (n.d.):

> Flexicurity is an integrated strategy for enhancing, at the same time, flexibility and security in the labor market. It attempts to reconcile employers' need for a flexible workforce with workers' need for security – confidence that they will not face long periods of unemployment (European Commission, n.d.).

Several studies on freelancing explored how national policies alter work within contemporary economies and cultural industries, which have promoted to become self-employed (Auer, 2007; Burroni & Keune, 2011; Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007; Keune & Jepsen, 2007; Wilthagen, 2007). Flexicurity birthed the phenomenon to employ fewer securely employed individuals in organizations and instead rely more on freelance workers which are highly present in contemporary creative industries (Wilthagen, 2007; Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007). Flexicurity was attractive to most European governments because of its ambiguity and is widely implemented in the Danish economy since the '90s (Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007). This meant looser job protection for Danish workers, but higher social protection and extensive employment schemes (Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007; Auer, 2007). Auer (2007) argues that these policies are directly resulting in a rise in freelancers, while Denmark successfully achieved a higher level of protection against poverty through social programs, by spending about 4,6% of its GDP on unemployment benefits and employment programs, which is the highest percentage in the EU (Auer, 2007; Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007). Eurostat (2019) concluded that creative industries are characterized by a high proportion of self-employed freelancers and workers in the industry experience the effects of flexicurity strategies heavily.

Creative industries and cultural industries are used interchangeably in the existing literature. For this study, we include broadcasting, film industries, music industries, print and electronic

publishing, video- and computer games, advertising, marketing and public relations, and web design (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). Within the cultural industries, much of the cultural work is delivered by creative freelancers (Ross, 2008), as in the publishing industry where the main product is written, narrated, edited and often translated by these creative workers (Florida, 2014; Morgan & Nelligan, 2018).

Freelancers within these cultural industries experience working conditions that are in several ways deviating from traditional secured employment, creating a new dynamic in the workforce (Blair, 2001; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Murdock, 2005; Ross, 2008). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) argue that "there has been a somewhat surprising lack of qualitative studies of working conditions in the cultural industries" (p.5). On the contrary, quantitative research has mainly been performed by authorities to gain insight into employment nationally, reporting a decline in securely employed full-timers, and a rise in insecure employed individuals, which includes self-employed freelancers (Murdock, 2005). Eurostat (2019) concluded that cultural industries are characterized by a high proportion of self-employed freelancers. For instance, in the European Union 33% of the cultural workforce are freelancers, compared to 14% on average in all industries (Eurostat, 2019). Additionally, workers in the Nordics are 2,5 times more likely to be self-employed in cultural industries compared to other industries. As the number of freelancers is rising across the EU, 18% of the workers in the Danish cultural industries are currently employed as freelancers (Eurostat, 2019).

Some academics argue that freelancers enjoy better working conditions as they have more autonomy and flexibility than securely employed workers (Andersson, 2008; Benz & Frey, 2008a; 2008a; Elstad, 2015; Florida, 2014). The high autonomy seems to be of importance to freelancers as it is noted that self-actualization and self-fulfillment are often one of the main drivers behind doing creative work (Elstad, 2015). Another positive working condition as a freelancer is, according to Damian (2018), the recent developments in technology that create more opportunities to find assignments and jobs as freelancers. According to this study, the network of each freelancer expands through online platforms while at the same time providing a way for formerly unemployed people to find "their calling", and be able to work remotely (Damian, 2018).

Others argue in contrast, that freelancers often experience more challenging working conditions than securely employed workers. These studies are often written in the critical

tradition, which holds the belief that social life is mediated by conflicting interests occurring as a result of capitalist exploitation (Prasad, 2018). Ross (2008) has found that being a freelancer in the cultural industries is highly precarious, with Gill and Pratt (2008) arguing that it is often unknown when the next assignment will be, and Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) mention that isolation is a significant problem for creative freelancers. Additionally, critics argue that poor working conditions are prevalent for creative freelancers; they experience low wages, work in a highly competitive environment and experience long work days (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Ross, 2008).

With the lack of qualitative studies on the topic, we started to wonder what role organizations play in affecting the working conditions of freelancers within cultural industries. This has led us to perform a case study at a Nordic publisher that specializes in producing audiobooks and ebooks and distribute them via their online streaming service. In this organization, the creative components are mainly produced by freelancers. Hereafter, this Copenhagen based organization will be referred to as PubliCom. The organization is part of a global organization we call PubliCom Global.

1.1   Research aim

The rising number of freelancers in culture industries is changing the dynamics in the workforce, making it relevant to understand which role organizations play in flexible labor markets. The core of our case study focuses on how an organization affects working conditions for freelancers and to understand how it affects the freelancers' personal experience to work. Further, this is due to the existing literature on the subject, that focuses mainly on how economic policies are changing the contemporary economy in quantitative research, and qualitative research on work experiences of freelancers. Few attempts have been made to understand what role organizations have in cultural industries, affecting the working conditions of freelancers. We aim to answer the research question:

> How does PubliCom affect the working conditions of freelancers in the publishing industry and how do freelancers experience working for PubliCom?

The purpose of our study is to discuss the wider implications of what role organizations have in affecting working conditions for freelancers. This research attempts to contribute to the

literature on how the working conditions of freelancers are affected by organizations and to gain a further understanding of how it impacts freelancers.

1.2   Relevance

As being self-employed becomes more prevalent in the contemporary economy, insight into the working conditions of freelancers is becoming more relevant. The dominance of freelancing in the cultural industries provides contemplation into how labor markets could look like in other industries if self-employment. We believe that these insights are fruitful for scholars within organizational studies, as well as for future managers and freelancers to gain an understanding of how organizations affect working conditions for creative freelancers. Through this, we attempt to make a meaningful knowledge contribution and further enhance this by making the study comprehensible for a broad audience to serve the common good, as well by avoiding and dismissing fads, fashionable clichés, and esoterism (Alvesson, Gabriel & Paulsen, 2017).

1.3   Scope, delimitations and limitations

This case study focuses on the Danish publishing industry and the effect a publisher has on the working conditions of freelancers. We designed our research to gain an in-depth understanding of how organizations affect the working conditions of freelancers, by limiting the scope to one organization, as they are leading in the Danish publishing industry and active in the Nordic countries, but employ different kinds of freelancers.

We chose to interview freelancers who have worked or work for PubliCom and individuals employed at PubliCom to be able to provide detailed descriptions of the working conditions and experiences at the particular organization. Most freelancers we approached have worked for a wide range of publishers and have been able to provide us with information regarding their personal experiences. Additionally, we chose to interview both less experienced freelancers and experienced freelancers to gain a wide range of perspectives and understand how the industry has been developing and how working conditions have changed.

In order to understand PubliCom's intentions and approach to working with freelancing, we chose to support the interviews with a brief analysis of documents as part of our empirical data regarding how PubliCom affects the working condition of freelancers.

1.4   Thesis outline

The outline of the thesis is as follows. We first present the relevant literature on cultural industries, flexicurity, freelancing, working conditions and work experience, which guides our study in chapter two. We present literature from two opposing sides regarding freelancing. The optimistic side of the debate argues that flexibilization of the labor market in the cultural industries is an important driver of economic growth, allowing individuals to develop themselves in creative and autonomous careers. The other side of the debate is critical towards freelancing and flexible labor markets as they argue that it is exploitative and freelancers endure high levels of precarity and isolation. In chapter three, we will describe our methodological approach and considerations used during our research process. This provides insight into how we collected empirical data through in-depth interviews and supporting documents, all of which were analyzed in accordance with the interpretative tradition and an abductive approach. Next to that, we describe our considerations and our presumptions towards the hardships of freelancers. Chapter four presents our main empirical findings, presented in the form of excerpts from our data in three parts. The first part presents the case study and the approach PubliCom Global takes regarding freelancers. Following, part two provides empirical findings regarding how PubliCom is affecting the working conditions of freelancers in the Danish publishing industry, where the third and final part of this chapter is concerning how the freelancers experience working for PubliCom. Both part two and three revolve around four themes: precarity and autonomy, isolation, inclusion in the creative process and finally, recognition. In chapter five we discuss our main findings in relation to the existing literature. We believe that organizations can significantly improve working conditions and work experiences by providing better rewards, reduce isolation through social gatherings, include the freelancers in the creative process and further by giving more recognition for the work they deliver. We provide our conclusions in chapter six with our final thoughts and suggestions for future research.

2   Literature review

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature in the field of freelancing and forms the theoretical base for our study. We first discuss what we understand about the creative and cultural industries, and briefly explore the proclivity of freelancers in the cultural industries and its relationship with flexicurity policies. Further, we discuss the literature on working conditions of freelancers. Here we present the challenges and favorable aspects of freelancing, according to the current debate in the literature. Then we will transition to the literature on how freelancers experience their work and what they value. Here we will also present the literature revolving job satisfaction of self-employed individuals.

2.1   Creative and cultural industries

As mentioned in the introduction, Western societies have made a shift towards creative and cultural industries becoming an important driver of economic growth (Auer, 2007; Florida, 2014). This is the result of West-European and North-American economies not being able to compete on the traditional production of goods locally, because of higher production cost compared to Eastern Europe and Asia, while globalization made the outsourcing of production of goods to those regions the new norm. (Auer, 2007; Florida, 2014; Hislop, Helms & Boshua, 2018; Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007; Morgan & Nelligan, 2018). Richard Florida expresses in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), that there is a new class of people who work in the creative industries. According to him, this 'Creative Class' involves 30-45 percent of the workforce, which predominantly works with their mind, engage in complex problem-solving, creating new technology or new creative content and possess a high degree of formal education (Florida, 2014). Florida (2014) describes that creative occupations are growing and organizations now aim to attract creative people for novelty and innovation. Although the book became widely popular with European and North-American policymakers, it is approached with skepticism and criticized by academics for its all-inclusiveness regarding who is part of the Creative Class, one-sided optimism and fetishization of creativity and optimistic faith in creative cities (Florida, 2014; Hansen, 2007; Morgan & Nelligan, 2018). Glaeser (2005) argues that only the people who are at the core of adding creative value should be part of the Creative Class. Additionally, Alvesson and Spicer (2016) demonstrate that by including teachers, engineers and accountants the terms 'Creative Industries' and 'Creative Class' have limited meaning and could be seen as a convenient way of glorifying knowledge workers, whereby

creativity has become in some sense a buzzword. Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005) have argued that the 'Creative Industries' of Richard Florida, is a political rebranding of the cultural industries.

It may be more useful to apply Hesmondhalgh's (2019) definition of the cultural industries to only include the sectors where most of the cultural products are created. According to Hesmondhalgh (2019), most cultural value is created in broadcasting, the film industries, the music industries, print and electronic publishing, computer games, advertising, marketing, public relations and web design. This is important to define in order to set up a framework and study PubliCom, as it produces and publishes ebooks and audiobooks through a streaming service and part of the culture industries. Both Hesmondhalgh (2019) and Florida (2014) acknowledge that contemporary communication and information technology plays an important role in the production and distribution of cultural products. In addition, Hansen (2007), reveals that technology serves to secure a competitive advantage for some cultural organizations. This is significant, as technological development has birthed mobile commerce, the cost-efficient transfer of large amounts of data, and further facilitates remote working and communication via email and social media (Svenningsson & Sörgärde, 2020).

2.2   Proclivity of freelancers in cultural industries

We have mentioned that flexible labor has become the new normal for many in the contemporary Western economies in recent decades (Auer, 2007; Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007; Rothmann & Cooper, 2015). Wilthagen (2007) argues that flexicurity could be effectively applied with flexible labor markets, but ensuring high levels of security, will only be effective if workers are given the opportunities to adapt to change, have minimal risks of poverty, reduce long term unemployment and have favorable career prospects. For instance, some studies have indicated that flexibility can be successfully balanced with extra security in Denmark, through vast social programs that enable better protection against poverty for workers (Auer, 2007; Bredgaard, Larsen & Madsen, 2006). Previous research generally agrees that a comprehensive social safety net has resulted in relatively high job mobility in Denmark, which means that workers can take more risks to switch jobs without risking poverty, however, it has further resulted in people experiencing more anxiety to lose their secure jobs as a direct result of flexicurity policies (Auer, 2007; Bredgaard, Larsen & Madsen, 2006; Standing, 2011).

Although results appear consistent within qualitative research and according to Auer (2007), Denmark is often seen as a positive example of flexicurity, there is some criticism that workers in the cultural industries often have no choice, but are forced to be self-employed and freelance for organizations to be competitive (Creative Industries Federation, 2017; Murdock, 2005). For instance, Murdock (2005) argues that:

> Corporations have sought to cut costs by shifting workers from secure employment to freelance contracts and making more use of part-time and casualized labor, hiring people "just-in-time" to meet particular production needs and then returning them to the reserve army of cultural labor (2005, p.22).

Similarly, the United Kingdom based Creative Industries Federation (2017) suggests that while some creative workers choose to freelance, for the majority of freelancers in the cultural industries it is the only way they can work. According to them, this is due to the lack of full-time positions available and having freelancers available in their networks means that organizations have access to specialist skills (Creative Industries Federation, 2017). The proclivity of freelancers in the cultural industries is reaffirmed by Elstad (2015) and Eurostat (2019), which report a high proportion of freelancers. Qualitative research has indicated that a worker in the Nordic countries is 2,5 times more likely to be self-employed in cultural industries compared to other industries (Eurostat, 2019). Similarly, across the European Union, 33% of the cultural workforce are freelancers, compared to 14% in other industries, reflecting the consistency of this phenomenon, with data collected by Eurostat (2019) argues that several jobs in cultural industries have an independent and specialized nature and could not be employed differently. Contradicting Creative Industries Federation (2017), Elstad (2015) argues that the majority of freelancers view it to be a personal choice to be self-employed.

Although flexicurity policies have been popular at policy-makers, it has been depicted as an ambiguous aspiration by some researchers, whereby the European Commission has been accused of strongly promoting the adoption of the concept, while the reality in most nations is, that the security part of flexicurity has been lacking in favor of employers (Auer, 2007; Burroni & Keune, 2011; Jørgensen & Madsen, 2007; Keune & Jepsen, 2007; Wilthagen, 2007). Burroni and Keune (2011) argue that even though more flexibility might be needed to stay competitive in the globalized economy, they want to emphasize that "previously protected older workers

may lose their jobs as employers start to replace them by younger, cheaper (and possibly better educated) workers" (2011, p.84).

