HOW TO MAKE A LIVING AS A FREELANCE DANCER IN THE DUTCH LABOUR MARKET

A qualitative study on the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and on the role of education

Student Name: Alberto Quirico
Student Number: 620815

Supervisor: Dr. Ellen Loots

Master Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

Freelancing, portfolio careers and multi jobholding are nowadays considered commonplace for professional dancers. Despite an increasing amount of studies on the career of performing artists, there is surprisingly little empirical evidence on how freelance contemporary dancers manage their careers and what skills and knowledge are needed to successfully make a living in the performing art labour market. One would expect that studying dance at university would prepare students to become fully-fledged professional dancers. However, studies have shown that there is a mismatch of those skills that the working field requires and those that are taught at higher education institutions (Bridgstock, 2011). By employing a qualitative research method and conducting twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews with freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands, this thesis investigates which entrepreneurial skills freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands need to make a living in the dance labour market and the role of education in acquiring them. The EntreComp framework (Bacigalupo et al., 2016) was used as a guiding conceptual model for this study given that it gave an overview of entrepreneurship competencies and what these entailed. I conclude that being a self-employed artist in the Dutch contemporary dance scene requires six skills: (1) Adopting a protean career orientation, (2) seeking out, using and offering support, (3) coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk, (4) having financial and economic literacy, (5) having promotion and communication skills and (6) combining a diverse artistic practice with freelancing. Findings appear to suggest that many of these entrepreneurial skills can be acquired through experience and by consulting

other people. The latter points out that even though freelancing means being a one-person business, knowledge and skills are acquired through collaborative practices. Dutch universities with dance programmes seem to provide semi-professional experiences especially during the fourth year of studies in which respondents had the possibility of doing internships within the safety net of the university. Students are also prepared for a career of freelancing by being told to focus on their own artistic identities and creation processes. They are also given promotion and communication skills which are however often connected to formal application procedures for more long-term contractual work. Dance studies are indeed often directed at working as employees in dance companies, rather than being a freelance dancer. The study suggests a general need to increase the knowledge around what self-employment is and the implication it has for one's career as well as make artists understand the need to combine their artistic practice with a business practice. Freelance contemporary dancers would therefore be able to make more informed choices prior to and during their careers as well as make improvements to their freelancing life.

KEYWORDS: entrepreneurial skills, employability, arts higher education, cultural entrepreneurship, dance labour market

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1. Introduction

It has been said that "artistic talent…seems not to be enough on its own to guarantee a professional career in the arts" (Thom, 2016, p. 3). Particular skills related to a certain discipline, known in the literature as discipline-specific skills, are necessary to be successful in the chosen career. However, professional artists also need other skills that allow them to compete and make a living in their preferred career (Bridgstock, 2011). This is especially true for self-employed people who, due to unstable income, often hold multiple jobs (Menger, 2006) or choose to adopt a protean career lifestyle (Hall, 2004) and therefore require skills that are transferable and suitable for various types of jobs. This is why arts entrepreneurship skills, that have been defined by Bridgstock (2013) to be those skills that have to do with the application, distribution and sharing of art and creative work, have been deemed necessary to make artists survive economically and be successful in their line of work.

While dancers might acquire knowledge in the field, it would seem logical that higher education institutions (HEIs), the places that precede many careers, would prepare students with the necessary skills, competences and abilities to enter and compete in the dance industry by a.o. developing entrepreneurial skills among students. There is, however, a clear mismatch between the skills that graduates develop during studies and what the reality of a career requires (Bridgstock, 2011). Entrepreneurship skills and related business skills are often not taught at arts HEIs (Bridgstock, 2013; Thom, 2016). It is therefore not a surprise that concepts such as cross-campus entrepreneurship education (CCEE) - "the process of infusing 'Entrepreneurship Skills, Knowledge and Abilities' to promote entrepreneurial behaviour within the non-business disciplines" (Roberts et al., 2014, p. 6) - have been discussed in literature.

Case studies that investigate the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills for students attending *contemporary dance* programmes in arts HEIs remain absent in the literature. Although studies concerning cultural entrepreneurship and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in arts HEIs exist, they often appear to either be general by applying academic theory to multiple art sectors at the same time or be too context-specific. Thom (2016), for instance, investigates the need for entrepreneurial skills to be successful as a *working fine artist* but does not acknowledge the implications for other types of artists. Similarly, Brown (2005) discusses how educational institutions may help entrepreneurs in the performing arts enhance their entrepreneurial skills but does not differentiate between the type of performing art the study's findings can be applied to.

Statistics clearly show that creative professionals such as performing artists are often self-employed in the Netherlands (*Culture Statistics - Cultural Employment*, n.d.), implying a need for arts HEIs to provide entrepreneurship education. To my surprise, however, there has been no research done on entrepreneurship education in the dance sector conducted in the Netherlands with several major arts HEIs, each with one or more contemporary dance programmes, namely Fontys Dance Academy in Tilburg, ArtEZ University of the Arts in Arnhem, Codarts University of the Arts in Rotterdam and the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam.

On top of it all, studies oftentimes exclusively focus on education as the one and only way to prepare people for a career in the creative sector, but surely this is not the only way. It should be taken into consideration that skills might be offered and acquired elsewhere, namely, in extracurricular activities and (entrepreneurship) programs outside of higher education. This debate ultimately comes down to what HEIs are set out to provide to students. This also depends on whether entrepreneurship skills are deemed relevant enough by these institutions in relation to their objectives. While there might be several approaches in attempting to answer the question of where to acquire entrepreneurship expertise to prepare for a working field dominated by self-employment, this study places a particular focus on education as the place of such acquisition.

Entrepreneurial skills for artists to make a living in the arts and to achieve economic success have not yet been clearly identified (Thom, 2016). This study therefore aims to investigate which entrepreneurial skills freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands need to make a living in the dance labour market and the role of education in acquiring them. This implies three interrelated research questions:

(a) What are entrepreneurial skills for freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands?

(b) Where and how are entrepreneurial skills acquired?

(c) What role does education play in acquiring entrepreneurial skills?

With this research, I therefore attempt to fill the gap in literature on the entrepreneurial skills developed by dance graduates in and outside of arts higher education institutions in the Netherlands.

This research is organised in the following way: Chapter two focuses on the existing literature in the field. This includes the nature of artists' work in the cultural and creative industries, ways in which freelance artists prepare themselves for working as a freelancer, what

career management skills and entrepreneurial skills are and the role of education and extracurricular programmes in providing what is necessary to make a living as a freelancer in the dance labour market. Chapter three focuses on the methodology of this study and acknowledges this study as an insider research. Chapter four and five present and discuss the findings and chapter six provides conclusions on the research questions and outlines implications for further research.

2. Literature

2.1. Artists' work nature in the cultural and creative industries

Careers in the cultural and creative industries have various specific sets of characteristics that make the sector different from other sectors. The artist labour market has been known to resemble a network of small firms that trade based on a matching process between employer and worker and from project to project (Menger, 2006). Artists, and especially freelancers, often build portfolio careers in an attempt to mitigate occupational and financial risk (Menger, 1999), in which they take on a variety of different jobs, including non-creative work (Munnelly, 2022).

As to performing artists, Menger (2006) establishes that these workers frequently change between employers, working almost exclusively on a short-term basis. They hereby go through periods of employment as well as unemployment and therefore behave like independent contractors. According to Munnelly (2022), for many visual and performing artists, opting for such a portfolio career is both a choice as well as a necessity, although a majority still prefers it over a full-time job in the arts. Among choreographers and dancers in the Netherlands, multiple jobholding is also very common (Bleichert, 2012).

2.2. Self-employment in the dance field

There appears to be a widespread agreement that self-employment is common in the cultural sector (Bridgstock, 2013; Roberts et al., 2014; Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2017). Indeed, using data from labour force statistics between 2003 and 2015 in the United States of America, Woronkowicz and Noonan (2017) conclude that freelancing among artists is much more common than in other professions. In the Netherlands in 2021, almost half (47%) of all cultural workers were self-employed which was the highest percentage of self-employment among cultural workers in the European Union (*Culture Statistics - Cultural Employment*, n.d.). Even for workers that want to start an artistic profession, choosing self-employment is often the more attractive option and does not, as one would expect, depend on age or work experience (Woronkowicz & Noonan, 2017).

In the Dutch performing arts field of 2019, we also see a larger proportion of the workforce as being self-employed (Statistiek, 2021). Among contemporary dancers, there is empirical evidence suggesting that three out of four workers in the Netherlands are self-employed (Bleichert, 2012). Bowbrowska (2019) theorises that the apparent high number of self-

employed dancing professionals in the Netherlands can be explained by the national budget cut for the subsidised cultural sector by 200 million euros that took place in 2011. She argues that this decrease of subsidies has lowered the number of existing theatre companies, dance companies and production houses, resulting not only in a decline of available job positions and in particular full-time job positions in the dancing field but also in more project-based work and short-term employment. At the same time, the number of arts education institutions with dance programmes in the Netherlands has not lowered following the budget cut, which has consequently led to a disproportionate number of professionally trained dancers in relation to the available jobs on a payroll basis. Based on the presumed surplus of dancers, Bowbrowska (2019) argues that dancers in the Netherlands are consequently often *forced* to consider other types of work, such as freelancing. Having to be self-employed, because there is no choice, can be seen as one explanation for the high number of freelance dancers in the Netherlands. Next to being having no choice in entering the labour market in such ways, workers in the creative sector also choose to be self-employed. Artists often prefer to have personal and creative control and become self-employed for that reason (Banks et al., 2000) and are therefore considered artist entrepreneurs (Brown, 2005).

2.3. Career preparation of freelance artists

Literature seems to suggest that artists are generally insufficiently prepared for their careers. Among the studies that have tried to find an underlying reason for this lack of preparation, a vast amount of attention has been given to arts higher education institutions, which are considered to be the main places of the development and formation of discipline-specific skills and knowledge.

Brown (2005), the Projects Officer of PALATINE, the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Dance, Drama and Music in the UK, reports on an observational study conducted by PALATINE which asked 97 students from various performing arts institutions and courses to reflect upon the relationship between arts higher education and work. The study, similar to Bridgstock's study in 2011, finds that almost four out of five students in the performing arts sector do not feel confident or not very confident to find work as a performer after their graduation. Similarly, Bennett and Bridgstock's (2014) study of the career projections of 58 music and dance students in their first year and upon graduation establishes that graduates

find it difficult to have multiple employment roles, manage their own business and develop technical skills on a constant basis, so to say that they become 'enforced' entrepreneurs. They therefore suggest that students could potentially be better prepared for their lives as artists, if career awareness was to be increased and more work-related experiences such as interviews with professionals, guest lectures and industry based-projects were to be integrated in education programmes to a greater extent.

Bobrowska (2019) argues that it is transferable skills that are crucial for careers which involve job-hopping, transitions within careers or multi-job holding. Some skills are acquired through dance schooling and have been considered especially valuable in the process of making career switches (Bobrowska, 2019). These include creativity, the ability to learn fast, discipline, ability to work in the group, body awareness and presentation skills. However, Bridgstock (2011) argues that, regardless of the type of employment, creative-industries related courses do not seem to prepare students well enough with the skills needed to make a living in the sector. She states that in 2003 in the United Kingdom, there were significant differences in the self-reported skills that creative industry graduates developed during their studies and the skills managers (employers) deemed crucial for employment.