Additionally, the proclivity of freelancers in the cultural industries is often criticized, as a result of freelancers having different working conditions than securely employed workers. This perspective is based on empirical studies about the challenges that freelancers face on a daily basis (Blair, 2001; Elstad, 2015; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Murdock, 2005, Ross, 2007, 2008; Standing, 2011).

2.3   Working conditions of freelancing

A significant amount of research has been done on a macro-level regarding economic shifts, as well as illustrated by the statistics on the presence of freelancing in the cultural industries, however, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) conclude that:

> There has been a somewhat surprising lack of qualitative studies of working conditions in the cultural industries (...) and of the experiences of cultural workers (2010, p.5).

While Hesmondalgh and Baker (2010) point out that there are not many qualitative studies done to working conditions, Murdock (2005) believes that it is due to the effort it takes to perform qualitative studies in organizations in the cultural industries. It is harder to interview executives and professionals than to do a study about the consumption of cultural goods (Murdock, 2005).

More recently, empirical studies have provided some findings on the topic and have indicated that creative freelancers experience challenges like precarity, isolation, long working hours for poor wages and no benefits (Ross, 2008; Standing, 2011). In contrast, other academics have found empirical data regarding favorable working conditions of freelancing in the contemporary cultural industries are benefiting from digitalization, autonomy and creative freedom (Andersson, 2008; Benz & Frey, 2008a; Damian, 2018; Elstad, 2015). We will discuss the literature on the challenges first before we move to the more positively perceived aspects.

Challenging aspects of freelancing

There is a body of academic research related to freelancing in cultural industries that holds negative views towards the working conditions of freelancers, and the rising number of freelancers in the creative industries. One of the prominent arguments that portray freelancing as challenging is precarity. For instance, Ross (2008) believes that flexibility in the cultural industries meant that job security declined and resulted in a rise in self-employed workers. Additionally, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) argue that cultural workers tend to hold multiple jobs, that work is irregular, contracts are short-term, and there is little job protection. Similarly, Gill and Pratt (2008) agree with this and call attention to the "increasing numbers of workers in affluent societies are engaged in insecure, casualized or irregular labor" (2008, p.2), to point out that the risk of poverty, even in developed nations, is for the self-employed is higher than securely employed workers. Denmark Statistics (n.d.a), the governmental organization under the Danish Ministry for Economic and Interior Affairs, reports that in Denmark, 10,2% of the self-employed are at risk of poverty, while just 2,2% of overall employed workers in Denmark endure the same.

Elstad (2015), although holding a more positive view about freelancing in the cultural industries, found that the downsides of freelancing are the fact that the supply of cultural labor is high so there is more competition between workers and wages are relatively low compared to the risk and uncertainty freelancers endure. The researchers who suggest that freelancing is challenging, believe that freelancers often feel the need to take as many assignments as possible because they are hired for just-in-time labor and mention that they often do not know when the next assignment will be (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Murdock, 2005; Ross, 2008). For the same reasons, Standing (2011) is arguing that flexible work is treated as a commodity because it is easy to hire and to let go of workers.

Even though information on the risk of poverty and unemployment are reported in qualitative research, statistical data presents an ambiguous picture; the self-employed in the Nordics have a 20% higher average income than the average worker while working 20% more hours per week (Andersson, 2008; Denmark Statistics, n.d.b). These statistics contradict the suggestion that freelancers' job-security is low, although they do not separate the cultural industries form the rest of the economy. Ross (2008) reveals that being a freelancer in the cultural industries can mean for some a 'feast or famine cycle', where it is possible to earn large sums of money in a short term, but freelancers are also faced with periods of not having any income (Ross,

2007, 2008). Similarly, Morgan and Nelligan (2018) believe that it is mainly younger workers, who have trouble making ends meet.

The research on benefits like pension, sick pay, insurance, parental leave and being able to receive bank loans remains limited. Elstad (2015) mentions that in the Nordics these schemes are based on full-time employment and freelancers are often not eligible and lead to a limitation of welfare rights. Alacovska (2019) concludes in a recent study that precarity and a low level of job security seem to be one of the most uniform concerns among freelancers in the cultural industries.

Furthermore, in the body of critical research the term 'precariat class' has gained traction, because of the precarious nature of creative freelancing (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Ross, 2008; Standing, 2011). This term is a juxtaposition of precariousness and proletariat, the latter is used by the Marxists to indicate the working class (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Ross, 2008; Standing, 2011). According to Prasad (2018), Marxists argue that social problems are a result of capitalist exploitation and that oppression of lower classes is present with the class struggle against an 'elite class' being a major theme in the ideology. Likewise, Ross (2008) argues that "after all, the profile of the creative economy fits the bill of capitalist expansion into untapped markets, utilization of hitherto marginal labor pools and the exploitation of neglected sources of value" (p.33). According to this critical perspective on freelancing, the members of the precariat class are the creative self-employed, who often hold a high educational degree (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Ross, 2008). Additionally, they include the low-educated workers in the service-industry who similarly experience increasing precarity (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Ross, 2008).

Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) and Creative Industries Federation (2017) found that freelancers report a strong sense of isolation. For example, they argue that freelancers often do not communicate much during a normal workday and have no supporting colleagues, while at the same time there is an expectation to network and a dependency on knowing the right people to receive favorable assignments (Creative Industries Federation, 2017; Elstad, 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). Isolation can be a significant problem as creative problems are often solved in social settings, as argued by Hardagon and Bechky (2006), who illustrated that help-seeking and help-giving are important tools for knowledge workers and creative

processes. The empirical research on creative freelancers suggests that the self-employed have to do self-promotion through their network, and a temporary break from the labor market could end up in long term unemployment for some (Blair, 2001; Elstad, 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010).

Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011) argue that isolated work can lead to stagnation in the development of skills, as "separation occurs through labor market structure rather than workplace design" (2011, p.348). This results in only specific tasks being given to freelancers "leading neither to technical competence nor to group membership" (2011, p.348). This could be significant as it explains why freelancers are hired as specialized workers and only use one set of creative skills per assignment, even though they may have an interest in developing themselves and proof themselves to be a valuable asset for the organization. Instead, informal communication on the job and work relationships are minimal, and sharing ideas seems to be less prevalent for freelancers (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2011).

Opposing the negative views on the working conditions of freelancers, there are positive views and favorable working conditions of freelancers.

Favorable aspects of freelancing

According to Damian (2018), one advantage of being self-employed is the benefit from technological development as "digital technologies and innovative business models dramatically stimulate freelancers' options for their future career" (p.278). As a result of the 2008 economic crisis, a multitude of former securely employed workers choose to work and promote themselves as self-employed freelancers through online platforms (Damian, 2018). This was due to the shift in the labor market as organizations choose to fire employees and outsource services, as well as these creative individuals' opportunities to work with "their calling" (Damian, 2018, p.278). According to Damian (2018), online platforms enable the opportunity to expand the freelancers' networks and potentially be hired through these (Damian, 2018). While mostly agreeing, Standing (2001) argues that a multitude of freelancing jobs are now performed remotely, resulting, on one hand, being able to find more opportunities, but at the same time enforcing isolation.

According to previous studies, autonomy is a capacity that is expressed to attract and motivate individuals who choose self-employment (Andersson, 2008; Benz & Frey, 2008a; Elstad,

2015). For instance, Benz and Frey (2008a, 2008b) illustrate that individuals choose to be self-employed due to "their more interesting work and their higher autonomy" (2008a, p.449), verifying Damian's (2018) notion that self-employed individuals are driven by their calling, and contradicting the idea of the Creative Industries Federation (2017) and Murdock (2005) that it is not a choice. Similarly, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) suggest that "autonomy, community, the possibility of self-actualization, and potentially high degrees of recognition, even celebrity" (p.9) seem important factors to why creative individuals could be self-employed in the cultural industries, despite low wages and longer working hours. Additionally, positive aspects of freelancing seem to be the result of not having a boss. Benz and Frey (2008a) argue that not having a boss and experiencing autonomy is associated with a higher level of engagement. The term self-employed suggests that freelancers are their own bosses, and allows them the absence of hierarchy, control over one's own working hours, and control over the effort expended on tasks (Andersson, 2008; Benz & Frey, 2008a; Elstad, 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010).

Elstad (2015) found that autonomy creates the ability to experience more self-actualization and self-fulfillment from creative work, which could suggest being rewarding enough to outweigh the earlier discussed negative working conditions self-employed freelancers often face in creative industries. She further believes that with the additional positive working conditions of a high amount of flexibility, most freelancers see their job as attractive, and have no intention to stop freelancing (Elstad, 2015), which is supported by both Andersson (2008) as well as Benz and Frey (2008a; 2008b).

An emphasized argument by Benz and Frey (2008a) regarding freelancing is that "people care not only about instrumental outcomes, as is usually assumed in economics, but also value the processes and conditions leading to outcomes" (p.453), thereby criticizing the idea that wages and job security are presented as the most important working conditions in most studies (Benz & Frey, 2008b). This critique is shared by Andersson (2008) as she argues that some previous studies have a limiting focus on financial income in relation to satisfaction, excluding the factor of the well-being of the individuals. By questioning previous studies on the subject, it suggests that some researchers argue that not only working conditions matter but the work experience of people is a crucial factor too, in order to understand why individuals work as self-employed freelancers. The research from both sides allows us to understand the debate on how policies affect both the working conditions and experiences of freelancers.

2.4 Work experience of freelancers

To gain a better understanding of what freelancers experience in cultural industries we review the literature and empirical data that is available on the experiences of freelancers in the cultural industries and explore what freelancers value, how satisfied they are compared to securely employed workers and how freelancing influences identity.

What freelancers value

Several studies suggest that creative workers are largely driven by intrinsic motivation, arguing they value the process itself, a need to express themself while embracing their individuality (Creative Industries Foundation, 2017; Florida, 2014; Elstad, 2015; Andersson, 2008). This might provide significant insight into why some researchers suggest that freelancers embrace positive working conditions and accept unfavorable working conditions, as Rothmann and Cooper (2015) argue:

> Working conditions seem to have a modest effect on job satisfaction. If working conditions are good, there will be no job satisfaction problems; if they are bad, there will be [an effect on job satisfaction]. It actually seems as if employees generally do not give much thought to working conditions, unless they are extremely bad (2015, p.62).

This is consistent with Alacovska (2019) and Elstad's (2015) findings that negative working conditions like precarity and isolation are not desirable but mentioned as a sacrifice in exchange for autonomy, self-actualization, and self-fulfillment.

Previous research on autonomy has revealed that creative freelancers value experiencing a feeling of control over work, freedom and independence, which might be an important reason to do freelancing (Andersson, 2008; Creative Industry Federation, 2017). Elstad (2015) found that this feeling of independence is a major reason why few creative freelancers in the Nordics have an intention to stop freelancing. One negative aspect of autonomy seems to be the extra responsibility and interruption of work-life balance, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) argue that:

Whilst some workers highly valued the freedom purportedly offered by the cultural industries, (...) freedom is complicated because it involves a very strong sense of ambivalence for many workers. Pleasure and obligation become blurred in a highly challenging way (2010, pp.17-18).

The critical researchers and more optimistic researchers all agree that a sense of freedom and independence in combination with working long hours are blurring the work-life balance, although Elstad (2015) wants to add that creative freelancers are generally deeply engaged in their work and finds it more meaningful (Elstad, 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Ross, 2007). Balancing work and life require more self-disciplining and assertiveness, compared to what securely employed workers have to develop a successful career (Ross, 2007, 2008; Standing, 2011). Previous research suggests that with self-employment, the organization is hard to distinguish from one's own self, as there seems to be no disagreement in research on the struggles of separating work life, from non-work life (Elstad, 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Ross, 2007, Standing, 2011). Furthermore, getting feedback and being employed can be essential for a freelancer to keep their identity, and your quality depends on what you create, as Blair (2001) named a study regarding the topic *You're only as good as your last job*. Often a freelancer's work is highly personal and praised or judged by others, including the chance to reach fame (Damian, 2018).

Several empirical studies suggest that job satisfaction and life satisfaction are believed to be different from self-employed freelancers compared to the securely employed (Andersson, 2008; Benz & Frey, 2008a; Blair, 2001; Elstad, 2015; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010).

Job satisfaction

Previous studies of Andersson (2008), Benz and Frey (2008a, 2008b), as well as Elstad (2015), have indicated that job satisfaction is higher among self-employed workers than among securely employed workers. According to them, the main reason for this is that creative freelancers often find their work to be more interesting as Benz and Frey (2008a) argue:

Self-employed enjoy considerable utility from having more interesting work than employed persons and from the opportunity of being their own boss. The value of "doing what one likes" explains a large part of the job satisfaction differential between self-employed and employed people, at least in Western countries (2008a, p.453).

This phenomenon is formulated by Benz and Frey (2008b) as the 'procedural utility proposes', which means that people value the conditions and processes which lead to the outcomes. Agreeing with this suggestion, Elstad (2015) further argues that by "doing what one likes", is overshadowing the negative working conditions of generally low wages and precarity. The feeling of freelancers being their own bosses and able to decide 'how' this process is supported by Florida's (2014) assumptions that creatives value their individuality and want to express that (Andersson, 2008; Elstad, 2015, Florida, 2014).

Life satisfaction

In Andersson's (2008) study of the Nordic population, job satisfaction seems to be influencing a freelancers life satisfaction strongly as a "larger share of the self-employed said that they were very satisfied with their jobs and for most of the time felt satisfied with their lives" (2008, p.220). Existing research suggests, that this might be due to the notion that cultural freelancers seem to enjoy their work more than securely employed people, as it is more interesting to them, however blurring the divide between work life and non-work life and therefore work more hours (Andersson, 2008; Benz & Frey 2008a; Bowling, Escheleman & Wang, 2010; Elstad, 2015; Johnsen & Sørensen, 2015). To put it in other words, work takes up a larger amount of creative freelancers' life in comparison to the security employed.

As mentioned before, Andersson (2008) argues that freelancers view self-employment to be a personal choice, rather than a consequence of not being able to get a permanent job, contradicting Murdock (2005) and the UK based Creative Industries Federation (2017). At the same time, she suggests that those who view it as their own choice to be self-employed, report a higher overall job satisfaction (Elstad, 2015). As there is a link between job and life satisfaction, the overall well-being of the individuals is affected in a positive manner as well if freelancers are content with their working conditions, but mostly the process (Andersson, 2008).

Andersson (2008) suggests that self-employed individuals do not find their work to be more mentally draining than securely employed workers because they find it meaningful and are deeply engaged in the process. Although creative freelancers report higher job satisfaction and life satisfaction, they seem to be at greater risk of developing mental health problems, such as tiredness, anxiety, or depression (Andersson, 2008). Annink, Gorgievski and Dulk (2016)

suggest that there might be a link between financial hardship and an individual's mental health. Other researchers hold the belief that this could be caused by the long working hours, precarity, isolation and balancing work life with social life (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Ross, 2007, 2008).

2.5   Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have established an extensive theoretical base for our study of how organizations affect the working conditions and work experience of freelancers in the publishing industry. We believe that there is an optimistic and pessimistic discourse on freelancing dividing the literature. Previous studies suggest that there are both challenges and favorable working conditions when working as a freelancer. We noticed that with the limited amount of qualitative research on the topic, the amount of studies performed on the challenges of freelancing in the creative industries seems to surpass the number of studies performed on the positive aspects.

We have examined why the proclivity of freelancers in the cultural industries exists and which working conditions are deviating for creative freelancers from the securely employed workforce. Although the number of qualitative studies is limited, some researchers suggest that creative freelancers seem to experience challenges such as; precariousness, more isolation, low wages, isolation, and a lack of benefits. On the contrary, researchers believe that the favorable aspects of freelancing are autonomy, technology being an enabler to find assignments and work remotely, partaking in the creative process, and the feeling of being driven by a calling is a motivator for most creatives.

Criticizing previous studies on working conditions, literature from the field of work psychology about the experience of being a freelancer, argues that the process for creative freelancers is more important than the personal financial outcomes. As creative freelancers seem to be more satisfied with their jobs, they engage more with their work as they find it to be more meaningful. Generally, previous research agrees that long working hours lead to a blurring of work life and non-work life. Again, how organizations affect freelancers' working conditions and work experience remains unclear in the existing literature and allows us the opportunity to contribute to existing literature. Following, we will now discuss the methodology used to conduct our study and analysis.

3   Methodology

This chapter clarifies the steps taken to answer our research question and provide justifications for our approach. We begin with a description of the overarching approach of our research, in order to allow readers to understand and evaluate how we came to our findings. We provide an explanation of our methods for data collection and analysis, which provide insight into how we extract meaning, gain an understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. This chapter further includes considerations about interpretation and reflection that we find critical to acknowledge for this study.

3.1   Research approach

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) argue that it is commonly claimed that qualitative research methods have the purpose to understand meaning and social interaction in social science. Qualitative methodologies are used and developed for studying phenomena that are not possible to be explained by numbers and have the purpose to deeply understand meaning and processes (Renstam & Wästerfors, 2018; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) argue that the research method "must be related to the particular research problem and research object" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p.27). Because our study has the purpose to discuss the implications of what role an organization has in affecting working conditions and the experience to work in the cultural industries for freelancers, we chose to use qualitative methods. This enables us to extract meaning, attitudes, feelings and lets us explore experiences. By focusing on only one organization, we strive to gain an in-depth understanding rather than generalization. We provide insight and uncover how people think, and which attitudes they hold towards freelancing, as we are interested in how individual experiences connect to the larger whole, making the interpretivist research paradigm appropriate to use. The main belief for this paradigm is that interpretation is the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world (Prasad, 2018). Furthermore, the interpretivist research paradigm is suitable as we aim to understand the interaction between freelancers and the employing organization. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) argue that social science is intertwined with political and ethical context, in which it is hard to "avoid either supporting (reproducing) or challenging existing social conditions" (2018, p.32). What they mean by this is that social interests are favored depending on which questions are asked, reality is represented and interpreted, therefore, the interpretations and the theoretical assumptions are

rarely neutral (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). For instance, as researchers, we bring prior knowledge to this study based not only on literature but also through personal experiences and formal education. This means we have to consciously reflect on what data we gather, how it is presented and on which assumptions, premises, and in which specific research tradition it is based. We remained open and flexible as we carried out the research and fully acknowledged the complexities of social reality.

Furthermore, we used an abductive approach by using our newly found empirical information as our starting point, but not neglecting the existing theory, which has its purpose to inspire to look for patterns (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). The abductive method has some characteristics of both induction and deduction, but according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) it is "not a simple 'mix' of these, nor can it be reduced to these" (2018, p.8). They argue that abduction provides the ability to gain a deeper understanding and is iterative in its nature by the researchers moving between theory and empirical data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

3.2   Data collection

We studied a case to provide answers to our research question, by using semi-structured interviews, additional supporting documents and performed an extensive literature review on the topic. This study was performed in one of the Nordic's largest publishers of audiobooks and ebooks. The pseudonym for the organization is PubliCom, which is based in Copenhagen, as part of their parent company PubliCom Global. There are several reasons for conducting the study in this organization, but there are perhaps three that stand out. First, the publisher hires a vast number of creative freelancers on assignment basis to produce audiobooks and ebooks in all stages of the production process. This provides access to numerous individuals who work directly with freelancers and can provide us with data of how a single organization affects the working conditions and experience for freelancers. Second, the organization is one of the largest publishers in the Nordics, therefore it disproportionately affects creative freelancers by having more influence. Third, the organization gave access to a wide variety of freelancers who have worked for PubliCom and other publishers in the industry, as it is common for freelancers to have multiple employers at the same time. It is appealing to get insights from the employees at the organization, as well as insight from freelancers. By analyzing both sides it allowed us to understand both how the employees chose to affect the working conditions and how the freelancers experience these. Using the qualitative approach, we aimed to find the meaning,

attitudes and feelings from collected the data, elucidating the interaction between PubliCom and the creative freelancers, as well as to identify people's perspectives and experiences. We made the conscious choice to do this, in order to provide described experiences and perspectives that are valuable to a broad audience, such as scholars within organizational studies, as well as for future managers and freelancers. We avoid and dismiss fads, fashionable clichés and esoterism to make our study meaningful (Alvesson, Gabriel & Paulsen, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews

Since the aim of our study is to gain insight into how an organization affects the working conditions and work experience of freelancers, we performed in-depth interviews as the main method of collecting empirical data. We interviewed ten individuals, of which six of them are securely employed at PubliCom, and four are creative freelancers. These employees ranged from a production coordinator and editors, who work closely with freelancers, to two of the managers at the top of the organization. The freelancers ranged from a test listener, who is studying at university to an experienced narrator, who also acts in theatres. Initially, we had planned to have a broad variety of freelancers by further including writers, translators and graphic designers, however, three out of the four freelancers ended up being actors working as narrator as some of the freelancers declined to be interviewed, which has affected our analysis by mainly focusing on the working conditions and experiences of this type of freelancer. We choose to approach these freelancers based on the fact that they have worked with PubliCom before, as the quality of our interviews was largely determined by how much insight we were able to gain. To ensure an open attitude of the interviewees and their trust we promised complete confidentiality by giving them pseudonyms and inserting in a couple of smokescreens, to prevent their identification. We were able to record them with permission for transcription purposes.

We approached the interviews as a kind of guided conversations (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). For instance, by crafting the interviews by thematizing the subtopics we found in the literature study. We asked ourselves *what* we want to know and *why* we want to know this, allowing us to clarify which data we want and for what purpose (Kvale, 1996). As Kvale (1996) argues, we had to design our interview specifically to obtain our intended knowledge, but must at the same time be open and flexible to expand on topics and discover new findings. We did this by asking follow-up questions and gave the interviewees time and the possibility to elaborate on their answers.

We started our first round of interviews by interviewing two freelancers to gain insight into what they value and find important regarding the working conditions and experience of creative freelancing. Subsequently, the second round we interviewed three individuals who are employed at PubliCom, to get their perspectives and obtained common practices and phenomena that freelancers experience in the publishing industry. The third round consisted of interviewing the last two freelancers and three employees from PubliCom. In between rounds, we compared the answers from freelancers and PubliCom and held them against existing literature, because we could alter our questions when we found it necessary and dig deeper into topics we find interesting. Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that adapting your research design enables the researcher to adapt to changing situations and allow qualitative interviewing to be a dynamic and iterative process.

The interviews lasted from forty minutes to well over an hour. It is worth noting that we had the intention to meet all interviewees face-to-face, so we would be able to optimally read body language and other non-verbal cues (Rubin & Rubin 2005). This would have provided us with the best way of sensing when our questions were sensitive and the sense if the interviewee is sufficiently confident in their answers (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the spring of 2020. This forced us to perform the interviews via video calling software or by phone. We choose video calling because the visual element gave us more body language cues and made it more personal to look the interviewee in the eyes. Instead of arguing that this software was limiting us, we used network latency and being separated from each other to think, reflect and create silent moments to gain more data. We have been inspired by Kvale (1996) arguing that silence could be used as a means to gain space to think and formulate what to say. This allows us also to ask for clarifications and elaborations on comments or ideas in more detail. Furthermore, video calls allowed us to take extensive notes by one of the researchers without making the interviewee uncomfortable, while the other researcher was asking the questions. The person who asked the questions was visible to the interviewee via the video connection and expressed broad sympathy by verbal communication and facial expressions. We have the impression that all interviewees were comfortable and open in expressing their views while they were getting interviewed from their homes and family's vacation homes.

Analyzing documents

Additionally, complementary data was gathered through analyzing a few documents to increase the richness of the empirical data and provided inspiration for interview questions. Accessing strategy documents and investor reports gave us a description of the company and an understanding of how the organization looks towards the industry and publishing sector. Reviewing this and integrating it in our findings contributed to clarifying the perspective and intentions of PubliCom Global and gave support to data collected during interviews. Bowen (2009) argues that documents "can be particularly useful in pre- and post-interview situations (...) to check interview data and vice versa" (p.36). This gave us reflexivity which resulted in more depth and richness of our empirical data (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Furthermore, we choose to study these documents as non-intrusive ways of gathering more information, as they are available for prospective investors and internal stakeholders.

3.3   Data analysis

After gathering all the necessary data, we transcribed our interviews and made labels for our relevant data extracted from the analyzed documents (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We followed Rennstam and Wästerfors's (2018) approach to qualitative analysis in the form of sorting, reducing and arguing, which provided us with guidance. However, in practice, this analytical process is not linear, as Styrhe (2013) argues, and we noticed that analysis started already during interviewing and transcribing, by looking for patterns and topics that were interesting for further exploration.

We sorted data by getting familiar with the transcripts and reading them repeatedly. We took notes and looked for patterns that our interviewees perceived as important, and we thereby are significant to answer our research question. While we carefully studied our transcripts, we labeled them, so the answers were coded and we were able to put them in more abstract and broader categories. As Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) argue, a researcher gets intimate by sorting data, as it is repeatedly read and recorded. The outcomes and quality of this process depend on the interpretative and creative skills of the researchers, who have to remember information, take context into account, and reinterpret ideas in new ways (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

As we had over 35 different labels for our data when we were coding it was crucial to reduce this into broader categories, by merging codes together and eliminating several of them. For example, we used 'isolation', 'job security' and 'creative expression' and while we merged 'pension' and 'parental leave' into 'benefits', but dismissed 'unionization'. Our decisions were based on what was perceived as most important to the freelancers by asking to the interviews what they perceived to be of greatest importance to them and asking what the most significant advantages and disadvantages of freelancing are. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) argue that:

> The process of reduction is a very sensitive activity and at times quite brutal. The analyst may here be likened to a sculptor who starts off with a fairly shapeless matter and who by cutting away large parts and allowing other parts to remain creates a particular form (2018, pp.107-108).

We decided to group the remaining categories by how relevant they were and their relationship to each other. We found it important to express that the decision of what is relevant is carefully chosen, since we think that relevance is not what is mentioned most frequently, but instead are the most interesting patterns and contribute to reach our aims.

After reducing and deciding what to use, researchers have to argue in order to actually say something (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We created an independent position as researchers in relation to the interviewees and documents by continuously interpreting the empirical data as our understanding, arguing with and against existing literature. We further brought different findings together, by explaining and describing the significance and relevant information we discussed (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). For arguing, we have widely used excerpt-commentary units, first introduced by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011). This method argues through formulating an analytical point and an orientation by presenting an excerpt from the material, and subsequently providing an analytical comment (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

The above-described framework of sorting-reducing-arguing guided us through the process of going from loose empirical material to interpreted findings. To ensure quality and a high level of research we made some considerations and looked at our own assumptions which could influence our interpretations.

3.4   Considerations and reflexivity

We find it important to bear in mind when drawing conclusions from qualitative data that the interviewees and researchers have their biases and assumptions, although individuals are not always conscious about them (Alvesson, Gabriel & Paulsen, 2017). Furthermore, we avoid self-interest as researchers to make a meaningful contribution (Alvesson, Gabriel & Paulsen, 2017). We did not only want to use interviews as our only data collecting procedure, as Bowen (2009) argues that "triangulation helps the researcher guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's bias" (p.28). Therefore, we chose to support our interviews and literature review with a brief document analysis.