The author finds that up until 2011, higher and vocational education sectors, especially those in the United Kingdom and Australia, have been promoting graduate employability through the development of generic 'key' skills (Bridgstock, 2011). This approach includes the fostering of generic skills that enhance performance such as numeracy, literacy, communication and problem solving which can then be transferred to a variety of job positions and situations (Bridgstock, 2011). Yet, there appears to be little evidence that key skills could be transferred to alternative employment roles and workplace situations (Bridgstock, 2011).

Even then, one must acknowledge the difficulty of predicting the various skill needs of freelance dancers and teaching them. Seeing that people fluidly move from job to job in the creative industries, it is impossible to know beforehand in what employment roles graduates will end up and therefore what skills are needed (Bridgstock, 2011). Moreover, "rapid change in workforce requirements (particularly in digital skills and knowledge) means that skill forecasting will always be inaccurate" (Bridgstock, 2011, p.7). So how can freelance contemporary dancers best be prepared for their careers?

2.4. Career management skills

If self-employment, multi-job holding and career transition continue to prevail in the labour market of contemporary dancers in the Netherlands, it is not necessarily discipline-specific skills and generic skills that need to be changed and adapted to an ever-changing dance labour market. Rather, skills need to be provided that prepare dancers for such career paths. Bennet (2009) writes: "The needs of dance artists are many and varied, and it is extremely rare that dance performance will be the only activity within a dance artist's career" (p. 33). Complementing this, empirical evidence suggests that while it is important to provide discipline-specific and generic skills to creative industry students at arts higher education institutions, university curriculums should concurrently focus on giving them other skills (Bridgstock, 2009; 2011). In doing so, Bridgstock (2011) argues that graduate employability would be promoted.

There are studies that point out that graduates need career management skills, which are the skills needed for intentional career building which allow workers to navigate the labour market and be in charge of their own career building process (Bridgstock, 2009). According to Bridgstock (2009), career management skills encompass *self-management skills* and *career building skills*. The former skills pertain to the ability to appraise and know oneself such as understanding one's abilities, values, interests, aptitudes and having information on how one balances work and life. The latter ones relate to the skills necessary to navigate and advance in the world of work which include (1) having information about one's industry such as knowing about opportunities, obstacles and success factors, (2) strategically establishing personal and professional relationships that could lead to new work, (3) locating employment opportunities and knowing when to take on an opportunity, (4) being able to take decisions and effectively choose among potential work opportunities in relation to projects, role and geography to secure work, and (5) having knowledge of the application procedure and obtaining of work and being able to represent oneself.

It is reasonable to think that freelance contemporary dancers, as artists that are self-employed, need career management skills considering that they are responsible for their own careers development. Providing these skills would allow them to proactively navigate a labour market marked by short-term contracts, multiple jobholding and financial instability and provide them with valuable skills to manage their own career building process. Yet, what individuals

need to be able to make a living as a freelance contemporary dancer also goes beyond career management skills.

2.5. Entrepreneurial skills

Artists working on a freelance basis need to acquire knowledge and skills that are specific to their employment type. Freelancing requires more than know-how of oneself and skills on how to take what opportunities and when, which career management skills seem to entail. Freelancing asks for entrepreneurship skills (Thom, 2016). For example, while Bridgstock (2009) describes that career building skills, as part of career management skills, involve creating social capital by establishing relationships with people through which one could obtain opportunities and resources, she does not specify the skills to entail mobilising these acquired resources, an activity that is essential in turning ideas into action (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). A more holistic view of what entrepreneurial skills freelancers need is presented in EntreComp, a framework which aims to foster the entrepreneurial capacity of European citizens (Bacigalupo et al., 2016).

The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, also known as the EntreComp, was established in 2015 and proposes a shared definition of what entrepreneurship as a competence is with the aim to help European citizens and organisations to develop entrepreneurial capacity (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Within the framework, entrepreneurship is defined as a transversal competence which can, among other things, concern the entering and or reentering of the labour market as an employee or as a self-employed person and the starting up of cultural, social or commercial ventures. There are three interconnected and interrelated areas within EntreComp, namely ‘Ideas and opportunities’, ‘Resources’ and ‘Into action’, which are each subdivided in 5 competences, together forming 15 building blocks of entrepreneurship as a competence. MORE

In his article “Crucial Skills for the Entrepreneurial Success of Fine Artists”, Thom (2016) comes up with seven skills necessary for surviving as a professional self-employed artist. He claims that since permanent employment is rare within the fine art, fine artists need to work on a freelance basis and are consequently required to act as entrepreneurs and equally bound to develop entrepreneurial skills. Having employed a “direct” approach to identify the crucial skills for entrepreneurial *success* and an “indirect” approach to identify the main reasons for

entrepreneurial and small business *failure*, the author attempts to come up with the skills needed for succeeding as well as the ones needed to prevent failure in an artist's career.

The study results in the "working model of the crucial 'five plus two' entrepreneurial skills" (Thom, 2016, p. 14) necessary for financial survival of fine artists in the creative industries. The model consists of five core entrepreneurial skills that are needed for a self-employment career or to create a business including creativity, strategic thinking, opportunity recognition and realisation, networking and leadership, as well as two finance and sales-related skills, namely finance and marketing, that aid in effectively managing a career.

While the entrepreneurial skill set of a freelance contemporary dancer might look different than that of a self-employed fine artist, Thom's model provides a valuable starting point for the purpose of this study, even if it is based on research done in other non-arts and non-cultural sectors and industries. The extensive EntreComp framework, on the other hand, is designed to be utilised as a de facto guide for any project intending to promote entrepreneurial learning. Its objectives include supporting people to manage their own careers, establishing a bridge between the worlds of education and work and developing curricula in formal or informal education where entrepreneurial learning is promoted (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). The conceptual model is furthermore domain neutral which implies that it can be used in any domain and value chain. Considering these points, EntreComp can certainly be a helpful tool in attempting to understand entrepreneurship as a competence within the career of freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands and could furthermore be used to analyse and improve ways to acquire entrepreneurial knowledge and skills in the dance labour market.

2.6. The importance of entrepreneurship education

Entrepreneurial skills are deemed important by many dancers and appear to always be connected to the freelance type of work (Bobrowska, 2019). Although it is not desired nor feasible to teach all required skills during the early stages of dance training, it is nonetheless vital for pre-professional education to expose pupils to the realities of the workplace (Bennett, 2009). Yet, empirical evidence suggests that entrepreneurial skills are often not taught at arts higher education institutions (Bridgstock, 2013; Thom, 2016), despite cross-campus entrepreneurship education being EU policy (Roberts et al., 2014). This contradiction suggests a bigger need to implement entrepreneurship education which is defined as "education which is focused on the

application, sharing or distribution of art, as well as its creation or making" (Bridgstock, 2013, p. 123). There are several ways in which universities can provide this entrepreneurship education to students. The following section highlights several ongoing efforts to promote entrepreneurship education in non-business specific disciplines.

Xiaocheng (2020) has suggested that arts HEIs need to offer employment guidance, provide courses specifically aimed at entrepreneurship and innovation, break down disciplinary barriers as well as actively encourage students to find and seize entrepreneurial opportunities. It is therefore hardly surprising that he, much like other authors, suggests that schools could support the development of higher-quality students by integrating innovation and entrepreneurship education with dance education.

While the notion of the protean career seems to suggest that the individual alone has agency, control and the necessary skills to navigate the work field, such career attitudes *can* (and perhaps should) be externally engendered by certain actors. Bridgstock (2011), for example, suggests that educational institutions can help students to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to manage their own careers by supporting them in developing self-management skills and promoting intrinsic career motivation. One possible approach could be to help students in the process of career identity building by letting students understand what they need and value in their careers, during which they would learn what their chosen careers entail (Bridgstock, 2011). In other words, they would thereby learn to self-manage their careers. The author further finds that a protean career orientation positively affects the graduate outcomes of creative industry students and contributes to higher initial career success of creative industries graduates, therefore enhancing graduate employability in both objective and subjective terms. This goes to show that HEIs can have a substantial role in offering certain non-discipline specific skills to semi-professional individuals to increase graduate employability.

In an aforementioned study, Brown (2005) proposes that for arts higher education institutions to develop entrepreneurial skills and abilities, they could offer business-planning exercises, entrepreneurial summer schools, SME experience and competitions. These findings are based on the PALATINE's PACE project which set out to develop and enhance entrepreneurship in the performing arts in the United Kingdom. Based on this, Brown concludes that students need to experiment, learn by 'doing' and reflect on their actions so that they acquire

experiences. Additionally, the study emphasises that a personal contact between students and mentors would be a successful way to promote entrepreneurship in higher education.

2.7. Extracurricular entrepreneurship programmes

Not only higher education institutions (HEIs) could be able to support entrepreneurial behaviours of graduates. There are, in fact, alternatives. Firstly, organisations that use incubation models, and in particular new generation incubation models, can support and accelerate business start-ups in a certain field by offering guidance, education and mentoring in the form of presentation, discussions, and collaboration activities (Masunah & Milyartini, 2016). Accelerators can thereby, for instance, provide knowledge of the performing arts market in order to facilitate access to it, increase awareness to create high quality productions and motivate people to be entrepreneurs. For example, Masunah and Milyartini implemented an incubation programme in Indonesia with the goal to help entrepreneurs in the creative sector to gain a deeper understanding and new insights of the performing arts industry in terms of global competitiveness. Recognizing that new generation incubation models can also promote entrepreneurship is important because it shows that entrepreneurial skills can be acquired in other ways than education.

Secondly, entrepreneurship skills are increasingly more offered outside of education in entrepreneurship programmes. One such example is the AHK Starterscafé (AHK Start-Up Café) which is an entrepreneurship project in Amsterdam, the Netherlands that helps young entrepreneurs run their business more effectively. This is devised in the form of extra-curricular workshops, held weekly and offered in both English and Dutch, where participants learn to build a portfolio, promote themselves, set rates, do taxes and bookkeeping and apply for funding. As part of their raison d'être, AHK Starterscafé believes that more attention should be given to entrepreneurship education.

Interestingly, AHK Startercafé is offered as an extracurricular program of an art university, namely the Amsterdam University of the Arts and is even run by students and alumni of the Amsterdam Hogeschool voor de Kunsten (AHK), mostly from the Academie voor Theater en Dans (ATD). The offer of such extracurricular programmes that exist next to university studies, which are mostly aimed at young professionals and alumni, raises the question whether they should be made mandatory and be incorporated in education directly, if they are considered

so vital to prepare students to be self-employed. However, students might not always have time and might be depleted of their energies after a long day of physical efforts and therefore choose not to attend these education programmes (SOURCE). Evidently, there could be significant personal costs from the side of the students that would need to invest money, time and energy to attend such extra-curricular entrepreneurship programmes which would hinder them from attending such programmes in the first place.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research methods

A qualitative research strategy was employed for this research. This was to allow for a detailed and intensive analysis of a few dozen people and to fill the gap on clear-cut theory on the entrepreneurial skills needed for freelance contemporary dancers to be active in the Dutch dance labour market and the role of education in acquiring them. In this sense, results will only internally be valid and therefore also exclusively useful for those people in charge of programming at higher arts education institutions in the Netherlands.