Next to that, we are aware that our interviewees speak from their own perspective and we wanted to be reflexive during our research. Reflexivity in research means according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) to carefully interpret data, but equally important to reflect on yourself as a researcher. Careful interpreting data can be explained as having the awareness that all qualitative empirical data is subjected to interpretation, and the "assumption of a simple mirroring thesis of the relationship between 'reality' or 'empirical facts' and research results (text) has to be rejected" (p.29). In simpler words, there is no objective truth in interpretive studies and therefore research needs to dismiss the assumption that empirical data is a reflection of the objective truth, as there is none in post-positivism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Prasad, 2018). Reflection on yourself as a researcher means looking critically at your own assumptions and thinking about what they mean in a broader sense and how they influence your work (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

Therefore, we had to reflect and think about our own assumptions. As we realized that Sofie has been working in the publishing industry as a marketeer, we understand that it has influenced our discussions. However, we are aware that we both have sympathy for creative freelancers and similarly hold the assumption that freelancing comes with many challenges. We developed this assumption individually from listening to individuals out of our social networks, and our own work experiences. Furthermore, we assumed that we might find some maleficent exploitation by employers, and before researching the topic presumed that a significant number of individuals want to escape from being a freelancer and grow towards different careers. This paradigm was influenced by contemporary issues regarding flexible labor and the presumption

that freelancers are more vulnerable and more easily exploited. For instance, by online platforms like Fiverr, that offer "low-cost options for freelance services" (Silva, 2018, n.p.). One can argue that Fiverr profits from labor markets in which the supply of work exceeds demand, undercutting wages (Morgan & Nelligan, 2018; Silva, 2018, n.p.). On the contrary, we realized that one can argue that these organizations provide a way to start out as a freelancer, expanding portfolios, networks, and the ability to practice business skills without large risks. This example is one elaboration on how debated phenomena can be seen from different perspectives, hence the need to be transparent and aware of context, assumptions, and biases. We value critical thinking and scrutinizing extreme normativity, as we believe that social reality is highly contextual. We have been interpreting carefully by not presenting the freelancers as victims and ensuring that we are not disregarding data that does not conform to our own biases by including contradictions and opposing perspectives. As researchers we played the devil's advocate by asking critical questions to each other, therefore we were forced to articulate our reasoning and justify our perspectives, and also undermining consensus (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016).

4   Findings

In this chapter, we present and explore our empirical material gathered through interviews with employees from PubliCom and freelancers as well as supporting documents. Our findings will be presented in three parts. The first part is an introduction of the case, where we describe PubliCom and provide results, in order to understand the organization's perspective and their approach of working with freelancers from the global organization to the local markets. The second part will focus on how PubliCom is actually affecting the working conditions and experiences of creative freelancers in the Danish publishing industry. This is done by examining the approaches and actions that employed individuals at PubliCom are taking towards working with freelancers. The last part of the chapter revolves around how the freelancers experience working for PubliCom, based on how they actually perceive working for the organization affecting the working conditions.

4.1   Introducing the case

PubliCom entered the Danish online streaming market in 2013 and was acquired by a competitor in 2016, becoming a part of the international organization PubliCom Global (PubliCom Global, 2020). The organization focuses on the Nordic region, although PubliCom Global is present in 20 different markets worldwide (PubliCom Global, 2020). The main products are audiobooks and ebooks for online streaming through in-app subscriptions, but in 2017 PubliCom Global further acquired a Danish publisher who produces and publishes a limited number of printed books (PubliCom Global, 2020).

According to Deloitte (2019), the market for audiobooks is growing on a global scale, which is the case in the Danish market confirmed by employees of PubliCom. Apart from the rising popularity, it has also become easier to produce audiobooks due to technological developments as Audio Manager Gregers explains:

> In general, there is a lot more work. You can now produce audiobooks from home in sound booths, it is much easier to produce them with digital files. The technology has improved.

PubliCom has produced and published audiobooks and ebooks for the Danish market since 2016 (PubliCom, 2020). During the whole process of production, PubliCom relies on freelancers to deliver most, and sometimes all, of the creative material. As Head of Publishing Paul states:

> We are nothing without those freelancers. We are mostly conceiving ideas alongside people we are working with, and then we are shaping them. We are the project runner, and a lot of the creative output comes from people who are outside of PubliCom.

The freelancers that deliver creative material for the process of production are writers, narrators, translators, proofreaders, graphic designers and test listeners, according to the employees of PubliCom. Due to the great number of freelancers that PubliCom is working with we found it interesting how documents of PubliCom Global represent freelancers and their relationship with the organization. We interpret this as fundamental in order to understand the approach to how PubliCom affects the working conditions and experience of freelance workers.

PubliCom Global is the parent company of PubliCom, and therefore we will commence analyzing how the organization addresses freelance workers in their report 'PubliCom Global AB Company Description' (Nasdaq First North & PubliCom Global AB, 2018). The report is accessible from PubliCom's own website and contains over 90 pages of information. The purpose of the company description document is to attract (potential) investors by informing on PubliCom's current situation, processes, strategy as well as the vision to grow the organization (Nasdaq First North & PubliCom AB, 2018). Sandell and Svensson (2016) argue that (financial) reporting by public organizations is mainly performative and meant to convince investors. Investor reports do not exist to be descriptive but let the receiver of the report think in a specific way, to create a paradigm, as it is not a neutral or objective document (Sandell & Svensson, 2016).

PubliCom Global states that part of their overall business strategy focuses on developing the publishing industry, as "PubliCom Global aspires to create the best digital service for storytelling while cultivating and expanding the publishing industry" (Nasdaq First North & PubliCom AB, 2018). This indicates that the organization understands the dynamics of the cultural labor market, which is further illustrated by the statement: "actors can work as narrators of audiobooks, creating a new revenue stream for cultural workers" (Nasdaq First North &

PubliCom AB, 2018). The latter quote suggests that PubliCom Global has given thought to how they affect the creative workers in a positive manner, as the quote implies that actors do not have enough work or full-time contracts in the film industry and theater industry. By providing work to actors, they can fill up their time with narrating audiobooks, as well as add to their limited earnings. This could further suggest that PubliCom Global is aware of actors' precarious working conditions. However, the focus of the report lacks the transparency of how the creative freelancers are paid for their creative work or how they are treated.

We found that PubliCom Globals's report frames the people they are working with, in a positive way possibly to avoid the receiver of the report to detect the possibility of precariousness. Similarly, they use the words to come across as professional and premium:

> With the audiobook, we introduce a third contributor to storytelling in the form of the narrator of the story, oftentimes a trained actor. The author, reader, and the narrator form a trinity that we at PubliCom [Global] refer to as the Golden Triangle. The right story with the right voice to the right reader (Nasdaq First North & PubliCom AB, 2018).

Using the words 'trained actor' indicates that they work with educated professionals when developing and producing their products in the form of audiobooks. Like mentioned before, receivers of external reports are investors (Sandell & Svensson, 2016), who are interested in possible financial returns, and we argue that they are less interested in the processes or working conditions. Instead, PubliCom Global's report is written to create a positive image of the organization, by creating a favorable paradigm through specific phrasing.

The analyzed report is a representation of the business strategy by PubliCom Global. Yet it represents the overarching organization's approach to operate in the market, however, in order to find if the same strategy is present at PubliCom, we have conducted interviews with employees who work directly with freelancers. When asked if there is a standardized approach or policies for working with freelancers internally at PubliCom Head of Publishing, Paul replied "yes, there is one. (...) We provide workshops to precisely grow their skills". On the contrary, every other employee we spoke to shows little to no recognition of a standardized approach. Country Manager August, when asked about it said: "no, I do not think there are any procedures, we just hire them if we need them". The lack of knowledge of the strategy could

be due to August not working directly with freelancers, making him unaware of how much of the creative work that is delivered by these workers to the final products.

An editor who works with freelancers on a daily basis lacks knowledge of the strategy too, nonetheless, these same employees mention the workshops that Paul mentioned as a link in the strategy. Further, Studio Manager Noah states:

> We can spend a lot of time and effort training them and then they can leave. It [building a network of talented freelancers] takes a lot of resources from us. We want to keep the ones we think are good at their job.

The mentioning of training from Noah's statement hints that an approach seems to be discussed internally. However, it implies that it has not been communicated that training is a part of the strategy for working with freelancers, even though it is carried out on a daily basis.

The majority of employees lack knowledge of the approach on how to work with freelancers. Paul, the Head of Publishing, is the only employee that is aware of the strategy, yet he can not provide any more details or information on the strategy during the interview. Instead, he acknowledges that most of the creative material is created externally by freelancers. This leads to our interpretation that the working conditions and thereby experiences of freelancers are mainly affected by individual employees' approach and actions to working with freelancers, not a fixed approach or managed by policies.

4.2 How is PubliCom affecting the working conditions of freelancers?

The main finding from the previous part is that it is the individual employee's approaches and actions that are mainly affecting the working conditions and experiences of freelancers, hence we will explore these in the following part. The findings are divided into four main areas, presenting information that is important by both employees of PubliCom and freelancers. The first area concerns what PubliCom does in relation to the precarity and autonomy that the freelancers experience. For instance, what influences job security, competition, pay and other aspects are different from being securely employed, like benefits and administrative tasks. This is followed by an examination of how the organization is affecting isolation and networking possibilities, while the third part concerns the creative process. This includes how PubliCom

interacts with freelancers and how involved they are in creative decision-making. The fourth part presents empirical data regarding recognition for different types of creative freelancers.

PubliCom is competing for the most talented freelancer by rehiring them, paying them better, but are still unaware of the extra administrative burdens

Among the employees of PubliCom, we found the general perspective to be that freelancers enjoy a great amount of autonomy within their professions, although it is challenging to balance it with precarity. This part presents our findings on how PubliCom influences job security, competition, wages, benefits and administrative tasks that come with being self-employed.

One phenomenon, we found that is mentioned by both freelancers and employees at PubliCom is the norm of freelancers being hired for one assignment at the time. This finding supports the existence of precarity among freelancers in the cultural industries, but the implications of it seem to be quite nuanced because freelancers are often rehired. We found that getting hired for a single assignment at a time has implications as Kathrine, Production coordinator says that:

> Freelancers at PubliCom are hired to do specific jobs, so there is more at risk for the freelancers. I see that they want to do the job well every time so they will be hired again, where the [secure] employees can lean back a bit. Full-timers do not have to perform on the same level all the time, (...) while the freelancers are trying to do their best every time.

This quote highlights the general attitude of our interviewees about precarity, with both employees at PubliCom and freelancers realizing that freelancers get one assignment at a time and feel the pressure to perform. As illustrated above, freelancers are in an unfavorable position that they are evaluated after every assignment they deliver. As a result, creative freelancers are seen by PubliCom's employees as hard-working people who feel responsible for their obligations. One interesting finding is that freelancers are rehired by PubliCom if the employees with whom they were working with are satisfied, and there is a preference to rehire, as Editor Johanna says:

> I like to use the same freelancers over and over again because once you know someone you do not have to explain much and you know how they work. Next to that, if someone

is difficult to work with, then I am not going to work with them again. So, I like to know who I can go to, so working with freelancers is easier.

Considering this quote, job security for freelancers at PubliCom seems to be additionally affected by the personal experience the employee at PubliCom had with the freelancer, the relationship. The individuals at PubliCom have the power to reject a freelancer if their bond was previously not good.

From our interviews, it becomes clear that the type of work further influences if a freelancer gets rehired. Country Manager August says:

We would like to have many different narrators, so it would not make sense to just hire one person to narrate a lot of different books. (...) We want to have a perfect match, that is why we use many different narrators.

This finding is significant because it would illustrate that the more artistic input your profession has, such as narrating, designing, and writing, the fewer assignments a freelancer can get from PubliCom in a short time period. On the contrary, professions with less artistic input like proofreaders, test listeners, and translators are more easily rehired as freelancers because it will not influence the creative product as much, so they are more likely to fit with a specific audiobook or ebook. August emphasizes that he wants PubliCom to make the best products possible. Similarly, it would explain why Editor Johanna likes to hire the same people if they deliver good work.

Remarkably, we found that hiring freelancers full-time might decrease the quality of the books, although it would be unexpectedly financially favorable for PubliCom, as Audio Manager Gregers, says:

The obvious one for PubliCom is that we cannot give them full-time contracts otherwise we would have the same six voices for every single book. If PubliCom had full-time narrators I could get labor much cheaper.

The preference to hire freelancers for one assignment at a time is more expensive, but also proof that PubliCom does not want to have the cheapest labor to produce books. This finding

illustrates that selecting freelancers is partly based on aiming to produce the best books and not suppressing costs or intentionally profit from the vulnerability of freelancers.

Because of this, we asked if there are freelancers hired for full-time or part-time positions. Johanna, the Editor says it is considered but does not happen often:

> We actually talked about it internally because we have a proofreader, we all really like and he would like to be an editor with us, but we do not want to lose him as a proofreader. So we did not hire him. I see that we do not really have enough work for freelancers to do full-time, so it is mostly a workload issue.

This quote illustrates that hiring freelancers for secure positions seems to be discussed among the employees, but not having enough work available seems to be the main reason not to offer freelancers a secure contract. Next to that, losing this person as a proofreader inhibited him from getting hired. In a way, this proofreader is restricted to develop because he is good at what he does.

Even though it rarely happens that a freelancer gets a secure contract, it happens often that PubliCom rehires freelancers for assignments. One narrator told us: "I have done 90 books in total in two and a half years. I did about 20 jobs for PubliCom". Another interviewed narrator is able to get between two to five assignments per month in the publishing industry at different publishers. We also have found that one test listener has about twice as many assignments but works with fewer publishers. The data shows that the work life of freelancers is precarious, as freelancing provides pragmatic benefits for PubliCom, as they are not obligated to pay them securely or give them work consistently. Our empirical findings illustrate that there are multiple employing publishers necessary to ensure some sense of job security for freelancers. The comparison between narrators and test-listeners show that it is harder to get rehired at a particular publisher if you have more artistic input.

From our findings, it is clear that there are five factors at PubliCom that affect the job security for freelancers. First, the quality of previous work needs to be at a sufficient level to be rehired. Second, if the freelancer is pleasant to work with, PubliCom wants to rehire particular individuals more often, as employees seem to have favorites based on previous personal experiences. Third, the amount of artistic input of a creative freelancer, such as their unique

voice, acting style or writing style, can inhibit the possibility of getting hired for projects, as PubliCom strives to match the right voice, cover design, and writing style to the story. Fourth, a major factor that influences job security for freelancers to get rehired in the publishing industry is the amount of work that is actually available. And fifth, even though the match between the freelancers and the story is good, there is further the wish to make all books unique. For instance, if a narrator has voiced numerous books recently, they probably will not get hired in the short term, because the story can feel too similar to previous books. Our understanding of these factors is that PubliCom tries to produce the best digital books, even though it is more costly than hiring a couple of freelancers full-time and giving them all the available work. Freelancing has the pragmatic benefit for publishers that freelancers always feel the need to perform well, and their autonomy gives the organization few obligations.