This study primarily utilised qualitative data in the form of in-depth interviews in order to get a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the respondents (Bryman, 2012). Employing *semi-structured* interviews further allows researchers to be flexible about the structure and order of questions of an interview guide and to let interviewees add what they find "important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour" (Bryman, 2012, p. 471).

The findings I present are based on primary data and in particular twelve semi-structured interviews conducted with freelance contemporary dancers who have studied and graduated from one of three arts higher education institutions in the Netherlands. The research design was also chosen to inductively let new theories emerge on this topic as well as get a deeper understanding of existing theories. The aim was to answer the research question on what entrepreneurial skills are for freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands and what role education plays in acquiring them.

3.1.1. Data collection and sampling

Interviewees were found by means of both criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Since I am myself a freelance dancer, I first contacted people who met the criteria as described below that I was acquainted with myself. Through these individuals, I got other names, phone numbers and links to the social media profile of people who met those same criteria, thus being able to reach people outside of my own network. All respondents were contacted through the social media platform Instagram and communication took place there or via the multi-platform messaging app WhatsApp. They were subsequently asked about particular characteristics, based on the requirements of the research. Upon meeting the criteria, dancers were asked to have an interview.

Interviewees had to be dance graduates of dance programmes in arts HEIs in the Netherlands that have decided to pursue the path of a self-employed dancer at one point or another in their past life. More specifically, these movement artists had to be self-employed and therefore have a registered business at the Dutch Chamber of Commerce (Kamer van Koophandel) as a 'zelfstandige zonder personeel' (ZZPer) - that is, a freelancer. This was believed to be true once respondents confirmed that they were freelancers.

Moreover, to account for having multiple diverse opinions on the matter of entrepreneurship education, I selected individuals that had attended and graduated from different dance programmes of universities in the Netherlands. The following universities came into question: Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam, ArtEZ University of the Arts in Arnhem, Codarts University of the Arts in Rotterdam and Fontys Dance Academy in Tilburg. All of these schools had multiple (contemporary) dance programs.

Brown's (2005) argues that an analysis of the expectations and opinions of students is crucial for evaluating and developing the quality of educational experiences. I therefore asked freelance contemporary dancers who had graduated between 2015 and 2019 from the said universities to be interviewed. This would allow me to gather information on their past experiences in arts higher educational institution's programmes. However, interviewing more established dancers who completed their study longer ago was necessary, given that it would provide more mature and holistic information on what skills freelance dancers needed in their early or mid-career period. This criteria was favoured in order to avoid having interviewees who encountered complications during their studies that could have resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic. Although it is acknowledged that this period could also have affected dancers during their early careers, one main interest of this study is to investigate the role of higher education for being a possible source for the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. As a result, it was deemed crucial to this research to opt for a study period that was not affected by the pandemic, as opposed to a point of time in respondents careers.

Most interviews were held digitally over Zoom, checking in from home and study places, or in silent coffee shops, so that it was possible to minimise the risk of having interruptions and distractions, ensure the greatest ease of hearing and recording (Powers, 2005) and to accommodate the schedules of the respondents that were based outside of Rotterdam or the Netherlands. Interviews were recorded in an audio-visual format. Ahead of the interview,

interviewees were sent a consent request for participating in research (see Appendix D) to which all respondents agreed to - orally or in written form - before holding the interview.

The seven interviews took place between the 22th of April 2023 and the 5th of June 2023. Five respondents identified as male, six as female and one identified as male body but non-binary. Two had attended the Jazz Musical Dance (JMD) study programme and three the Modern Theatre Dance (MTD) study programme at the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam, three had followed the Dance study programme at Codarts University of the Arts and four had been students of the Dance Artist study programme at the ArtEZ University of the Arts. Respondents were between 26 and 30 years old. It needs to be noted that since 2022, the Jazz Musical Dance programme and the Modern Theatre Dance programmes at the Academy of Theatre and Dance no longer exist.

3.1.2. Data analysis

The interview guide (see Appendix C) used for this research included five sections. First, respondents were asked about some general background traits such as age, gender, level of education, place of residence, international background and ethnicity, main occupation and the type of organisations they (had) worked for as freelancers. The second section included questions about the respondents career paths: How respondents became freelancers, why they had chosen or continued to have chosen freelancing over other types of employment, how they had experienced the freelance type of work in the dance field so far and what other occupations they had had besides dancing, if any. In the subsequent section, questions included in what ways they were managing their own dance career, what skills they thought were necessary to be a freelance dancer, where these were acquired and what their thoughts were of the term ‘entrepreneurship’. The questions in the third section of the interview guide focused on education and asked how the dance study that the dancer had graduated from had prepared him, her or them for the freelance dance career, what specific knowledge and skills they had needed to manage their dance career and did or did not acquire in their dance study, and how practical experiences that they had had during their dance study had helped them in their dance career, including how the possibility of doing internships in your fourth year of studies had influenced their careers. To conclude the interview, respondents were asked if they wanted to add anything else to the interview that they thought could be relevant for me to know. During later interviews, the order of questions altered

slightly. A conscious choice was made to ask the question about what respondents associated with the term ‘entrepreneurship’ only at the end of the interview, so as to check whether the term would emerge naturally in the responses used by freelance dancers.

Special attention has been given to the rhetoric used in the questions. This is because it might be difficult to match academic terms and related concepts to the real-life scenarios of the dancers, meaning that it is possible that their vocabulary might differ from the one used in this thesis so far. This was most evident in the use of the term ‘entrepreneurship’. Oftentimes, dancers seemed more familiar with terms such as ‘management’ and ‘business’ and questions were therefore more broadly asked about the respondents’ career, how they managed it and how they were prepared for it.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. No special attention was given to behaviour or actions of the interviewees. One exception was including the gesture that indicated the use of air-quotes in speech, which I have found important to include since it might show particular attitudes towards certain terms, something that was also being researched as part of this paper. A personally constructed transcription guide (Appendix E) was used to guide the transcription process and largely followed Powers’ (2005) recommendations.

In the coding stage, I conducted a qualitative thematic analysis to analyse the transcribed data of the interviews. Using this method was necessary to first identify and then report on key patterns present within the data. The coding process largely followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) four phases of thematic analysis. I made use of ATLAS.ti as the coding software, facilitating the assigning of codes to data and merging of codes.

The procedure started with reading the transcripts with main theoretical topics in mind and making notes of initial ideas, as suggested by Kuckartz and Mcwhertor (2014). Particularly relevant or interesting text passages were made bold. The next step entailed creating initial codes. Initial codes are short (usually one to four words in length), descriptive labels used for building categories (Strauss and Corbin’s, 1990) which were assigned to phrases within sentences, full sentences or even paragraphs within the datasets. The text units for coding were defined by semantic boundaries, respecting complete thoughts (Kuckartz & Mcwhertor, 2014). Following this phase, codes were clustered and categorised to create categories for the main theoretical themes. Decisions to which category to assign a code to were based on overlaps and resemblances among them. The goal was to systematise and identify dimensions of the main

themes - that is, main categorical topics (Kuckartz & Mcwhertor, 2014). In the subsequent phase, categories were assigned to themes. Creating themes had occurred before reading the transcriptions. This process followed a deductive as well as inductive way of working, meaning that themes emerged from the theoretical framework on one hand and developed from the data on the other. In other words, themes in this research were both "theory-driven" and "data-driven" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 88-89). More specifically, four themes were created based on underlying theories from the literature. These were eventually determined to be (1) adopting a protean career orientation, (2) seeking out, using and offering support, (3) coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk and (4) combining a diverse artistic practice with freelancing.

Other topics were developed inductively from the data by writing memos during the text-reading phase, an approach described by Kuckartz and Mcwhertor (2014). The reason for choosing this combined approach was not only to corroborate *existing* theories on the topic with data on freelance dancers, but also to come up with *new* theories on how these movement artists in the Netherlands are able to acquire entrepreneurial knowledge. The research question served as a theoretical compass all throughout the deductive part of the research and helped in the development of themes and categories. I also employed the concept of theoretical sensitivity (Clarke, 2003), that is, being open to look upon empirical data material by utilising theoretical terms. In the final stage, themes were revised, refined and more generally improved. This was to examine the relationships between the themes and to identify nuances, contrasts and possible contradictions within the different themes, with the aim of increasing the level of sophistication, complexity, and explanatory power (Kuckartz & Mcwhertor, 2014). For example, what started as the skills of being individually driven eventually became "adopting a protean career orientation" as it became evident that respondents displayed a self-directed and self-motivated behaviour.

3.2. Ethical issues

Due to my background as a dancer, I am aware of the fact that my personal connection to the topic and the insider knowledge I have on being a freelance contemporary dancer in the Netherlands could potentially affect my views and findings. Doing a study with the researcher having the same criteria as the analysed group is known as an insider research (Greene, 2014). There is therefore a risk of subjectivity influencing the study. Nevertheless, doing insider research also provides a lot of benefits since it derives from a more knowledgeable point of view

on the study's topic (Chavez, 2008). I can therefore follow along better with specific examples that are being mentioned by the respondents and that are specific to the context of the Dutch freelance dance field than a non-dancer would.

3.3. Limitations

First, it is worth mentioning that similar to Thom's (2016) article, this paper focuses on the entrepreneurial skills from an labour market perspective and does not research the artistic skills that are usually obtained at arts higher education institutions. Nonetheless, it is and has been acknowledged and explained that there are discipline-specific skills, generic skills and other skills that students need before entering the (freelance) dance labour market.

There are certainly issues in thinking of a one-size-fits-all type of solution to prepare individuals to be self-employed contemporary dancers. The notion that learning a specific set of skills and acquiring a certain type of knowledge to be used in institutions and courses is not appropriate. This is because career paths among freelance artists might greatly differ from one other. Most freelancers do not benefit from social security or income regularity which is why many work in multiple jobs that are often not dance-related (Menger, 1999). The unstable nature of work makes others even consider transitioning to other careers altogether (Bobrowska, 2019). Consequently, different dancers require different skills to manage their careers.

One must acknowledge the difficulty of predicting the various skill needs of freelance dancers and teaching them. Seeing that people fluidly move from job to job in the creative industries, it is impossible to know beforehand in what employment roles graduates will end up and therefore what skills are needed (Bridgstock, 2011). Moreover, "rapid change in workforce requirements (particularly in digital skills and knowledge) means that skill forecasting will always be inaccurate" (Bridgstock, 2011, p. 7). Still, this study is valuable on its own in that it might help freelance dancers to become aware of what skills they lack. It can therefore be seen as framework.

Thom (2016) has also pointed out that because there is no agreement on what the most important entrepreneurial skills are, it is difficult to implement entrepreneurship education at art HEIs. However, I argue that there does not need to be consensus on this matter as different HEIs will have distinct educational objectives that are tailored to the local (or national) labour market in the proximity of the HEIs. In this sense, it seems rather wise to look at the unique conditions

present in a certain area, look at what the profession requires in that area and adapt the education accordingly. There is therefore no need for a general one-size-fits all type of model here. Instead, context-specific studies provide more specific information that are more useful to the unique characteristics of a situation.