It is clear to us that PubliCom has an advantage over the vulnerability of freelancers, but the flexible labor market also provides the opportunity to make more diverse and better digital books. Furthermore, flexible labor is also benefiting employers by making them able to react to changes in demand.

We found that employees at PubliCom are aware of the vulnerable position of creative freelancers. Johanna, the Editor told us:

> I can see that employers could dump vulnerable freelancers. I mean that is always the case on the market where the employer has the advantage, but I do not think PubliCom will ever do that. I just gave a freelancer a job this week [March 2020] and I gave them the same rewards and conditions as usual. I do not see the COVID-19 crisis as a problem for the publishing industry.

This employee at PubliCom shows empathy for freelancers and seems aware of the advantage the organization has. Even though freelancers are more likely to become unemployed, the intentions from PubliCom seem good and the market for digital books is not negatively affected much by the pandemic. Paul, Head of Publishing, tells us his perspective on the vulnerability of freelancers:

> It would be shortsighted [to exploit freelancers] because there is a tomorrow and a future. It is already really a struggle to get the good freelancers to work for you, so you

really try to do your best and find work for them if they lack work. You treat everyone as you should - with respect.

Paul explains that it would be highly unfavorable in the long term to exploit freelancers, even if they have the opportunity. PubliCom wants to keep a good image as an employer and see the need to treat freelancers well if they want to make premium digital books and run the organization sustainably. This quote illustrates significant information and shows that even though freelancers are vulnerable, publishers are experiencing the challenge of having to compete for the freelancers they desire. We interpret this as an important finding that not only the freelancers feel competition because of the flexible labor market, but also the publishers. The individuals at PubliCom seem aware of these issues and put effort into not exploiting freelancers, because this approach could decrease the ability to get skilled freelancers in the long term. PubliCom aims to attract talent by providing the same amount of work and working conditions to freelancers as normal, which is in our interpretation a form of job security.

Regarding competition, Gregers the Audio Manager describes how they pick narrators for an audiobook: "we use a lot of data when we choose people, like sound samples and reviews from our streaming service". This quote exemplifies that choosing narrators is often focused on the wishes of the consumers and supported by data from their online platform. What is significant for PubliCom is their effort to offer inexperienced narrators a chance to work for them as Gregers says that:

> If we cast [for an audiobook], we send an invitation to two or three professional narrators, plus a beginner. The beginner might be bad, and if we have doubts about their skills, we look at the data we have on the other narrators. I do not think there is a publishing company that has as many beginning narrators as we have. We take pride in that we have a lot of new voices. It is very competitive to start as a narrator.

Gregers explains that the competition among freelancers makes it hard to start a career as a narrator in the industry, but it becomes easier if you already have done an assignment for PubliCom that is well received by consumers. He seems empathetic towards freelancers who want to work for PubliCom and is proud as they hire inexperienced freelancers, positively affecting how hard it is to start a career as a narrator by making it easier. Our interpretation is that PubliCom wants to expand the pool of freelancers, to build a greater network of narrators to pick from.

Regarding competition, both freelancers and employees at PubliCom mentioned one particular trend explained by Head of Publishing Paul:

> I think that the market is going to grow even more and that there are going to be more streaming services. Maybe some of the publishers who do not stream right now are going to stream.

Having more competition among the publishers could mean more work for creative freelancers as more books will be produced. This will increase the demand for creative freelancers affecting the amount of competition as assignments become less scarce.

We found that not only do freelancers endure competition, but also publishers compete to get the right talent. PubliCom affects the working experience of freelancers by giving inexperienced narrators the chance to narrate audiobooks. Therefore, making it easier to start a career as a freelancer in the publishing industry, but at the same time increasing competition for narrators. Furthermore, we found that PubliCom expects that the organization will experience more competition because publishers will start to stream audiobooks and ebooks. Therefore, PubliCom feels the need to improve the working conditions of freelancers, ensuring they can attract the most talented freelancers and maintain a good relationship with those in their existing network.

One widely discussed working condition affecting freelancers, according to the literature are wages. As we presumed that freelancers experience hardship, we asked what employees at PubliCom think about wages. Audio Manager Gregers tells us:

> We have a minimum wage [for narrators], which is 750 DKK (1.075 SEK) per usable recorded hour. This is higher than most of our competitors have. We have a good collaboration with the Danish Actors Union. The Danish Actors Union has a specific group for narrators, so we have a standard agreed minimum price. This is 700 DKK (1.010 SEK) per usable hour of narration, but we give them 750 DKK (1.075 SEK).

This quote illustrates that PubliCom works together with the union that represents narrators and actors, resulting in higher wages. PubliCom giving a higher payment than the established

standard wage seems to be an act in good faith, as Gregers talks positively about the collaboration with the union.

Additionally, Gregers told us the following about raising the wages: "I would love to do that, that is a widespread feeling at PubliCom, but it depends on the market, and this is how much the market can handle". His answer suggests that there are competitors paying freelancers below industry standards, but PubliCom tries to pay the freelancers well, as it is hard to get the best freelancers to work for the organization. Noah, the Studio Manager adds "I think it is important that the narrator is compensated, so we do not exploit our freelancers". If it becomes well known that specific publishers like PubliCom pay better, it can strengthen the bargaining position of freelancers, which results in the wages slowly rising in the publishing industry. In other words, PubliCom is affecting the average wages on the labor market by paying freelancers better, improving the working conditions and their competitive advantage as an employer in the industry.

As we were wondering how employees at PubliCom think about freelancing and their experiences, Noah, the Studio Manager said the following: "[One of the biggest downsides is] you do not receive any money for vacations or your pensions - well some places you do - but that is in relation to short hirings". This quote illustrates that individuals at PubliCom are aware of the increased responsibility that freelancers have for their livelihood. Only workers with a contract for a specified period of time get benefits, like part-timers and full-timers but not freelancers. The autonomy of freelancers seem to have extra challenges that PubliCom does not try to affect, help with administrative tasks, examples are more complicated tax system or making freelancers aware how they can get royalties from the digital books. For instance, narrators like Vita, talk about royalties regarding pay "I get a fixed amount for the recording by the publishers and also some royalties externally at the Castle and Culture Board", there seems to be little awareness of it at PubliCom. Audio Manager Gregers says "if the narrators got royalties they might do a better job. It might motivate them". From the perspective of freelancers, there could be an opportunity to provide freelancers with a digital overview, where it is stated which assignments each freelancer has done for PubliCom and a statement to get royalties.

PubliCom is reducing isolation and providing network opportunities by hosting social gatherings

The interviewed freelancers mentioned isolation to be one of the main challenges of being self-employed. While often working remotely from a recording studio or from home, the freelancers lack social interactions and the feeling of having co-workers. However, they explained that PubliCom is hosting social gatherings, which is allowing them to meet other freelancers and the employees of PubliCom creating a feeling of a community.

The employees are aware of the isolation that freelancers are experiencing. Editor Johanna explains that "some of the translators are sitting in a shared office space. So I can write to them and a translator in that office will write back to me". Johanna implies here that PubliCom does not provide them a place to work, but a group of translators fulfilled their needs of having colleagues and are able to work for a multitude of different organizations in this way.

Due to isolation being prevalent among freelancers we asked how employees of PubliCom affect it. We found that PubliCom organizes preparation meetings, workshops, a Christmas reception, and a yearly award show. Gregers explains why PubliCom organizes meetings in the PubliCom office:

> We talk about the book and we agree on how characters sound because it is sometimes not what you expect. For one and a half years we have been doing these preparation meetings. We do it for almost every book. That is something that narrators have asked for. When we have the workshops, we speak to them and ask for feedback, so we get better results.

The purpose of the preparation meetings is to improve the quality of the products that PubliCom produces, as well as provide the opportunity for creative decisions to be negotiated with writers and narrators. As Head of Publishing, Paul's statement on workshops clarified earlier "We provide workshops to precisely grow their skills", the gathering seems in our interpretation to develop PubliCom as a business and improve the creative production processes.

On the other hand, PubliCom also hosts a Christmas reception which is a social gathering without a focus on the creative products or skills. Instead, it allows the freelancers to expand their network both within the publishing industry but also in other cultural industries as many

creative freelancers work across multiple of these industries. The possibility for freelancers to expand their network is also present at the yearly award show that PubliCom is hosting, as other competitors and the press are invited to this event, but mainly it is offering the creative freelancers recognition for their work.

To summarize, we found that PubliCom reduces the amount of isolation of freelancers by organizing different types of gatherings. First, there are preparation meetings, which serve as briefings before digital books are produced. Secondly, PubliCom organizes workshops to optimize the creative process better. Third, PubliCom has a yearly Christmas reception that serves as a social event, and fourth they host an award show for the industry.

PubliCom is including freelancers in the creative process without making them a part of the initial decision-making
From our study, we found that the narrators talk about themselves as artists and that their work is meaningful to them, making them value the creative process, as well as the outcome. Based on the conducted interviews it became clear that PubliCom have introduced different initiatives that make the creative freelancers feel included in the creative process.

A great deal of satisfaction for the freelancers comes from the creative work they deliver. However, they do not have an equal share in the creative decision-making according to Head of Publishing Paul:

> I think that when you are in the freelance part of the industry, you always come last because you are not part of the decision-making.

As he continues it becomes clear that he means that freelancers are not a part of choosing or developing projects from the beginning, but hired later in the process to deliver a specific creative component of the end product. Paul further states:

> If you are lucky you get really interesting projects, but the sad thing is that you are not the one deciding which projects you get.

One of the main advantages of being a freelancer mentioned before is the high amount of freedom. However, even as they have the freedom to refuse assignments, there is still a

limitation to which projects they are able to work with. This is both because they are not a part of the creative decision-making inside the organization and because they actually need to be hired for projects.

However, PubliCom includes freelancers to a greater extent than other publishers, as they host preparation meetings where the narrators meet the writers and are able to discuss how they should narrate the specific story. These meetings were a suggestion from narrators as Audio Manager Gregers explains:

> So we now do preparation meetings and test recordings. That is something that narrators have asked for. When we have the workshops we speak to them and ask for feedback, so we get better results.

This shows that even as the freelancers are not a part of the initial decision-making in the creative process as Head of Publishing, Paul stated, PubliCom is still receiving feedback and changing the process in order to please the creative freelancers.

PubliCom is providing freelancers more recognition for their creative work

The social gatherings that PubliCom is hosting are not only affecting the experienced isolation of freelancers and providing an opportunity to network, but further helps the creative freelancers gain recognition for their creative work. The award show celebrates audiobooks, providing recognition in the publishing industry, as well as on a societal level because writers, actors and journalists are attending the event. Editor Johanna talks about the feedback she has received from freelancers after the event:

> A month ago we had the award show, and we heard from the narrators that they were so happy we focus on audiobooks now. The market has grown a lot and it is more interesting to be involved with. There is a lot more recognition in that field.

The award show makes "invisible, lonely work more visible", according to our freelancers, concluding that there is more recognition for audiobooks. Furthermore, this event was broadcasted on the internet and free to watch for consumers that might recognize them from acting or help them reach fame in the future.

PubliCom is the first publisher to affect the working experience of freelance workers in the publishing industry by focusing on recognition and fame for the narrators. The initiatives started by the organization is pressuring other publishers to implement similar measures into their strategy in order to attract the most talented freelancers.

4.3   How do freelancers experience their work and working for PubliCom?

As we have now described in the previous part what PubliCom affects regarding the precarity, autonomy, isolation, involvement in the creative process for freelancers, and recognition for their work. At PubliCom there seems to be a willingness and actions are taken to treat freelancers well. Individuals in the organization feel the competition for talented freelancers, because the organization needs the best freelancers to produce premium digital books. Similarly, they provide recognition to freelancers and reduce isolation by organizing gatherings to improve the creative progress and stimulate more involvement. Although these measures are well intended, we see that different types of freelancers get treated differently. In this part we show how our interviewed freelancers actually experience these measures, presenting our findings on how they feel and think about freelancing in the publishing industry. Following the same order, we delve into the freelancers experiencing precarity and autonomy, their isolation and network capacity, and ending with their perceived involvement in the creative process and recognition.

Freelancers feel both frustration and excitement towards freelancing: experiencing autonomy along with precarity, a high level of competition, low wages and the burden of administrative responsibilities

We have found before that PubliCom affects freelancers autonomy and precarity in multiple ways; by rehiring freelancers often mostly for pragmatic reasons, give unexperienced narrators the opportunity to work for them for the same conditions as experienced freelancers, and pay all freelancers better than what is normal in the publishing industry. Despite, not providing benefits or supporting self-employed individuals is also affecting the freelancers' experience. We will now present our findings regarding how the earlier described measures actually impact freelancers.

One significant finding we found is that an unstable stream of income can cause freelancers to work long hours in periods adding pressure to their work-life balance. For instance, Albert

argues that freedom sometimes also is a challenging aspect as it can be tempting to work longer hours in order to guarantee your monthly income consistently:

> The difficult thing about freelancing is not knowing. It might look a little bad next month and suddenly there is a job there and a job there, so sometimes you say yes to too much and give yourself a lot of work pressure.

Albert explains that freelancers often do not know what the next couple of months of their work life are going to look like. Narrators talk about putting extra pressure on themselves is their own choice.

Studio Manager Noah, who has worked as a freelancer himself in the past, comments that upsides of freelancing are "the flexibility and the possibility to earn a lot of money in a short period of time if you work a lot". In our interpretation, these two quotes serve as different perspectives on precarity and autonomy, which we find important to recognize. A freelancer can be without work for a while, living from savings for a period, although possibly getting copious assignments a couple of weeks later. Vita says that she enjoys not being in a stable job, but adds the downsides:

> I love the freedom of freelancing, but I hate and like not knowing what I am doing in the near future, because I am quite structured and enjoy knowing what I have to do, although I do not need to know everything. I like the thrill of getting jobs and meeting new people to do jobs for. When I find my work nice, it is really nice, but if I find it hard, I find it really hard because as an actor it is hard to get jobs all the time.