There is also a risk present of interviewed freelance dancers not remembering what skills were acquired in school, since all respondents graduated a minimum of 4 years ago. This indeed has an effect on the validity of the study, since respondents might remember certain things but forget others. However, interviewing the freelance dancers right after completion of their study would perhaps not be sufficient to properly understand what the dance labour market requires.

4. Findings

The following section presents and interprets the findings in relation to the theory, research question and sub-questions. This is structured as follows: STRUCTURE. Generally, each part consists of the presentation and interpretation of the theoretical themes, supported by the research data. The second part of the research question - that is, what role education plays in acquiring entrepreneurial skills - is also discussed in each part.

4.1. Adopting a protean career orientation

From the interviews, it appeared that adopting Hall's (2004) notion of the protean career orientation played an essential role in being a freelance dancer. In this study, the theoretical theme of adopting a protean career orientation encompassed self-awareness and self-efficacy, motivation and perseverance, staying healthy and taking initiatives.

Self-awareness and self-efficacy is described by Bacigalupo et al. (2016) to be the ability to understand and reflect on one's needs, aspirations and wants at any point in time, determine and evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses and know about one's power to affect events and their outcomes. In respondents' terms, knowledge of one's own (market) value seemed especially important because dancing required a unique and authentic artistic identity which enabled some respondents to make better decisions and secure work. Pamela (female, 29 years of age) noticed:

> And maybe also concretely, is not only about an idea, but you see something—something special in a person, ... something that nobody else has. Something like ... is a detail in the way of being, of moving, of—, which is very special. Yeah, it's very weird. And it's, like, kind of attractive, sometimes. And this is like ... the only reason why sometimes, why you get picked among other people. (female, 29 years of age)

One could even say that this was the need of a unique selling point of a one-person company to bring to the market. This authenticity was also oftentimes reported to be connected to having distinct physical appearances as a dancer. Having unique tattoos or the 'perfect' skin were among those bodily characteristics that determined to have a certain originality. Caroline explained that 'looks' indeed play a crucial role in being selected as a dancer for jobs because it would make someone stand out - a process that in the dance field is also known as type casting.

Motivation and perseverance, on the other hand, related to the ability of being determined, dedicated, ambitious and resilient. Respondents reported requiring an intrinsic drive to realise one's aspirations as a freelancer and knowing that freelancing was one's own choice that carried responsibility with it. Most noticeable was an attitude of determination to keep on going and to 'push' oneself despite challenges. Aaron reports:

> And kind of, like, being really understanding that you're in control of your own growth and development. And I think that's something important. That you need to have this little drive of, like, that you are doing it. So that you need to push yourself, like, nobody else will push you. And it's not, like, it shouldn't also feel, like, a force. It should feel, like, also, you want to do it, like, you want to grow and you want to get better in arts. (male, 26 years of age)

Giulia, a self-employed dancer in an association, further remarked how being a freelancer was a constant reminder for her that she alone had the control over the development of her one-person company. She acknowledged that she was the "only person that makes it or breaks it" (female, 27 years of age). DISPLAYING SEE E'S COMMENT ABOVE According to four respondents, 'hard work' was also vital for surviving as a freelance dancer and several pointed out the need of being determined to keep on trying and dedicated to working long days.

Staying healthy was another aspect of being a protean artist that was frequently talked about in the interviews. Although many agreed that it was vital to ensure one's own health by taking time to rest and staying physically fit, it appeared to be difficult for a lot of people to stay healthy. This was because the nature of working on a freelance basis was often stressful and marked by too much work. This was also where the opposing employment type of being in a dance company was mentioned by one respondent, since she considered working in dance companies to provide dancers with more mental stability than freelancing.

Most respondents furthermore reported that taking initiatives was essential for their careers. Taking the initiative has indeed been identified by Bacigalupo et al. (2016) to be an entrepreneurial competence and sees individuals creating value-added products or services, taking up challenges and executing actions. Much of the data seemed to especially relate to how respondents dealt when encountering obstacles such as lacking knowledge, having to negotiate or being assertive about beliefs on work ethics. It was therefore shared that it was important to obtain business knowledge oneself or to dare to ask questions about work and stand up for

oneself, especially to choreographers. In relation to the former, two respondents even mentioned that they had started looking for information on business knowledge during the Covid-19 pandemic, which appeared to be a trigger for them. Virginia (female, 29 years of age, freelance dancer and maker) explained:

> In the corona period, I did a little course actually ... from the AHK. ... It's called, like, Boost your Career, or something like this. ... Talking about how you can sort of bring yourself to the next step. (female, 29 years of age, freelance dancer and maker)

This quote clearly shows how the respondent took her own initiative to improve her career as both freelance dancer and maker.

One of the major challenges and personal shortcomings proved to be being self-employed in a different country from one's country of origin and having to, for example, learn to do taxes in a Dutch system (which shows resilience). This was commented on not only by three Italian dancers but also by one Dutch respondent. Still, a couple of respondents were motivated to face challenges and liked to have them.

4.2. Seeking out, using and offering support

While adopting a protean career orientation seems to play a crucial part in being a freelance dancer, it would appear evident that relying on support was just as necessary. The theoretical theme of seeking out, using and providing support encompasses learning through experience, mobilising resources, investing in relationships and opportunities and working with others.

The first ability was about learning through experience and regarded the ability to learn through trial and error. Here, people often referred to the fourth year of dance studies in which dance students in the Netherlands were able to do internships. A few respondents noted that they appreciated having had the possibility to do internships in their last year of studies which felt to them like a simulation of the work field. They were therefore able to have semi-professional experiences on what it was like to try and find a job by auditioning, contacting their network or new people to find projects. More specifically, it allowed many respondents (five out of twelve) to have a safety net to which to rely on in their early career and a place to be able to find opportunities. Doing internships was therefore seen as a type of support that helped interviewees in their careers. It was used as an opportunity to learn from, to work within a safe environment

and to establish new relationships from. Next to such internships, the educational institution would facilitate creation processes, as Aaron (male, 26 years of age) noted, therefore providing experiences through which respondents could build relationships.

A second skill related to the mobilisation of resources which Bacigalupo et al. (2016) describe as getting and managing "the material, non-material and digital resources needed to turn ideas into action" (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p.12) and the "competences needed at any stage, including technical, legal, tax and digital competences" (idem), while exploiting both as much as possible. Knowledge about how to manage one's business as being one non-material resource was acquired from a variety of sources such as books, specifically designed business courses, other studies that respondents followed, platform and websites. It also seemed that interviewees were seeking more support for dance pieces they had made (e.g. venues and spaces) and also wanted more knowledge on how to conduct their business activities, but it was not entirely clear as to why these possibilities were not followed up on. One possible factor is that entrepreneurship courses often lacked depth, as Virginia (female, 29 years of age, freelance dancer and maker) remarked. In contrast to this, one respondent (Paula, female, 30 years of age) even mentioned that business skills are not teachable and that they are something one needs to search for. It is possible that this opinion was expressed because she felt that the educational institution had not prepared her sufficiently for being a freelance dancer and she therefore had to acquire the necessary resources to make a living as a dancer by herself.

On top of the aforementioned insufficient preparation through university was furthermore a lack of business knowledge regarding self-employment during one's studies. Most respondents did mention that the university had given them theory classes on the business side of being a dancer but Virginia said how it might have been challenging to acquire the knowledge. She also theorised on the possible underlying problem of this:

> And this was ... like one hour a week within a— a working week of like, I think, eight hours a day of dance classes and dance rehearsals. One hour a week we did coaching, and in that hour,—. Of course, well, I mean, let me let me introduce this hour with one hour finally sitting down with a group of dancers that are rehearsing the whole week is—. I think it's hard to get them into the entrepreneurship space. Because we are tired physically, we're never sitting down in in like chairs, so it's just— it was hard to get our attention as a group. (female, 29 years of age)

In response to how entrepreneurial knowledge could be provided differently, another girl (Caroline, female, 27 years of age) suggested a solution in which students would be required to do the production of one of their creations to learn how to create project plans, make budgets, do taxes and apply for funding and to be graded on it in order for the learning process to be taken seriously.

Third, it appears that all twelve respondents emphasised the importance of making investments in relationships and opportunities and to network. This type of capital was acquired through establishing and maintaining connections with relevant stakeholders (e.g. through online interaction) and by attending various events such as performances, workshops, classes and auditions. The objective of making such investments and to network was the hope of finding new work opportunities, which is why it seemed to be an imperative for freelancers. One of the interviewees who was doing both contemporary dance jobs and commercial dance jobs pointed to how contacting people was just as necessary:

> And just writing [to] people. It's just, like, writing, writing, writing, writing. Especially with commercial stuff, you just write agencies— agencies. But also, like, as a contemporary dancer, ... writing a choreographer, not necessarily just to, like, to get a job, but also, if you're interested in— in a work, just, like, I don't know, even get inspired by just being in their space or getting to know people. (Aaron, male, 26)

This quote also shows that making such investments was not always done by people with the intention to obtain work directly, but was also seen as an opportunity to be inspired or make new acquaintances. He also added that he knew people who did not pass auditions for companies, wrote to those same companies, followed their dance classes and were able to get a job in that way. Other respondents were working in employment roles (e.g. marketeer, dancer for a commercial) that they knew they were able to obtain thanks to such investments. These three examples furthermore go to show that there was a return of investment when dancers would contact people, attend events and generally make sure to be visible in the field, which is why many stressed the importance of doing it. Since networking and investing in relationships and opportunities helped people to obtain new opportunities, this is seen as another support structure to be actively used by people wanting to make a living as a freelance contemporary dancer.

When it came to how education prepared respondents to invest time and resources in building this capital, four dancers agreed that they were able to find work thanks to doing the

said internships during one's study and through a network provided by the university. One respondent furthermore said that the dance study encouraged her to attend events.

The last competence that permitted nearly all respondents to exploit support was the ability to work with others. This entailed collaborating and interacting with business leaders, accountants, business managers, mentors as well as peers, friends, more established and experienced freelance dancers and people that are in the same situation, often with the aim of acquiring knowledge to grow one's business from others of similar kind in the field. Virginia explained:

> I think also in terms of skills .... Your skill to negotiate, your fee. That's definitely something I would always discuss with my peers, with other people that are doing the same work as me. What do you ask for such a gig? How do you negotiate? Is this worth my time, or should I not do it? (female, 29 years of age)

Because of this described need to constantly rely on other sources of information, three respondents expressed their wish to have another person involved in their business such as a manager or a person that would be capable of representing the artist when it came to conflicts. Likewise, Tom (male, 26 years of age, working solely as a freelance contemporary dancer) said that he was jealous of how professional football players were usually supported by multiple coaches who would advise them on what to eat or how to train.

Education institutions had promoted four of the interviewees to work with others in interdisciplinary ways or more generally work in a co-creative way together with the choreographer. The dance studies also offered mentoring schemes, although Virginia and Jack, who mentioned having this type of support, were disappointed by a lack of help from mentors. Moreover, those that had worked with renowned people or organisations indicated that it had had an impact on their freelance life, since it had provided them with a 'good' network or made the start of their career easier.