Being autonomous seems to be experienced as both having positive and negative aspects, making our empirical information nuanced. From one perspective freelancing creates positive emotion and makes work exciting. Freelancers express precarity as having a lot of autonomy, but it can also be stressful. The publishing industry seems to be less precarious than the film industry or theatre, although freelancers have to perform well at every assignment and experience hardship. Even though PubliCom rehires freelancers often, working for one publisher is not enough to give the same amount of job security as somebody who is securely hired at an organization.

We found that there is plenty of competition among freelancers, as they all mention it can be hard to find assignments consistently. Nanna explains that "there are many talented freelancers out there, who are competitors. It is important to be remembered by people and be in touch with people all the time". This quote exemplifies how competition puts pressure on freelancers and their network is important to build up a career. We understand it as an awareness that other freelance workers are competitors and the perception of publishers having large pools of good freelancers to choose from.

However, the autonomous nature of freelancing also provides one major advantage, Albert illustrates that: "[I] enjoy the feeling of freedom to say no". This further supports our finding that the publishers likewise need to compete for talent, which we interpret as autonomy and precarity being different perspectives from the same phenomenon.

Regarding wages, narrators think similarly to PubliCom's employees that freelancers should be paid better. Albert says "in general I think the payment is a bit too low. This is especially true now audiobooks are becoming increasingly popular as the publishers claim". Employees at PubliCom argue that they pay freelancers better than most publishers, and we found that all freelancers we spoke to support this finding. Next to that, narrator Albert confirms that pay is not high, but increasing.

However, two narrators have stories of being paid poorly in the past by other organizations. Vita says:

> I also have worked for a publisher that paid 350 DKK (505 SEK) per usable hour [of recorded audio], but afterward, I got a job at a different employer for 700 DKK (1.010 SEK) per usable hours. So I felt ripped off when the first publisher offered me 350 DKK (505 SEK) again.

Vita expresses her frustration and unwillingness to work for low wages after she had a good offer, learning that some publishers try to pay inexperienced narrators less. We interpreted this as it is hard to guess the economic value of a creative freelancer's time and skills, as inexperienced narrators sometimes accept quite poor offers. PubliCom is paying narrators more than double the just mentioned publisher, making them favorable to work for.

One remarkable finding regarding wages is that narrating actor Albert tells us that the Danish state-funded organization that narrates documents and educational literature for the visually impaired does not pay well either:

> I took it [the assignment] and thought it was more exciting to sit and narrate books, working with my voice, than sitting at home waiting for a job. There was also the fact that we were helping blind people to be able to participate in society. I think we got 180 DKK (250 SEK) per narrated hour.

This finding is significant as we presumed that public organizations usually pay better than for-profit organizations. Additionally, this finding suggests it is satisfying to work for a good purpose other than getting paid.

As mentioned before, the high level of autonomy also comes with challenges that are not actively affected by PubliCom. Related to wages and precarity, is the limited financial security in the form of benefits, which is mentioned by all interviewed freelancers. Not having consistent income seem to coincide with another universal frustration of the freelancers: the extensive amount of administrative tasks that follow when being your own boss, which includes struggles with getting royalties from digital books. This has led us to perceive that every freelancer experiences similarities of a small business.

The main administrative task that was highlighted by the freelancers was to calculate and report taxes, as this is not registered through the organizations that employ them. While talking about the subject one narrator sighed and said:

> I have to keep track of my finances with spreadsheets. I note everything I earn each month and I try to specify my wages through the taxes taken out or in a self-employed structure where the taxes are not taken into account. I have to keep track of each stream of income I get paid through. It is hard.

From their paid wages, freelancers further have to deduct money for their pension, sick leave, and potentially parental leave. Next to allocating time for those tasks, there is a potential risk of them miscalculating their wages. This could lead to them facing a major issue of having to pay a further amount of their earnings in taxes at the end of the financial year. PubliCom is

currently not doing anything to positively affect the heavy administrative burdens as they pay the full sum to freelancers in accordance with industry standards, not calculating and subtracting taxes, pension, or other benefits. We found a gap in the literature that there is no sufficient qualitative information regarding benefits, even though all our freelancers told us they have not received any benefits as a freelancer in the creative industries. One consequence is that it can be financially challenging for freelancers to get children. One narrator, Nana told us:

> When I had my first child, six years ago, I was only doing freelancing. The maternity leave was problematic financially because I did not have any income at all, but luckily my partner had a secure job.

Not having the benefits that securely employed workers have, is one major downside and could make freelancers feel like they cannot have any children due to financial risks. Nanna was able to take maternity leave because she had the income of her partner. After getting her first child she chose to do less freelancing and took a part-time job at a marketing agency to have some extra security. A different freelancer, Cecilie, explains that being your own boss has more challenges: "I have to be able to pay my own vacations and pay my own pension. So there is a lot of stuff I need to consider about being a freelancer full time". Not enjoying paid vacation or pension can lead to freelancers working more pushing their age of retirement up or neglecting their health. Creative freelancers have fewer options to take time off, as they are not offered any compensation for taking leisure, like a small business owner.

The last universal frustration regarding burdensome administrative tasks is claiming royalties. Vita, a narrator explains "I keep track of the books because you can get royalties for people using your narrations. I have to fill in internet forms to get those, but that is why I keep track of the books." This is a burden because many freelancers emphasize that "the Castle and Culture Board is very administration heavy and old fashioned. (...) I do not know how the system works or how they calculate it". This again shows that freelancers have extra administrative burdens that securely employed workers do not have.

To summarize, creative freelancers enjoy no benefits as they do not receive a pension, paid vacation, sick pay, or paid parental leave as it is not part of their contracts. PubliCom does not seem able to affect this, although as earlier discussed, paying higher than average wage

provides some relief and makes it easier for creative freelancers to go on vacation or save up for retirement or parental leave.

Freelancers are experiencing loneliness due to technology induced isolation, but this feeling is reduced by attending social gatherings providing networking opportunities

A practical advantage of working as a freelancer is that technological development has made it possible to work remotely, thereby adding to the experienced autonomy. Test listener Cecilie explains:

> I definitely really enjoy that I can work from home. Especially now [during the pandemic] that is a very big privilege. And that I can work at every time of the day. I can do it just when I have the time and when I want to do it, which I think is nice.

However, we found that the development in technology has led to the freelancers feeling more isolated as their jobs can be done remotely with the right equipment. On the topic of isolation one narrator, Vita tells us that "it is quite a lonely job to do. Narrators do not have co-workers to discuss things with". Vita explains not having co-workers seems to be the main reason why creative freelancing feels lonely. Having colleagues is a much-missed positive working condition for creative freelancers. We found that, while technology enables working remotely and finding assignments, it can take away the important pleasure of working in a social environment. Albert, who narrates for more than 40 years, says it used to be different:

> [In the past] there was also a technician present who was recording and listening along. They listened for mistakes, that was extremely comforting. Now it has evolved to us sitting alone again, except for some very few productions. The norm is that we sit alone now.

> I am glad that I have experienced having a technician with me because it has given me so much expertise that I benefit from today. I always imagine that there is someone in the room with me listening when I narrate. That is how I keep myself motivated.

This finding suggests that technological development from using older complicated technology to newer recording equipment, like digital files, made the need for a technician redundant in most cases. It used to be comforting and motivating for narrators to work with somebody else

who helped them. Having someone guiding the recordings additionally made Albert a better narrator and helped him gain more expertise. We found that test listeners and proofreaders are mostly working from their own homes, but narrators are often booked into a studio. PubliCom is not doing anything to improve their experienced isolation in relation to help change the physical scene of where freelancers work, however, the freelancers reported that the social gatherings that the organization is hosting are eliminating some of the experienced isolation.

PubliCom hosts different events such as preparation meetings, workshops, a Christmas reception and a yearly award show. These gatherings have the benefit that they make the freelancers feel less isolated. Vita tells us about the preparation meetings:

> Meeting with staff from PubliCom gives me a sense of responsibility, which I like. When I started out being a voice actor, everything happened by email, so I did not know those people. I get motivated when I meet the people who were involved.

There is a consensus that all narrators we interviewed enjoy the preparation meetings. For some it motivates them, and for others it additionally raises the amount of responsibility they feel towards their work.

The workshops are mentioned by the narrators to open up the possibility to grow as an artist, as well as expanding their creative network. As they meet other freelancers at the workshops it provides the possibility to talk to others about the creative process and get feedback. Narrator Albert explains that he had other narrators contact him for feedback as "some of them also call me to ask what I would do with the book they are going to narrate". This quote illustrates how important feedback is for freelancers.

We found that workshops are not provided for all of the freelancers. Test listener Cecilie is not invited to any workshops, which we believe is due to her not contributing with any artistic input, but rather reviewing the work of other freelancers. She expressed that she would prefer to be more included in the creative process.

However, the yearly Christmas reception is reducing some of the experienced isolation for all of the interviewed freelancers as the non-artistic freelancers are likewise invited, as test listener Cecilie told us:

It is really nice to meet people in the community and at PubliCom. I am happy I got invited to the Christmas party, where I also met the marketing staff. I crave a place where I feel like I have co-workers and social interaction.

This quote illustrates that PubliCom is providing social interaction, to a limited extent, but it makes freelancers feel like they are a part of a community.

Another event that the creative freelancers are invited to is the yearly award show. Narrator Vita says "I really like the award show that PubliCom recently held. It was a really nice event and it kind of creates a community in the industry". This award show provides some freelance workers the opportunity to meet each other, opening up the possibility to build a group to support each other. Generally, we found that the award show from PubliCom is very much appreciated and that the organization is one of the first to celebrate digital books. This gathering does not only create a community, but also a network.

The freelancers feel less isolated based on the initiatives PubliCom has taken by hosting events. The preparation meetings are hosted for the creative freelancers, while other freelancers are only invited to the yearly Christmas reception. This is making it clear that PubliCom has an interest in satisfying the freelancers that deliver artistic input to their products. The workshops and award show are exclusively for the creative freelancers. Besides providing the opportunity for the freelancers to expand their network at the award show, it further helps to gain recognition for the creative freelancers.

Inclusion in the creative process feels very satisfying for freelancers
From our study, we found that the narrator's talk about themselves as artists and that their work is meaningful to them as it allows them to work with their calling of telling a story. Showing that they gain meaning and are engaged by being able to express themselves. By pursuing their calling, we found that the creative freelancers are motivated by being included in the creative process.

From the interviews with the employees of PubliCom, we found that the freelancers are not a part of the initial decision-making, however, PubliCom is receiving feedback from them and changing the creative process based on this feedback. Nonetheless, multiple freelancers

confirm that they wish to be involved further in the creative process on projects. Regardless, it seems that they are not aware of how much of the decision-making process they are missing out on.

Even though freelancers are not heavily involved in the initial creative decision-making, all creative freelancers we interviewed seem to be satisfied with PubliCom as an employer. According to the narrators, there is a higher inclusion in projects run by PubliCom as there is a preparation meeting before their creative work starts. Another reason for feeling included is due to workshops that the organization hosts. One narrator explains "It is really nice to feel that this is a community that I can be a part of". By hosting events PubliCom is creating a place for freelancers to meet and discuss the creative process, providing feedback for each other. Narrator Vita expressed satisfaction about PubliCom as an employer as she started to receive some feedback on her work:

> It was peculiar that for every audiobook I narrated, we communicated by email [in the past]. Before PubliCom I even never got any feedback. The only reason I knew that it was going well was because I was getting more jobs. But later with PubliCom I finally got some feedback.

However, all freelancers expressed that they wish to receive more feedback on their creative work, as their motivation is rooted in creative expression.

Test listener Cecilie especially believes that there is room for improvement, mainly in terms of inclusion and feedback as she communicates with employees at PubliCom through email: "I feel like there are people that I know but I have not really met them more than one or two times, which is weird". This supports our finding that PubliCom treats freelancers differently depending on the creative contributions they deliver.

It is clear from the conducted interviews that freelancers such as test listeners are not prioritized to the same extent as narrators. This is due to the creative contributions being of different importance to the final product. Test listener Cecilie is not delivering a creative component, but is instead reviewing the recordings, explaining she is not invited to the preparation meetings or workshops. Test listener, Cecilie expresses:

I think it would be nice to have some meetings every once in a while. Obviously, it does not have to be often, but it would maybe just be nice to meet at least one time - to have a meeting also with the other freelancers there - to kind of evaluate. Not that I have a lot of feedback for them, but I think it would be nice just to have a conversation with them about work and if we could do some improvements. I know one of the other test listeners and sometimes we discuss what we actually do.

This test listener feels the need to meet other freelancers and employees from PubliCom to talk about her work. Cecilie wishes that she had more evaluation and finds it nice to talk to the people who she works with normally on the other end of her internet connection. From Cecilie's statement, it is clear that she holds an interest in the final creative product even though her main motivator is to earn a wage that can help her get through university. She says:

We [test listeners] do not get access to the PubliCom app. Sometimes it would be nice to listen to the finished product afterward and see what changes they made - what kind of things they considered.

Cecilie is expressing that her experience as a freelancer would be improved if she was more involved in the creative process, by understanding what PubliCom values in their products, instead of only being invited to the yearly Christmas reception.

The creative freelancers experience a lot of satisfaction from participating in the events hosted by PubliCom, however, there is still one particular issue in the creative process. Narrator Vita explains:

One hard thing about this work is that there is no shared language to discuss voice acting. It is really hard to talk about these things. That is why in theatre and film there are directors. They shape the way an actor has to perform, which is its own art. PubliCom could try to get that language established. More workshops could help with that.

This freelancer talks about missing a common language because workers in the publishing industry are not working together on a regular basis. Vita wishes a person to guide the creative process like a movie director or theatre director, referring to different social environments she

works in as an actress. The freelancer explicitly wishes for a closer working relationship between the employees of PubliCom and narrators, by hosting more workshops. PubliCom has not yet been able to develop such a language, which is limiting the shared creative process that freelancers value. However, PubliCom could be leading the industry towards developing such a language, as other publishers are starting to host workshops as well.

The creative freelancers are satisfied with PubliCom as an employer as they are more included in the creative process compared to industry standards. Yet, test listener Cecilie does not feel included, as she is only invited to the yearly Christmas reception. All of the interviewed freelancers are expressing a desire to receive more feedback and to be further included in the creative process. As PubliCom is hosting workshops there is a new creative challenge for the freelancers, as they need to develop a language to talk about narration.

Recognition is providing the feeling of validation and satisfaction among freelancers
A key finding from our study is that actors chose to work as narrators, as it is perceived as a valid job both by the Danish Actors Union and other actors. Narration is thereby viewed as a way to work with something relevant and meaningful outside of the theater and film industry and makes it easier to find work. Narrator Vita explains:

> So that is how I got into the Danish Actors Union, I did not have any employment before, because I had my own production company, which did not count. So the voice acting actually got me into the Actors Union.

As narration is viewed as a valid job by the Danish Actors Union it seems that it is preferred to earn wages through this occupation rather than working elsewhere. According to the report published by PubliCom Global, that was examined at the beginning of the chapter, one of the advantages mentioned was that trained actors can spend their time with narration, offering a way to earn money through something that is related. However, despite one of the actors calling narration a "money-job", all of the interviewed narrators agree that the payment is low. This indicates that the reason for the actors choosing to narrate is the opportunity to pursue their "calling" as one narrator addresses it. Vita explains that:

I could earn enough with voice acting and it belongs in the acting industry. It is telling a story and using my voice, even though it is not what makes it meaningful or my calling, but I like it. It is a good job as an actor and I can go to rehearsals and auditions.

Her actual calling of telling a story as an actor is not fulfilled entirely by narration but it allows her to work within her field, with some amount of consistency. Another aspect of this is the possibility of gaining fame for the creative work that the actors provide, both by the organization but also by the public. One narrator explains: "I really like that my work gets listened to a lot, that is satisfying". Pursuing fame is rather explicit in Alberts statement:

Just like if someone said, "He is a very good actor" then they [PubliCom] want people to say "He is a very good narrator". This makes me very happy because it has been a little bit difficult to say that we are not just someone who should read aloud.

According to narrator Albert, PubliCom is adding value to the experience of working as a narrator, by acknowledging the need for recognition and prestige, that is low compared to the writers. The other freelancers hold similar views pointing to initiatives such as workshops and the awards show hosted by Publicom having a positive effect on the industry. For instance, one narrator argues "It also inspires other publishers to do a better job". This is seen by other publishers following PubliCom's example and has invited narrators to similar events.

One of the narrators explained that he felt that PubliCom is trying to make audiobooks prestigious "I have very big hopes that PubliCom will lift the level for audiobooks with the increased popularity". The same narrator told us:

I have met a lot of people there. I find it really nice to speak to those people, and it is motivating and empowering. You can talk to others about how you do your recordings.

Next to being able to expand their network, the same narrators talk about the benefits of gaining recognition as "you have to milk the opportunities of a nomination". This finding reveals how social gatherings are enabling freelancers to progress in their careers within different cultural industries.

It is clear that PubliCom affects the working conditions and experience of freelancers in a positive direction; by hosting gatherings as the narrators feel more recognized for their skills. At the same time, the vision to make consumers appreciate the creative work it takes to narrate is making Albert feel appreciated. This further supports the actors' pursuit of recognition and potential fame, as recognition and popularity are necessary to progress in the creative industries as a freelancer.

Working as a narrator allows the creative freelancers to pursue their calling of telling a story in other cultural industries, which we found multiple examples of. Vita told us:

> I work at different theatres for three months at a time, narrate audiobooks, narrate company videos and I teach acting. Teaching is usually only for half a year at a time, but sometimes, I also do theatre workshops and some acting work in films.

This is an example of how an actor is supplementing her theatre work with narration. Similarly, freelancer Albert explains he has a large number of different titles:

> Almost all educated actors cannot lean back and say "that was it" and then live off being an actor. You always try to open as many doors as possible. If nothing is happening in theatre then you have time to narrate audiobooks, if nothing is happening with audiobooks then you have time to do [voice-acting for] cartoons. In that way, you have many opportunities to earn the money you need each month.

These two quotes show us that most narrators not only work in the publishing industry but also in other cultural sectors. Vita and Albert are working in the theatre industry as actors besides being narrators in the publishing industry. A different freelancer, Nanna, works "30 hours a week as Head of Content at a digital agency too". We found that there is a preference for creative freelancers to supplement their core profession with multiple jobs in the cultural industries, this way Nanna found her way to receive benefits, as discussed before. Some actors are narrators, and many narrators further do voice-overs for commercials, company videos and cartoons.

The only creative freelancer we interviewed, who was not supplementing their work is Cecilie, a test listener. Cecilie said she is happy to do about 30 assignments per year for PubliCom, to

have an income while studying at the university, and nothing more because of the workload she already has.

To summarize, it seems that the possibility to pursue a calling of telling a story through acting is a fundamental motivation for creative freelancers working with narration, especially as it is perceived as a valid job by the Danish Actors Union and other actors. The awards show hosted by PubliCom is improving the possibility for recognition of the creative work that freelancers deliver, as well as helping them expand their network in other cultural industries. This is something that pleases the creative freelancers, as they often take multiple jobs.

4.4   Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have presented the findings from our case by describing PubliCom, their perspective on how they view freelancers, what this organization does to affect the working conditions and experiences of freelancers, explore how freelancers experience working in the publishing industry and delved deeply into how freelancers perceive working for PubliCom. Below we will summarize the findings, split up in the four themes of the chapter.

First, PubliCom reduces precarity by rehiring freelancers consistently, offering them above-average wages, creating flexible jobs for actors and providing freelancers better working conditions by competing for the best talent, while providing them their autonomy. We have found that the autonomy of freelancers is perceived as a very positive aspect, making freelancers excited, while it has a dark side because it is a result of their insecure jobs. As PubliCom needs to compete for the best talent, they are forced to provide better wages and working conditions, which results in improving the experience of working in the publishing industry for all freelancers. The freelancers have the freedom to refuse bad offers when a different employer provides them with better offers, such as PubliCom. However, we found that it is hard for inexperienced freelancers to say no or to estimate what a good job offer is.

Second, the ability to work remotely is loved by freelancers, which is enabled by modern technology despite that it further has increased working separately and isolation. However, it is broadly appreciated that PubliCom organizes preparation meetings, workshops, award shows and Christmas receptions. This allows freelancers to experience less isolation, emphasizing that little effort has a big impact on reducing loneliness and increasing the possibility to be able

to form a community. The feeling of having co-workers is generally missed by freelancers and further, isolation is resulting in a stagnation of careers. Besides this, remote work provides job security during pandemics and makes it easier to find jobs or communicate.

Third, PubliCom motivates creative freelancers by involving them more in creative processes, as we found that freelancers are motivated by feeling like they are being a part of the decision-making and not only providing a part of the end product. PubliCom provides this by organizing workshops, which are meant to improve the creative processes for making digital books. Moreover, PubliCom organizes preparation meetings to align the story with how narrators pronounce words or present PubliCom's vision for the books, which has the consequence of having influence and more participation for freelancers. However, only the freelancers who have artistic input are involved in this process, like narrators and writers, while test-listeners and proofreaders are excluded.

The last way PubliCom affects freelancers is by providing them more recognition than other publishers, in the form of hosting an annual award show. From our findings it was clear that freelancers appreciate getting recognition and strive to get famous. Their work feels very personal and PubliCom's award show is providing validation, while further give them opportunities to network so they can progress their careers forward. We found that many narrators are actors, and see narration as a valid acting job where they can chase their calling for storytelling, and at the same time it allows them to go to rehearsals and auditions for their jobs in the film industry and theater industry.

5 Discussion

This study is initiated out of interest in freelancing and what role organizations play in the cultural industries regarding the working conditions and work experiences of freelancers. This interest has been further provoked as there seemingly is a gap on this subject in the existing literature, which is also suggested by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010). The previous chapter presented empirical data, which describes where PubliCom is successful and less successful in affecting the working conditions and experiences of freelancers in the creative industries.

In this chapter, we have grouped the main findings together into four themes: autonomy and precarity, isolation and networking, involvement in the creative process, and providing recognition. By grouping them together, it allows us to discuss our empirical findings in relation to the existing literature in order to draw our conclusions. Our empirical data indicates that the approach towards working with freelancers at PubliCom Global is mostly decentralized, putting the responsibility to affect working conditions and experiences on individual employees of PubliCom. Besides this, we would argue that an organization's actions can affect the working conditions of all freelancers in the industry.

Where previous literature is split on the topic, one side of the debate being optimistic (Elstad, 2015; Damian, 2018; Florida, 2014), and the other side critical (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 1996; Ross, 2007; 2008, Standing, 2011), we believe that the freelancers' experiencing autonomy and precarity are better represented with the metaphor of it being two sides of the same coin, acknowledging both the hardships that freelancers face and advantages of their situation. Further, when this is believed it opens up a debate on what organizations can do to improve the working conditions and experiences of freelancers, as well as a discussion can unfold about the incentives the organizations have to do so. Our interviews have repeatedly shown that competition among publishers to attract the best talent is improving working conditions like pay, isolation, and the creative input the freelancers have.

5.1 Organizations can reduce the freelancers' experienced precarity by providing better rewards and job security

We found that autonomy and precarity are experienced by freelancers as two sides of the same phenomena; with freedom comes uncertainty and increased responsibilities, although the

interviewed freelancers also feel excitement towards their autonomous position. The ability to say "no" to assignments is embraced and the flexibility of freelancing provides them with the opportunity to pursue careers in the film industry, theatre industry, marketing, or get educated at university. We disagree with Gill and Pratt (2008) and Standing (2011), who present creative freelancers having multiple jobs as an exclusively negative aspect. Instead, we argue that this amount of autonomy would not be provided with secure jobs and enables creative individuals to pursue their creativity and satisfaction in their work lives (Andersson, 2008; Benz & Frey, 2008a; Elstad, 2015). As an example, the freelance jobs that PubliCom provides are attractive for creative workers, although the lack of benefits and more administrative burdens are perceived as challenging.

We want to emphasize the nuance our empirical findings show, as not only do the freelancer's experience competition because of low job security, but publishers are experiencing similar competition as one manager argues that it is "already really a struggle to get the good freelancers to work for you". For instance, where freelancers feel the need to perform on every assignment, PubliCom feels the obligation to treat freelancers well despite their advantaged position. The organization wants to produce the best digital books and therefore has to give better assignment offers to freelancers than competitors, in accordance with a fruitful relationship with the Danish Actors Union, resulting in a standard wage. Furthermore, as we found that inexperienced freelancers are tempted to take lesser offers (Morgan & Nelligan, 2018), we compliment PubliCom, as an example, that they provide work to that group for the same working conditions as experienced freelancers even during economic uncertainty. These two measures affect the leverage of freelancers in the industry and result in higher standard wages, as we found that wages and the amount of work available are both rising. On the contrary, there would not be many consequences for organizations if all of them chose not to do anything to affect the experiences of freelancers in a positive way. We believe that the individuals inside organizations are capable of setting these norms because of pragmatic reasons with the aim of sustaining the business long-term and making the freelancers feel satisfied. The freelancers in the industry are reacting very positively to the initiatives that are evolving, which makes the studied organization one of the more popular employers in the publishing industry.

5.2 Organizations can both add to and decrease the experienced isolation among freelancers through technology and gatherings

Researchers such as Andersson (2008) as well as Benz and Frey (2008a) have criticized the existing literature on working conditions as they claim that most of those studies solely focused on financial aspects and job security. We support this argument with the findings from our study of how an organization can affect the working conditions and experiences of creative freelancers. Based on our analysis of empirical material, we argue that isolation is generally a concern for freelancers, which is previously suggested by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010), Creative Industries Federation (2017) and Alacovska (2019). However, there are measures an organization can take to affect the experience of working in publishing, and furthermore we argue that it also provides a competitive advantage for organizations to do so.

While working from home or alone in a studio is both perceived as a privilege and a hardship, the main cause of isolation among freelancers seems to be the development of technology. As Damian (2018) argues, modern information and communication technology allows working remotely and getting hired for assignments more easily. For instance, the freelancers we spoke to communicate mostly through email and work with digital audio files and text processing software. This allows freelancers not to have to meet physically with employees from the organizations they work with. Although remote work provides job security to freelancers during a pandemic, allows efficient communication, and provides opportunities to network online, it can also be argued that technology is the main cause of isolation. From this perspective, our findings suggest that technological progress has made contemporary freelancing more lonely, as freelancers are expected to work alone and digital files are easily and safely transferred. Organizations can affect isolation in different ways as PubliCom, for instance, is affecting freelancers currently in multiple ways.

Publishers can reduce isolation for freelancers by hosting different types of gatherings. First, preparation meetings will enhance the quality of audiobooks by aligning the vision for digital stories, choosing the pronunciation of names and developing the creative process, it has a side effect that narrators experience a higher involvement and feel like they have co-workers. Second, workshops can provide the opportunity to develop a better creative process, but freelancers benefit from it as our findings show a community is forming and freelancers are meeting each other during those workshops. In our case, the researched organization is the first

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publisher to do it, although other organizations are following positively affecting the working conditions and experiences of the freelancerin the Danish publishing industry. Third, creative freelancers feel less isolation by being invited to celebratory events. In our case this was in the form of an award show which the publisher hosts. This type of event provides not only a sense of accomplishment and validation, but also the chance to network. All narrators we spoke to appreciate the effort of hosting an award show, affirming the belief of Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011) that a freelancers' career development is generally limited when your job is isolated. This argument is illustrated by the views of narrators and writers, suggesting that recognition and gatherings help their careers, which has the consequence of the narrators networking more easily and creating a community of peers. Fourth, reducing the feeling of isolation can further be done by inviting freelancers to events that have traditional cultural significance, like an office Christmas reception or other tradition. These kinds of events provide freelancers with a sense of having co-workers and appreciation.