4.3. Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk

Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk is one the competences of the EntreComp Framework (Bacigalupo et al., 2016) and seems to be quite crucial to the interviewed freelance contemporary dancers. As per Bacigalupo et al. (2016), it involves making decisions when limited information is available and when there is a chance of having unplanned outcomes. The

conceptual framework also describes this competence as the ability to structurally put ideas to the test to diminish any chances of failure and to respond to situations that move quickly in a flexible and rapid way. In this research, it seemed to also imply being flexible, trusting and open to opportunities and (work) experiences which has allowed respondents to handle uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. Flexibility, trust and having an open attitude were about being aware of the dynamic nature of being a freelancer and putting trust in the career process as well as having confidence that things will eventually be solved or go away.

First, according to the interviews, freelancers in the dance field need to be flexible in regards to types and amount of occupations and in terms of time and scheduling. For example, nine respondents had other jobs besides working as a freelance contemporary dancer which included both dance-related or arts-related jobs as well as non-artistic jobs (i.e. being a freelance model, marketeer, producer, waiter, caretaker). Among the interviewees that were able to solely live off of freelance dancing, two still took on jobs that were also more commercial, which would often be paid better (e.g. performing in a commercial for the cognac brand of the singer Usher). These occupations were mostly deemed to be secondary to the profession of dancing and almost always served as an additional financial support to the dancer's career, enabling them to pay rent or cover the costs of other expenses. For a few people, these were also ways to fill up periods of no work. Taking up multiple jobs, however, also had consequences, in that some respondents were also overworked, which in return took a toll on their health, as I elaborated earlier.

Flexibility also concerned the ability to exploit (free) time differently and use it to acquire new information relevant to one’s career (see the example of exploiting the pandemic in sub-section 4.1) or undertake new activities. Sergio (male, 29 years of age, freelance contemporary dancer and performer, sings) for instance, explained that a necessary recovery time following a surgery that he had undergone emanated him to take time to reconnect with a more mature way of being himself and allowed him to train to become a better singer. For Virginia, on the other hand, this skill seemed to already develop during her last year of study, since she decided to work together with her peers and later formed a collective with them because of having no immediate internship opportunities.

Second, for eight of the twelve respondents, being open and curious to have new experiences was seen as indispensable to how they would manage their careers as self-employed

artists. It meant needing to lower any expectations they would have about new work experiences, having to occasionally or continually take on other jobs and work besides dance even if these were not to one's liking and knowing that experiences could also be better or more enjoyable than expected. For example, Mara (female, 26 years of age, working contemporary jobs and commercial jobs) noticed how this was the reason she was able to do many different jobs all over the world: "As I said, like, for now, my experience is more than positive because I see that I can— I am being pulled in a lot of different directions, because I'm available".

Third, trust was a necessary quality to have. This was more generally described by several of the respondents to be the ability to know that one project would lead to another by means of recommendations without any personally initiated and formal application procedures, and that work opportunities would eventually emerge again in times of little to no work, which respondents referred to as 'gaps' in their careers. For Pamela, education also supported her in being able to trust the career progress in that it continued to develop after an internship she had done. For many, trust was linked to acceptance, that is to say accepting that there would not always be work and reassuring oneself that it was 'okay' not to constantly work, even if two respondents noted that they had feared such moments. Interviewees described the process of getting new work opportunities within and outside of the dance field as "it happening", pointing out the more inactive part of managing their careers. Moreover, phrases such as "it's gonna roll" were not unusual and showed up numerous times across the interviews, further highlighting the aspect of dealing with uncertainty in the freelancing career.

The uncertainty, ambiguity and risk also called for skills of organisation, planning, time-management and evaluating as well as prioritising from the side of the freelancer. A quote from the interview with Virginia best depicted this aspect:

> I think you really need some type of, like, an organised agenda to, like, know: 'What is your planning? Can I do this project? Can I fit it in?' Sort of overall managing skills. I think you definitely need them. (female, 29 years of age)

Organisation was especially seen in light of the fact that different aspects of freelance life affected one another and that were therefore interrelated. Attending classes and workshops to train were needed for staying physically fit, which was helpful when doing auditions and those needed to be attended to find work. The earnings from these or other jobs were in turn necessary for respondents to a.o. pay for an accountant and new classes. At the same time, respondents

considered the securing of a venue for one's own performance to be beneficial when applying for funding, but this was often not possible without a starting capital. Organisation skills were therefore required to make a career as a freelance artist. In the words of Jack (male, 27 years of age, founder of an app for facilitating the work of freelance artists), the nature of freelance dancing could therefore be seen as a constantly repeating "cycle". Two respondents claimed that they acquired the ability to organise during university, seeing that the education would ask students to make their own dance pieces and realise the production around it, too.

Three respondents furthermore pointed out that it is important for self-employed dancers to organise one's business according to tasks and roles and to know what responsibilities to take on when:

> So, I think now I— I understand how I function with all these roles I need to have. So I also know when it's the moment to put on the jacket of: 'Okay, I'm now my manager and now I'm gonna negotiate my fees'. And then I drop the jacket and I'm in the studio, and I'm just, like, super fun and— and light, you know. But I know which role I need to take on in a specific moment. (Giulia, female, 27 years of age)

One way of doing this was for people to see themselves as both the employer and the employee, allowing them to do the administrative part of their business, such as making schedules or writing emails as well as being the dancer. Another interviewee who compared dancing to other fields in which there were people that would represent artists mentioned how she also felt the need to be in a representative role of her business to a potential employer besides being the 'artist'. Some respondents also said that they liked being their own 'boss' as it gave them autonomy.

What stood out most among the ability to cope with ambiguity in particular was how freelancers were in need of evaluating and prioritising opportunities. This consisted of making choices and plans in light of a variety of factors that satisfied different needs as a self-employed person. A majority of the respondents (eight of the twelve) directly or indirectly reported that money was not the sole determining factor when seeking out work in the freelancing world, despite it generally being a paid profession. In fact, other things were considered valuable for career development as well. Evaluating and comparing opportunities to choose the best option for oneself ultimately seemed to be determined by their worth or their return on investment, as I also elaborate on in a previous subsection. Some respondents chose to invest in new (unpaid)

opportunities from which they could establish new work relationships or have an enjoyable experience, whereas another respondent chose one project over another due to availability. Choosing to follow-up on certain options also depended on whether the freelancer felt connected to the project's artistic vision and on whether they 'believed' in it or not, or even on whether there was a good working environment in the project. There was also an example in which a respondent let his physical state influence a business choice. He says:

> What I'm not thinking is only in, like, money, or like price in money, but also price in body, ... But I also think, like: 'Hmm. How much time is it really? How much effort is it really? What does it give me in— in— in sense of inspiration? Like what kind of energy does that— do I get from this assignment? (Sergio, male, 29 years of age)

Respondents generally and more broadly seemed to use the following question as their guideline: Do I want to invest in this or not? Paula felt able to make such cost-benefit-analysis by virtue of doing internships in her fourth study year.

For half of the respondents, planning and time-management also played an essential role in their careers and in handling uncertainty and risk. In fact, as a result of evaluating and prioritising certain things over others, people felt the need to plan their days and schedule their months in the short term and plan to do accounting and mobilise resources in the long run. In relation to the latter, Jack, who used to be a freelance dancer, said:

> So, what I find so important with freelancing ... is actually how to manage your career and how to plan for your career. Like, so, where do you get the money? How are you going to invest in yourself? Where are you going to train your skills? Where are you going to get your skills? (Male, 27 years of age)

4.4. Having financial and economic literacy

Entrepreneurial skills among the interviewed freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands furthermore included having finance and sales skills. These included skills related to accounting and being able to create budget plans, estimate earnings and setting pricings, commercialising art and setting prices and more generally mobilising financial resources.

Eight out the twelve interviewees mentioned accounting as an integral part of their freelance career which related to having know-how on how the tax-system in the Netherlands works, filing taxes, knowledge and skills in creating, sending and receiving invoices, and

managing bookkeeping. One third of the dancers had an accountant, though it was acknowledged that working with one was expensive. Others dealt with accounting matters by themselves. Some respondents found it rather difficult to do accounting and file taxes in particular. A few respondents found it very useful for dancers to have bookkeeping skills; However, two of them wished to have had accounting classes during their dance study. Interestingly, those freelancers that emphasised the advantage of being able to do accounting did not report having difficulty with having to do taxes.

Regarding earnings and pricings, almost half of all respondents remarked on the financial instability of being a freelancer and how it is a constant struggle and stress to ensure enough of an income to be able to make a living. Several of the contemporary dancers also highlighted the need for negotiation skills as vital to their career management. Two male respondents, both graduates of the Jazz Musical Dance programme at the Academy of Theatre and Dance, which according to them placed a lot of importance on the individual, also stressed that dancers should be aware of their own commercial and financial value as artists. At the same time, Pamela noted how it was rather difficult to set prices and earning rates as a freelancer. She explained that there are so-called collective labour agreements (the CAO) in the Netherlands that are collective terms of employment usually used between certain employers and employees (Netherlands Enterprise Agency, RVO, 2011) which are seen and quoted by freelancers as guidelines to give quantitative information of minimum wages. However, CAO are just estimates and do not directly apply for freelancers which is why payments often diverge from what freelancers ask for, which puts freelance contemporary dancers in difficult positions when asking for certain amounts.

4.5. Having promotion and communication skills

Another theoretical theme of this study in the labour market of self-employed dancers concerns the skill of promotion and communication. The skills of promotion and communication included being able to promote one's artistic identity in physical as well as digital ways and being able to write and communicate with possible work relations and when applying to stakeholders in acquiring financial resources.

On the one hand, according to Virginia who was also working as a dance choreographer, this skill involved getting seen and letting people know what one was up to. Making a personal CV, creating a website for oneself, filming and editing showreels, posting content such as videos

on social media and going to various events such as auditions, workshops and performances were all things that many respondents deemed important to know how to do when freelancing. Yet, both Aaron and Kees (male, 28 years of age) encountered obstacles when promoting themselves. Aaron said that posting videos on his social media page did not feel representative of himself as a dancer because he was constantly growing and the content therefore being of ephemeral nature, although he had the intention to post more dance videos. Kees, on the other hand, was neither focused on nor giving importance to showing off his dancing at the time of the interview but described having attempted to post daily content for a month in the past but that just made him tired.

When it came to how education prepared them for the skills of promotion and communication, respondents generally agreed that their dance programmes of their education institution provided some elements. Among them was getting information on how to make a CV, skills for creating a showreel, the tools needed to promote one's own performance throughout the university building, but also how to behave and be sure to be visible at auditions. Conversely, few respondents lacked the skills on how to talk about their artistic identities, brand themselves or market themselves.

Communication skills can be seen as complementary to promotion skills and were talked about by half of the interviewees. These skills encompass the ability to contact people who would be able to provide work opportunities via email and to be in constant communication with stakeholders of agreed-upon projects (e.g. over the phone) in order to be transparent about any possible conflicts between them in terms of time. Nonetheless, writing skills in particular were also seen as crucial even though Aaron (Male, 26 years of age, exclusively dancing and performing) disliked the need to speak or write about his art. He considered the necessity to connect art to a societal relevance in funding applications to be vain, especially given the fact that dance is a physical profession that he thought should be practised instead of talked or written about. Six out of 12 respondents stated that writing was provided as a competence during their education which was useful to have when they needed to write project plans for funding applications or residencies.