For instance, both the preparation meetings and workshops are exclusively for narrators and writers, as their creative contributions are perceived as the most important components of artistic products. This means that test listeners are not often invited to these events, however, they are invited to the yearly Christmas reception, which serves as a social gathering with no focus on the products or development of skills among freelancers. From our findings, we conclude that even little effort is appreciated, for instance, as a test-listener emphasized her gratitude for being invited to a Christmas reception by PubliCom, however not all loneliness can be solved by organizations. She expressed the craving for social interaction and the feeling of having co-workers.

Besides this, we found it happens that organizations discriminate who is invited to specific events based on the artistic input different types of freelancers deliver to the final products. In our case, PubliCom is hosting multiple events for narrators and writers that the remaining freelancers are excluded from gaining the recognition as well as opportunities to expand their network. We would argue that our research shows how an organization can affect freelancers positively, as other organizations are starting to copy initiatives. This illustrates the complex workings of freelancing in creative industries, developing the publishing sector, and the dual advantages gatherings bring.

5.3 Organizations can make freelancers feel more included in the creative process

From our study, we believe it is very important for creative freelancers to be engaged in work they find meaningful. This means that we agree with Benz and Frey (2008a), believing that the freelancers value the processes and conditions leading to the outcomes too. The most significant finding from the previous section on isolation is that organizations affect the working conditions and experiences differently, depending on the artistic input the freelancer delivers. In the case of PubliCom, the narrators and writers deliver the main creative components and their working conditions and experiences are thereby prioritized. This is supported by the data which shows that events that provide development and training are exclusively for these specific types of creative freelancers.

Creative freelancers in the publishing industry are driven by a creative calling, making them experience a great deal of satisfaction from the creative process and the contributions they deliver. The freelancers express that they value the creative sparring they have with publishers, an example being PubliCom's workshops that are viewed as an opportunity to develop shared tools, such as a common language for narration. Therefore, we agree with Hargadon and Bechky (2006), who argue that seeking help and giving help are important tools for knowledge workers and creative processes. This supports the argument that creative freelancers care not only about the creative outcome, or financial rewards, but value the experience and process. Damian (2018) phrases the feeling as "their calling" (p.278), which is the same phrasing that was used by one of the narrators we interviewed. The calling was mentioned to be to tell a story, preferably through a job that is viewed as valid through the Danish Actors Union and by other actors.

Another supporting finding, to the freelancers caring about the creative process, is that all of them communicated a desire to receive more feedback on their creative contributions to the products. In the paper *You're only as good as your last job* (2010) from Helen Blair, she argues that getting feedback is important for freelancers as their chances to get rehired is bound to what they create. As one of the interviewed freelancers made the same point by saying "you are never better than the last thing you made", emphasizing the need to perform well every time in order to get rehired, as well as getting recognition for the creative work, nurturing the identity of the freelancers. Where securely employed individuals can rely on being paid for the

time they spend on work or in the workplace, creative freelancers are judged on more tangible components, which means they cannot cut corners.

As an example, we found that PubliCom involves their freelancers to a greater extent than other publishers, making the freelancers question why other organizations within the industry are not offering the same influence. One of the main competitors of the organization has proceeded to invite their most prefered narrators to a workshop for improving their creative process, which the narrators believe is a response to the workshops PubliCom has been hosting. This finding shows that organizations are able to affect the working conditions and thereby experiences within an industry due to the competition of trying to contract the most talented labor.

5.4 Organizations can help develop freelancers' careers in the cultural industries by providing recognition

Recognition for creative work, and the aim to reach celebrity status, are also suggested by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) to be a motivation for individuals to choose to work as creative freelancers. Their argument is supported by our study showing that narrators are striving to earn fame both within the cultural industries, besides the publishing sector, but also the theater and film industry. Organizations in the publishing industry can provide creative freelancers more recognition. For instance, in our case study, the organization is hosting a yearly award show that is streamed online increasing the freelancers' possibility to be recognized by the public. Freelancers view it as an opportunity to expand their creative network both in the publishing industry as well as in other cultural sectors. For instance, PubliCom is affecting the experience of freelancers in a beneficial way, as we found that they feel that their creative contribution is taken more seriously and feel more validated. We therefore support Grugulis and Stoyanova's (2011) argument, that group membership and development of careers are stimulated by creative inclusion and avoiding separated workplaces.

In order to help to contribute to the existing literature on working conditions, we have focused both on the conditions and the experiences of the creative freelancers. Our case shows that they are mainly motivated by their creative calling to tell a story and that they experience PubliCom as a favorable employer. This is not only due to higher wages, but a higher involvement in the creative process compared to other publishers through social gatherings, which is making the freelancers question the working conditions in the publishing industry in general. For example,

there has already been a change in the industry because PubliCom has affected the freelancers' working conditions and experiences more to their preferences, as higher rewards and creative feedback is provided from one organization, others follow in order to contract the most talented workers, creating an upward spiral in the whole industry.

In the flexible labor market, the responsibility of providing fair working conditions and experiences is moved to employing organizations and the ability of freelancers to build leverage to refuse bad offers from organizations, who do not treat freelancers fairly. Our case study shows that organizations need to carry the responsibility to care for freelancers in order to stay competitive, and are able to do that because the individuals who are securely employed in the organization have control over resources and the power to affect the working conditions and experiences of freelancers from the bottom-up. For instance, as PubliCom (Global) does not set out a fixed approach or policies for the organization, we believe that PubliCom's approach is comparable to the concept of *think global, act local*. The individuals inside the organization seem to listen and learn from the wishes of the freelancers they employ, which provides them a competitive advantage and a good image as an employer. Acting locally allows organizations to comply with national laws, culture and stay flexible regarding Human Resources and a changing publishing industry. The growth of the publishing market and the current state of working as a freelancer in the cultural industries seem both the results of globalization and development of technology.

Technology enabled the rise of streaming services like PubliCom's as their product is dependent on broadband cellular internet, powerful computers and digital media files, completely transforming the publishing industry and the way people work within it. Communication via email and the use of digital file transferring has become a new normal, with flexicurity enabling finding assignments online, networking via social media and remote work as transformations in the working lives of many. Moreover, these changes are entangled with increased autonomy, precarity and isolation, exposing the insecurely employed not only to a shift in the way how many individuals work in contemporary societies, but leave an individual's whole life vulnerable to economic forces. Nevertheless, freelancers express optimism and excitement for having engaging jobs which provide meaning for them, which is overshadowing their hardships and increased responsibilities. We believe that autonomy predominantly creates engagement in freelancers' work, further allowing them to choose assignments, refuse employers and artistically express oneself. Autonomy and engagement

appear to be good reasons to follow your passion and pursue your calling, as we believe that most creative freelancers are not willing to get a secure job, as we argue that it could mean sacrificing their creativity and a meaningful profession. However, we conclude in contemporary flexible labor markets with extensive social security programs, proper flexicurity, organizations have a wide range of tools to improve the well-being of the people they employ and they may feel responsible to act humanistically which makes an employer attractive to work for.

5.5   Chapter summary

To round off our discussion, we will summarize four ways organizations can affect the working conditions and experiences of freelancers in the publishing industry. First, precarity can be reduced by rehiring freelancers regularly. These freelancers are motivated to do well, if they experience that they get adequately rewarded for their work. Freelancing is providing individuals with a great amount of autonomy, which is perceived as a benefit, because freelancers use their autonomy to refuse jobs, reject employers and find engaging assignments to work on. However, with this autonomy comes insecurity and instability, which are both perceived as exciting and frustrating, which shows nuance in the precarity debate. While we believe that it is hard to reduce one without the other, freelancers seem very satisfied with their professions. Not only freelancers compete to get assignments but employers compete for freelancers, which means that treating freelancers right is making organizations more competitive and allows them to attract the best freelancers.

The second way organizations can affect freelancers' working conditions and experience is by reducing their isolation. Freelancers express that their jobs are lonely because they often work in isolation from home or from a studio by themselves. Being able to work remotely is seen as a privilege, caused by modern technology, but a major downside is that it causes loneliness and no support structure for working. Freelancers barely meet the people they work with, which causes stagnation in their development. Organizations can affect freelancers by hosting gatherings, which we explored examples in our case. For instance, freelancers appreciate preparation meetings, workshops, award shows and office Christmas receptions. This way they can network, form a community of freelancers or simply talk with others about work. We believe that these social gatherings are often intended to contribute to the products, developing

creative processes and promoting the organization, but being invited is highly valued by creative freelancers.

Including freelancers in the creative process is the third measure to affect the working experience of freelancers. The expectation is that creative freelancers are exclusively hired to make specific components for a product, as a result of rarely being included in the decision-making process. However, we found that creative freelancers get a lot of meaning and satisfaction out of the process and not exclusively of the end-result or financial rewards. Organizations can host workshops where they invite freelancers to develop tools, improve the creative processes and give feedback to each other. We believe that a higher involvement leads to a better working relationship and appreciation towards the employer.

Providing recognition is the last way we found that organizations can affect the freelancers' working conditions and experiences. Creative freelancers are motivated by recognition and the possibility to gain fame, hence award shows are significant events to improve the experiences and enjoy their work. These award shows provide the opportunity to network, tend to boost careers and celebrate the creative products and artistic professions together, which gives freelancers higher status and feelings of appreciation.

Overall, we found that these measures are tailored to the local culture and specific creative sector, which is a result of a bottom-up approach and listening to creative freelancers' needs. We found that creative freelancers that have a larger artistic input to the creative products are prioritized by employers because they are perceived as the most important freelancers to have and to compete for. This competition for the right freelancers results in improving working conditions and experiences for freelancers, creating an upward spiral.

6   Conclusions

The aim of our study was to understand what role organizations have in cultural industries affecting the working conditions and experience of freelancers, as few attempts have been made to research this topic on an organizational level. Therefore, our research aimed to contribute to filling a gap in the literature and answer the research question:

> How does PubliCom affect the working conditions of freelancers in the publishing industry and how do freelancers experience working for PubliCom?

In the process of investigating this research question, we uncovered different ways of how an organization is affecting the working conditions of freelancers in the publishing industry and delved deep into different ways freelancers experience working with PubliCom. A significant finding from our study is that it is the individual employees at PubliCom that are affecting the working conditions and experiences of freelancers specifically, as PubliCom Global has not communicated a specific strategy and stimulates to act locally.

6.1   Main findings

Our study provides the nuance that freelancers experience both precarity and autonomy, and not only one aspect as the current debate is suggesting. While critical researchers believe that being a freelancer in the cultural industries is highly challenging and synonymous with exploitation, this seems to be a response to the optimism of neo-liberalists worshipping unregulated labor markets. We conclude that the experience and working conditions of freelancers lie somewhere in the middle and organizations can both positively and negatively affect these in multiple ways, hence why we argue that precarity and autonomy are two sides of the same coin.

For instance, one major benefit of autonomy is that freelancers can refuse bad job offers if they have a network and experience, forcing publishers to be better employers than other organizations in the industry. Despite this, we conclude that inexperienced narrators are more vulnerable as they do not have that power. We believe that freelancers in the publishing industry experience more personal responsibilities than securely employed workers, as they endure an extensive amount of paperwork and have to save money for parental leave and retirement, like a small business owner. Freelancers feel the pressure to always perform well,

or else are unable to get rehired, while securely employed workers have the luxury of not experiencing this pressure, although a vast amount of the workforce is generally less engaged in work.

Our study highlights that while technological development has enabled freelancers to find work and work remotely, which are seen as privileges, it further strengthened their experienced isolation and loneliness. Current technology makes freelancers disconnected from their employers and co-workers, emphasizing why it is important for employers to host different types of gatherings. In our case study, we found that even though the publisher is hosting such events most of them are exclusively for the freelancers who provide artistic input.

Another fundamental conclusion from our study is that due to the freelancers being motivated by their creative calling of telling a story they are valuing the experiences they have during the creative process of projects, as well as the artistic output. Leading to the two most important factors for freelancers regarding creativity is being included in the creative process and gaining recognition for their work. These two factors, however, are mainly offered to the freelancers who deliver a creative component to the final product. Therefore the remaining freelancers are missing out on developing themselves and progressing their careers.

We conclude that an organization can influence an entire industry by providing better working conditions and experiences for freelancers, as we found that publishers have to copy the measures to remain competitive and attract the best talent. This highlights the need for awareness of the working conditions and experience of freelancers in the cultural industries for future managers and future freelancers, not only to understand the downsides of insecure work and flexicurity policies but to realize that organizations can affect working conditions and working experiences of freelancers positively or negatively. This information can be used to reflect and rethink the role of governments on labor markets, not only regarding working conditions like wages, working hours and benefits, but also regarding isolation, remote work and boundaries between work-life and non-work life.

6.2   Further research

Our findings highlight the nuance and complexity of freelancing in the cultural industries and provided significant depth toward understanding what role organizations have, complementing

existing literature and pointing out shortcomings of previous research. However, our case study is not comprehensive on the topic and we suggest that more qualitative research about the role of organizations in the cultural industries should be conducted, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) have suggested. We agree with Murdock (2005) that it is not easy to interview executives and professionals than to do a study about the consumption of cultural goods, although it will provide valuable insight into creative labor and the unique circumstances of insecure employment in the cultural industries. This is interesting for scholars within organizational studies, as well as for future managers and freelancers because it could provide a more comprehensive knowledge into how organizations operate and the wellbeing of (freelance) workers. Further, it could reveal what future flexibilization of labor markets could mean for workers and the broader society.

For instance, it would be interesting to further investigate the different experiences between inexperienced and experienced freelancers, as our research only scratched the surface regarding their different experiences.

Nevertheless, the scope of our case study was limited to one Danish publisher, while the freelancers' experience might be different outside the Nordic countries. It might be interesting to study the influence of organizations in relation to the experience of freelancers in nations where unions do not play a central role in the labor market, like the United Kingdom or the United States, where there are also smaller social safety nets for workers.

Moreover, we believe that studies can be performed on the topic of remote working and the consequences the COVID-19 pandemic has on the attitudes regarding isolated work and working with separated workplaces. Many secure workers are now also experiencing isolation and loneliness, which could result in a broader understanding of what freelancers are experiencing, potentially leading to a change in how they work with freelancers. On the contrary, the current circumstances could result in an acceleration of adopting remote working practices if employers see mainly benefits or insight into the importance of inclusion.

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