4.6. Combining a diverse artistic practice with freelancing

The last entrepreneurial skill that became evident in the data was the need of combining a diverse artist practice with being self-employed. This covered freedom, a wish for variety and diversity and a desire for autonomy. In addition, having business and entrepreneurial knowledge empowered dancers to have a stronger artist practice.

While reporting on how the individuals became freelancers and why they continued to choose to be one, every respondent seemed to allude to their personal expectations, needs and wishes of being a diverse artist. In other words, freelancing fitted interviewees' (artistic) personas. Numerous contemporary dancers (six out of twelve) enjoyed the freedom of freelancing which allowed them to choose what to do and how to do it. As Sergio happily expressed: "But I think that's the beautiful thing of freelancing. Is that you can really—. You're free. You can really create your own schedule. Create your own kind of structure. There, yeah. That's a beautiful freedom" (male, 29 years of age). Respondents were also happy to be working on a freelance basis because they disliked the monotony and repetition of contractual employment. Seven interviewees reported liking the diversity that freelancing brought with it, thus, being able to have different (work) experiences and being exposed to a variety of places and people.

Despite these advantages, respondents acknowledged that freelancing brought challenges with it. Self-employment was experienced to be a very dynamic career and work was perceived to be unstable, which implied that one could be very busy one day and unemployed the next. Several respondents also reported struggling with their career, especially when trying to find work. Three respondents stated that freelancing was particularly hard in the beginning of their careers:

> I mean first year definitely very rocky because I did move to the north of the Netherlands in Groningen. ... And I did not know anything about it because nobody prepared me to. So I have to say, they were tough years. I definitely did not really have an understanding of what it meant. (Mara, female, 26 years of age)

Additionally, several respondents also felt that they were able to create their own business and focus on their own artistic practice within a freelancing career, contrary to working for other projects under the direction of choreographers and their artistic vision in which dancers were solely being asked to follow the choreographer's instructions and simply 'execute'.

Focusing on one's own work also helped Virginia to be a freelance choreographer (also known as a freelance dance maker), since the role involved being even more clear about one's artistic work and business identity than being a freelance dancer, as she explained. She expressed how this was also the case for when she had worked as a dancer in interdisciplinary projects:

> Many times I did also projects where I'm— I am the only dancer, within like art projects. ... And then you really need to, like, sort of fit yourself into this project, and it doesn't feel so much—.... Or my experience was that I still sometimes feel like a puppet within projects, let's say. And not so much that I'm also—, that this is my business in a way. (Virginia, female, 29 years of age)

Many responses furthermore suggested the need to be aware of the correlation between being a freelance artist and managing a business. Having knowledge around what a business is and what being an entrepreneur entails as well as being able to use it to conduct business was a notable finding. As such, several respondents found it necessary to identify one's value as an artist (see self-awareness and self-efficacy in subsection 4.1), see the company as a brand that brings value to the dance labour market, have knowledge about laws and rights, persuade and convince people why one was suited for a project, negotiate and have knowledge on fair salaries. Sergio explained that when a dancer understood that being a freelance artist implied being a business, the way in which he or she managed their career changed. He went on to state that it was important to ask the following questions: "Why, you're— you're— you're a different kind of brand? Why is your class different? What is it specifically that you're bringing" (Sergio, male, 29 years of age)? He therefore emphasised the need for originality and identifying one's own (market) value. Pamela, who had also graduated from the Master of Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship in Rotterdam, on the other hand, said that having certain knowledge also gave her more influence and power in certain situations:

> Because when people know that you know, they will not try to be unfair with you. When we talk about stipulating a contract and the amount of money they should give you, they will not— they have no way to find justifications, also. Because they know which justifications they could use in order to say that they cannot pay you so much. So they have a hard time, even if they try to— to— to find false justification, not treat you as it should be. They will encounter problems because of your knowledge. So automatically,

> you'll be treated better. So you will— you— you make yourself worth by knowing. And letting people know that you know. So that's important. (female, 29 years of age)

One question I had asked as part of the interview was what respondents thought of the term entrepreneurship. The answers greatly differed from each other but it appeared as if a majority of the interviewees did not identify with it. On one hand, several respondents struggled (and some failed) to relate to the idea of being a business and an entrepreneur. Among these, two did not identify as entrepreneurs, two thought of the term as being distant from them, two felt that it was 'big' and two had the opinion that it was unfortunate that self-employed artists needed to act as one. On top of that, one third of the interviewees had the wish to exclusively focus on their art. Among them, Aaron explained that he wanted to make art for art's sake instead of thinking about the value it had for society. Another reason for not feeling connected to the term was presented by Caroline who explained that it was a lack of knowledge about what 'entrepreneurship' means that gave her a negative connotation to it:

> I think it's also something, like, if you don't know, if you don't have the skills, and if you don't know what it entails, you don't like it. At least with me, the more I— I have knowledge about something, the more I find it interesting. So it's a bit—. You graduate, and you're forced to be an entrepreneur without you knowing even what it is, which gives it a very negative, and yeah, connotation for me. (female, 27 years of age)

Becoming a freelancer was oftentimes less of a choice and more of a decision that would 'happen' or considered a necessity. Some respondents indicated that it came from the fact that there was mostly or 'only' project-based work on the labour market and no long-term contracts and that there appeared to be a high demand for freelance dancers on the market. For Paula it was a combination of two factors: "So yeah, it — it was both a necessity for me for the person that I am and an observation of what the market, let's say, is requesting" (female, 30 years of age).

Concerning preparation and the role of education in it, a majority felt that education had not prepared them for a freelance dance career or for being an entrepreneur. One explanation that was given for this reasoning was a lack of knowledge about freelancing or entrepreneurship during the studies. Indeed half of the people in the sample said that education was directed at preparing students for employment on the basis of contracts and dance company work, but not for a freelance career. Two interviewees said that this was due to outdated course content which

was provided by older teachers that were not “equipped well enough to teach what the market needs” (Jack, male, 27 years of age). Three respondents who had all attended the Dance Artists study at the ArtEZ University of the Arts, felt that the possibility to become a freelance artist had been communicated during their education. However, two of them wished to have had more clarity in theory classes that could have been given on accounting and freelancing.

5. Discussion

The most notable thing in this study was the amount of variety and diversity among the responses of the interviewees. The pool of freelance contemporary dancers was arguably not a large one, especially if you take into account the ratio of respondents to arts higher education institution's dance programmes in the Netherlands. While I, myself, am not able to compare the amount of variation among respondents in relation to other similar studies, it is nevertheless noteworthy. If future studies were to take bigger samples with the same or comparable criteria as seen in this study, it is probable that there would be more similarities and patterns among respondents. Yet, I could also imagine for there to be even more nuances and context-specific cases of career types and management styles. I argue that this variety might be a result of the unique nature of being a freelancer, which is perhaps even specific to that of the freelance dancer. Not only were dancers opting for the freelance career for a multitude of reasons, but they also did very different jobs (both within and outside the field of dance)[1] and acquired knowledge and know-how relevant to them from a variety of sources.

Whatever the type of freelance life, respondents all implied the importance of having entrepreneurial skills as a self-employed contemporary dancer. First, the Dutch freelance contemporary dancers of this study seemed to *embody Hall's (2004) notion of the protean artist* in that they were managing their career in a self-directed and self-motivated way. Dancing on a freelance basis seemed to require a great deal of self-awareness. This included having a good understanding of one's abilities and strengths, knowing about personal shortcomings and one's value on the market as well as acknowledging that appearances played an important role. This finding is in line with the competence of self-awareness and self-efficacy as established in the EntreComp framework (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). In fact, identifying and being knowledgeable about these facets of a one-person business empowered respondents to use their knowledge to their advantage, while at the same time taking initiative to get support and the necessary resources to attempt to compensate for their insufficiencies. Determination and hard work proved to be crucial to financially survive in the labour market and related to Bacigalupo et al.'s (2016,

[1] The need of diversifying occupations and therefore skills appeared to be one of the few common points among almost all respondents.

p. 12) competence of motivation and perseverance. Staying healthy was also deemed important for one's career, although it was not always cared for by the dancers.

Respondents were often encouraged in their dance studies to focus on their own artistic identity and projects. This supports the idea that the notion of the protean career, as described by Hall (2004), is something that can be facilitated (Bridgstock, 2011), especially by promoting intrinsic career motivations and aid in the development of skills for career self management (Bridgstock, 2011). To Bridgstock's (2011) findings I add that there are other ways in which to engender this notion, for example by encouraging students to have semi-professional work experiences (e.g. internship, intracurricular creation processes). Promoting entrepreneurial skills and abilities can be therefore indeed be engendered by arts higher education institutions that expose their students to experiences that promote a 'learn-by-doing' model, corroborating Brown's study (2005).

The ongoing process of getting to know their strengths and weaknesses, working hard and continuing to 'push' while taking care of one's health and taking initiative, enabled the movement artists to make a living as freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands. Every respondent had graduated before 2019 and had begun freelancing immediately following their graduation which suggests that all but one[2] dancer had been successfully freelancing for a minimum of approximately four years. Together with the findings above this corroborates previous studies which established that having a protean career orientation as an artist increases the chances of being a successful professional artist (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2004).

According to the findings, the second entrepreneurial skill that freelance dancers need to have is about *seeking out, using and offering support*. The first ability, that is, to learn through experience was, as per Bacigalupo et al. (2016), about viewing any effort that could create value as a learning opportunity, taking lessons from both one's own and other people's successes and failures and learning with others. Respondents were able to learn by 'doing', through experience and through trial and error, the latter corresponding to learning from achievements and defeats. Internships in particular were seen as safe, reliable and valuable sources of support since people

[2] This related to Jack (male, 27 years of age) who had previously stopped freelancing to dedicate his time to a new start-up.

were able to acquire semi-professional experiences by doing them, create new opportunities for themselves through them and network within them.

Mobilising resources, which is also known to be a competence which enhances an individual's entrepreneurial capacity (Bacigalupo et al., 2016), was done to obtain knowledge on how to manage one's business. Respondents also thought that such knowledge was not always offered in the best possible way, with respondents pointing out a lack of theoretical depth in business courses and falling short of the ability to focus during business-related theory classes in their dance studies. One idea to counter such issues in arts higher education institutions was to let students take care of the production of a creation process.

Additionally, seeking out support was also done by means of making investments in relationships and opportunities and through networking, since respondents believed that they would gain from such investments in the future. Respondents said that the dance study had also provided them with such investment opportunities and a network.

Working with others proved to be rather important when it came to using support and appeared to primarily be connected to the acquisition of knowledge about how to manage a business by means of asking people in one's direct surroundings for help. These people were oftentimes peers, colleagues or people in a similar career position but also directors and choreographers. This shows that exposure and access to information from professionals is necessary (Masunah & Milyartini, 2016), but that knowledge from peers and other professionals might be just as valuable. Several respondents seemed to long for an additional person to involve in their business activities who could take on a more business-related role. A dance programme would give dancers the competence of working with others by offering a curriculum that included co-creative experiences. Having mentors during one's study did not seem useful.

Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk also proved to be an essential entrepreneurial skill to have as a freelance dancer in the Netherlands. In general, this skill entails making (quick) decisions despite uncertainty, ambiguity, risk and time-constraints and avoiding failure by testing (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Testing did not seem to be present in this study. At the same time, additional importance was given to having flexibility, trust and an open attitude towards any future situations which might arise. Flexibility entailed exploiting time efficiently and taking on multiple jobs for a vast majority of the respondents to financially survive as a freelancer. Multiple jobholding can be connected to Bleichert's (2012) remark on reconsidering

the profession of a choreographer as being a broader occupation given that it mostly includes other types of work, too. Like her, I propose that freelancing in the dance sector can also have a more extensive definition that comprises more than just dancing.

Having an open attitude towards future opportunities and trusting these allowed respondents to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity. The former consisted of lowering expectations towards new experiences and being curious about them instead, whereas the latter related to knowing that work would emerge again, even without one's own constant input. The fact that many of the respondents described situations they found themselves in during their career as 'happening' and 'rolling' also insinuated the necessity to trust the career building process.

Other ways to cope with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk as a freelance contemporary dancer in the Netherlands includes having skills of organisation, planning, time-management and evaluation. Organisation was also deemed to be necessary to set priorities and make strategic decisions. It was evident in the way in which dancers created roles as fragments of their identities to manage tasks. Similarly, upon evaluating and setting priorities for certain opportunities, respondents actively made decisions for reasons other than monetary gain in an attempt to have the said returns on investment. Here, respondents once more exemplified certain entrepreneurial competences as conceptualised in the EntreComp model. These were the competences of vision, valuing ideas and planning and management (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p. 12). In this study, they were interconnected with each other as well as with the competence of coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p. 12).

Financial and economic literacy (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p. 12) also appeared throughout interviews and is deemed an important entrepreneurial skill to develop as a freelance contemporary dancer. In both the EntreComp framework and in the data of this study, this encompassed the ability to calculate costs, plan, implement and assess financial decisions as well as manage financing in order to promote a sustainable business practice (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Interviewees either had accountants that would manage the financing or had developed accounting skills which allowed them to successfully deal with it by themselves.

Having *promotion and communication skills* was one entrepreneurial skill that does not show up in the EntreComp framework. It included being able to write and communicate effectively with potential collaborators and relevant stakeholders, as well as being able to market

one's artistic identity both physically and digitally. While respondents seemed to have been prepared for the aspects of formally applying for work such as making a CV, creating a showreel and standing out at auditions, dancers also faced challenges when it came to publicising content on social media. When it comes to communication skills, it was especially being able to write that turned out to be necessary in the freelancing career which is something that was taught while studying dance.

Lastly, I considered *combining a diverse artistic practice with freelancing* to be a crucial entrepreneurial skill. This ultimately boiled down to being aware what being a freelancer entailed and intentionally choosing this employment type if and when it fitted one's needs and desires as an performing artist. This covered the wish for being free to make any type of choices whenever one wanted to, enjoying a variety and diversity of experiences, people and places as well as being able to fully develop one's own practice without being told what to do. It was also reported to make job-hopping easier and enable one to work in a project-based way, but it could furthermore involve other reasons which are unknown to this study. It also included being aware of the downsides of freelancing: Having a dynamic career, unstable work and having recurring struggles. 'Entrepreneurship' as a term was eleven out of twelve times not brought up by the interviewees with the only exceptions being when it was cited as part of a study programme or course name. This is surprising as being self-employed implies being an entrepreneur.

A great majority of the interviewed artists reported becoming freelancers not because they had actively chosen to but because they had needed to or that it had simply 'happened'. One of the main reasons was that studies prepared dance students for long-term employment and contracts which is usually seen in dance companies. This might suggest a lack of clear-cut theoretical knowledge about freelancing in general in the dance field. Alternatively, this might suggest a need for more comprehensive business knowledge in courses and during classes at dance schools that cover such topics.

Knowing more about all facets that being a one-person business entailed provided more holistic knowledge on what being a worker in the dance field implied. The study also seems to suggest that having theoretical knowledge of the field helps in carrying out freelance-related tasks in the dance industry. It could also be argued that knowing what being a freelancer entailed would also minimise the amount of people who desire another person as part of their business that would undertake more business-related matters. Therefore, being self-employed and having

the knowledge of having a business and choosing to be an artist should not be seen as separate concepts but as being interdependent parts of being a self-employed contemporary dancer.

Out of all competences that are outlined in the EntreComp framework, respondents seemed to especially lack the competence of 'ethical and sustainable thinking' (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p. 12). While some aspects of it were met, such as reflecting upon the outcomes of chosen actions through the aforementioned ability to evaluate possible consequences of an opportunity on one's career (see the point on evaluating and prioritising under subsection 4.3), this competence seemed to be the least represented one by respondents. However, interviewees did not seem to think about the impact of their ideas and actions on the market or on society as much. Even though one could argue that this aspect can be found in project plans where societal relevance often needs to be included, there is also evidence in this study that points to a different reasoning. One of the respondents' wish to solely focus on art without having to think of the value it has for society could explain the less cited external impact. This could indicate that freelance contemporary dancers do not normally think about such aspects of being an entrepreneur by default.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to research what entrepreneurial skills are for freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands and what role education played in acquiring them. Fundamental to this study is the fact freelancing implies being self-employed. This causes artists having to manage and direct a one-person business. Different knowledge and skills are necessary in order to successfully stay active in the job market, among these is the need for entrepreneurial skills. It is important to mention that these skills are not necessarily required to dance better, but rather to act like a successful cultural entrepreneur, regardless of the level of proficiency in dance. Discipline-specific skills and generic skills were therefore not taken into account for this study unless specifically mentioned to be necessary to manage a company, but it is acknowledged that these are, nonetheless, needed to be a professional dancer. A qualitative research method was employed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve freelance Dutch contemporary dancers that have graduated from a Dutch art higher education institution prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis was then employed to analyse the data and come to valid and reliable conclusions through heuristic methods. Findings were then discussed in light of existing literature on the topic. It is now possible to answer the three questions that have been posed throughout this research.

(a) What are entrepreneurial skills for freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands?

Six skills have been identified as necessary for dancers to make a living as a self-employed dancer in the Netherlands. The skill of adopting Hall's (2004) notion of a protean career orientation means that freelance dancers need to have self-awareness and self-efficacy, exploit their strengths and values and take initiatives. They furthermore need to be determined and hard working but must also pay attention to stay healthy, especially when taking into account that dance is a 'physical' career. Where they lack knowledge and skills, performing artists need to seek out, use and in return offer support from and to others. On the one hand, this simply implies to learn by 'doing', while, on the other, it entails mobilising resources such as obtaining knowledge to improve one's business practice. Part of this skill involved making investments in relationships and opportunities and more generally required working with others. Dancing on a freelance basis in the Netherlands appears to be marked by instability, struggles and a dynamic work nature. Coping with the resulting uncertainty, ambiguity and risk within the dancer's career

can be achieved by being flexible to take on different tasks and jobs at different times, trusting that new work opportunities continuously arise and staying open-minded about any (new) experiences. Having uncertainty, ambiguity and risk is also alleviated by means of planning, organisation and the ability to make choices based on the value of opportunities. Financial and economic literacy is seen as no less important, seeing that it helped freelance dancers to sustain their businesses. Having success in the dance labour market is not possible without having promotion and communication skills that enable self-employed performing artists to advertise their value, although it appears that dancers barely uploaded content on social media platforms. Finally, this study shows that freelance contemporary dancers need to have the skill to combine a diverse artistic practice with freelancing. This is essential to let people make informed decisions in regards to their career and in this case concerns the ability to know what ad hoc knowledge and skills self-employment entails, including advantages and disadvantages, and whether it fits with one's needs, aspirations and wants as an artist. Freelance dancers need to develop an understanding of the basics of entrepreneurship, for example by being aware of the competences laid out in the EntreComp framework or better yet, of this study. On top of that, people choosing for this career must have know-how on how to freelance in the dance field in particular, which would allow them to focus on their artistic practice.

(b) Where and how are entrepreneurial skills acquired?

As this study shows, many things that freelance dancers learn can be acquired through experience. This includes learning to be flexible regarding different occupations and time, having an open-attitude and trusting the dynamic nature of being a freelancer as well as being organised, planning ahead and assessing opportunities to be able to cope with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. It furthermore entails speaking up for one's beliefs and values. To have financial and economic literacy, having an accountant seems to be helpful, even though costly.

The second way in which entrepreneurial skills can be acquired is through social channels. For example, dancers can consult experts with business knowledge such as (artistic) directors, choreographers and people employed in funding organisations. Alternatively, they can ask people who are experienced and established as performing artists or who simply might have relevant knowledge. Due to this reliance on others, self-employment in dance could perhaps even

be considered a collaborative practice, even if it is a one-person job. Education also plays a role in the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills as I elaborate below.

(c) What role does education play in acquiring entrepreneurial skills?

It appears that up until 2019 (the last year of graduation among respondents), educational institutions mainly helped contemporary dance students to become freelancers through the possibility of doing an internship during the fourth year of dance studies. In the eyes of the (past) students, this opportunity provided students with the necessary practical experiences to 'begin' their career within the safe and supportive environment of the university. Doing an internship therefore allows students to network and invest in new opportunities that could prove to be valuable to them. It should be, however, noted that internships usually take place outside of arts HEIs which to some extent suggests that the process of acquiring entrepreneurial skills within education occurs exogenously.

Students are, however, also prepared beyond internships during their studies, for example by being encouraged to focus on one's own artistic practice and own creation process and which promotes self-awareness and self-efficacy or by learning to work with other creatives in co-creative projects. Education also provides numerous promotion and communication skills, by teaching students how to create a CV, film a showreel and stand out at auditions, employing them with the skills needed to effectively market themselves and consequently secure new work.

Among the challenges of arts higher educational institutions promoting the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, one of the main factors that seems to hinder students from successfully making a living as a freelance artist is that dance studies seem to be directed at long-term employment and contracts within dance companies. Studies provide theory classes that inadequately prepare students as they lack depth and substance. Knowledge provided by teachers is antiquated and does not meet the demand of the dance labour market. Due to these reasons, I conclude that arts HEIs are limited in how they prepare freelance dancers in their career.

While it would be useful for dancers to know where they would like their career to be headed early on, it remains a question to what extent arts HEIs could provide such preparations. Surely, even if entrepreneurship skills might be crucial to prepare students for self-employment, there are difficulties in having entrepreneurship in non-business related disciplines such as the arts. There continue to be questions left unanswered on this topic. Roberts et al. (2014), for

instance, show that further exploration is required in the process of infusing entrepreneurship within non-business disciplines. This includes whether or not models of entrepreneurship coming from business disciplines should be adapted to non-business related disciplines and whether entrepreneurship can adequately be taught by non-business faculty. The authors also mention that there might be a time lag which is likely to occur between the instruction of entrepreneurship education and its fruition, making it difficult to keep entrepreneurship education connected to the zeitgeist of the labour market.

In conclusion, this study highlights that freelance contemporary dancers in the Netherlands require entrepreneurial skills to be active in the dance labour market. While many findings corroborate findings on arts entrepreneurship in general, this thesis clearly shows its application on dancers. The fact that many artists have little to no propensity in owning a business and often become entrepreneurs out of necessity (Richards, 2005) continues to be true. As a matter of fact, this study shows that performing artists, and more specifically contemporary dancers, often become freelancers out of necessity and not out of choice. I have empirically shown that dancers are in need of entrepreneurial skills and therefore filled a gap in literature on the nature of freelancing in the dance sector in relation to entrepreneurship.

On a policy level, one of the implications is for entrepreneurship and business courses in and outside of education to incorporate more depth and concrete knowledge. Arts HEIs need to make sure to sufficiently prepare future freelance contemporary dancers by making sure that students have enough knowledge and skills regarding self-employment. Moreover, any initiatives that aim to increase the entrepreneurial capacity of freelance dancers in the Netherlands should give special attention to the interconnectedness of having a business and being an artist. Apart from implementing the six entrepreneurial skills as explained in this study, such efforts should further include ways in which to engender more sustainable thinking by making anyone who would like to become a freelance dancer or advance within their career learn how to assess the impact of ideas, entrepreneurial actions on the market and on society.

Further studies could furthermore approach the topic of entrepreneurship education within the dance field from a different and even more extracurricular angle. Rather than inquiring about the experiences of how dance studies have prepared graduates for their careers, which was in part covered in this study, authors could devote their efforts to researching how

extracurricular programmes came into existence and why they are in some cases made available next to studies, such as in the case of AHK Starterscafé.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A. Overview of the anonymous respondents

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Level of education	Place of residence	International background/ ethnicity	Main occupation/ income	Type of organisation they work for
Aaron	26	Male	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Sint-Niklaas, Belgium	Russian, West African	Freelance Contemporary Dancer	Self-employed
Sergio	29	Male	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Dutch, Spanish	Freelance Contemporary Dancer & Performer, Freelance Singer	Self-employed Club, Educational Institution
Virginia	29	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Dutch	Freelance Contemporary Dancer & Maker, Marketeer	Self-employed Dance companies, Dancing institutions
Paula	30	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Dance), Bachelor of Science (Pediatric Nurse)	Vicenza, Italy	Italian	Freelance Contemporary Dancer, Nurse	Self-employed (in association)
Andrea	27	Male body, Non-binary	Bachelor of Arts (Dance), Pre-Master of Arts	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Dutch, Thai	Freelance Contemporary Dancer & Maker	Self-employed
Pamela	29	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Dance), Master of Arts (Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship)	Italy	Italian	Freelance Contemporary Dancer, Freelance Sports Trainer, Restaurant Employee	Self-employed, Air BnB

Caroline	27	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	Dutch	Freelance Contemporary Dancer, Caretaker	Self-employed (in association)
Giulia	27	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	Italian	Freelance Contemporary Dancer & Performer, Freelance Producer, Freelance Model, Restaurant Employee	Self-employed (in association)
Mara	26	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	Italian	Freelance Contemporary Dancer & Performer	Self-employed
Kees	28	Male	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	Dutch	Freelance Contemporary Dancer, Freelance Gym Teacher, Customer Relation employee	Self-employed (for choreographers)
Tom	26	Male	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	Dutch	Freelance Contemporary Dancer	Self-employed (for choreographers, smaller companies)
Jack	27	Male	Bachelor of Arts (Dance)	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Dutch	Program Coordinator, Founder of a tech start-up	Self-employed (for a start-up), for a dance studio

Appendix B. Overview of the collected data

Pseudonym	Dance university & study programme	Graduation year	Date of interview	Duration of interview	Location
Aaron	ATD, JMD	2018	22. April 2023	0h 52min7s	Zoom
Sergio	ATD, JMD	2016	23. April 2023	0h 52min58s	Zoom
Virginia	ATD, MTD	2016	23. April 2023	0h 48min10s	Zoom
Paula	ATD, MTD	2018	26. April 2023	0h 42min34s	Zoom
Andrea	ATD, MTD	2017	29. April 2023	0h 39min43s	Zoom
Pamela	Codarts, Dance	2017	13. May 2023	1h 14min31s	Zoom
Caroline	ArtEZ, Dance Artist	2019	20. May 2023	0h 30min8s	Zoom
Giulia	ArtEZ, Dance Artist	2018	25. May 2023	1h 8min46s	Zoom
Mara	Codarts, Dance	2017	29. May 2023	0h 39min12s	Café (Studio Unfolded)
Kees	Codarts, Dance	2017	1. June 2023	0h 28min35s	Café (Unfiltered)
Tom	ArtEZ, Dance Artist	2019	1. June 2023	0h 32min7s	Zoom
Jack	ArtEZ, Dance Artist	2017	5. June 2023	1h 7min54s	Zoom
			Total Duration	**9h 36min 45s**	

Appendix C. Interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Info

Age:

Gender:

Level of education:

Place of residence:

International background / Ethnicity:

Main Occupation/ Income:

Type of organisation you work for:

Freelancing

1. First of all, **how** did you **become** a freelance dancer? Tell me about your career **journey**.
2. **Why** have you chosen **freelancing** over other types of employment in the dance field?
3. How have you **experienced the freelance type of work** in the dance field?
4. What **other occupations** do you have besides dancing?

Career management

5. In what ways do you **manage your own dance career**?
6. What **skills** do you think are necessary **to be a freelance dancer**?
    a. Where have you **acquired these skills**?
7. What do you **think of the term 'entrepreneurship'**?

Education

8. How has your dance study **prepared** you for your freelance dance career?
9. What **knowledge and skills** that you need to manage your dance career did you acquire in your dance study?
10. How did **practical experiences** that you have had during your dance study that have helped you in your dance career?
    a. How did the **possibility of doing internships** in your fourth year of studies influence your career?

Conclusion

11. Is there **anything you would like to add** that you think could be relevant for me to know?

Appendix D. Informed consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Alberto Quirico
Statensingel 144D, 3039LW Rotterdam, The Netherlands
alberto.quirico@outlook.com
+31 6 36322639

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about the acquisition of career management skills. The purpose of the study is to understand what career self-management skills are in the professional life of dancers and what role education plays in the process of developing them.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to your professional life as a freelance dancer.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape / video recorder for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

I am aware that the possibility of identifying the people who participate in this study may involve risks for the participant's reputation in the dance field and damage or affect social relations with the dance schools they attended. For that reason - unless you prefer to be identified fully (first name, last name, occupation, etc.) - I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study. I will only use pseudonyms to identify participants.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work,

such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take approximately 50 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact - anonymously, if you wish:

Ellen Loots

loots@eshcc.eur.nl

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimise risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Signature

Appendix E. Transcription guide

1. **Spelling:**
    - Use contractions: can't, don't, aren't, isn't, won't, ain't, and so on as heard.
    - Use slang: “gonna” for “going to”, “wanna” for “want to”, “gotta” for “got to”, “‘cause” for “because”.
    - Use yeah, yup, okay, and so on exactly as heard.

2. **Language and dialect:**
    - Transcribe all words verbatim; spell unusual words (those not in the dictionary) as they sound.
    - Use conventional British spellings of all common words.

3. **Punctuation of text:**
    - Use basic punctuation: periods, commas, question marks, em dashes.
    - Do not use colons or semicolons, unless examples or accumulations are provided by the speakers.
    - Use exclamation points for strong reactions.

4. **False starts, broken sentences, repetitions cif words:**
    - Include all false starts, broken sentences, repetitions.
    - Use em dashes between phrases, repetitions (do NOT use ellipses).
    - Use ellipses in square brackets [...] only if speaker falters or seems hesitant.

5. **Filler words**

Example: "You know", "Like", "Obviously” or any phrase or
word used frequently:

- Include all fillers.

6. **Nonverbal sounds:**

Assent and dissent sounds: uhuh [assent]; mhmhm [assent]; unh unh [dissent]

- Include all; Spell as above.

- If necessary, follow each sound by [assent] or [dissent].
- Include overlapping assent/dissent sounds of others, including those of the researcher on a separate line.

Indicate the following nonverbal sounds - uhm, eh, er, oh, ooh, mmm - as follows:

- Do not include these nonverbal sounds.

Indicate other sounds such as laughter, coughs, sighs, and so on as follows:

- Omit laughter; use exclamation points.
- Omit all coughs, sighs, and so on.

7. **Pauses**

Include all brief pauses.

8. **Overlapping speech**

When two or more people speak at the same time

- Transcribe, if you can hear the overlapping words, and indicate speakers
- Start overlapping fragments on separate lines at point of overlap and use curly braces { } at the beginning and end of the overlapping portion. Include names, unless you cannot distinguish speakers. Example:

    Jane: Oh { the way it was then}

    John: {we never knew how it} was then

9. **Unclear or hard to hear words or sections**

If you are uncertain of words/phrases, indicate as follows:

- Place the word(s) in square brackets preceded by a question mark; Example:

    [?justice reigns]

- If you cannot decipher at all after a few tries, spend no more time, and indicate by using square brackets that there are missing words [inaudible words]. When possible, give an approximate number of unclear or hard to hear words/syllables. Examples:
    - [inaudible 2+ words], [3+ syllables unclear], [1+ words unclear]

Alternatively, if you cannot hear the interviewee due to connection issues with the internet, give an approximate number of seconds (indicated by ‘) in which the connection was lost. Examples:

- [connection lost for roughly 5’], [connection lost for roughly 10’]

10. **Foreign language**

Foreign words: The tapes include some words in Dutch.

- Transcribe using *italic* font, followed by the British English translation in brackets [translation].

11. **Researcher's speech**

- Include researcher's introductory instructions.
- Include researcher's comments and conversation.

12. **Other sounds:**

- Note interruptions (phones, people entering the room, other sounds that override speech). by brief description [phone rings] in square brackets.

13. **Expressive aspects**

- Include emphasis if words are emphasized strongly: use underline typeface.
- Add comments such as [angry], [pleased], [sing-song], [flat voice], when you can be certain of interpretation, to indicate them.
- Loud speech: Indicate by capital letters.
- Soft speech: Indicate by inserting [speaks softly].

_____

Typographic symbols

Use the following conventional typographic symbols as indicated:

- Periods .:
    - Use when marking the end of sentences.

- Commas ,:
    - Use for very brief and short pauses (<2 seconds).
    - Use to indicate breaks between segments of a sentence.
- Em dash —:
    - Use after false starts.
    - Use for broken sentences.
    - Use for repetitions.
- Square brackets []:
    - Use when you insert any kind of comment.
    - Use if you have a query; type query in capital letters.
    - Use when you cannot hear words, noting if you can how many words are missing.
    - Use when the internet connection is lost, noting how many seconds it was lost for.
    - Use if you are uncertain about specific word(s) and precede with a question mark [?word(s)].
- Ellipses in square brackets [...]:
    - Used when indicating cut material.
- Question mark ?:
    - Use for questions.
    - Use if you are uncertain about specific word(s) by preceding the word(s) in square brackets.
- Plus sign +:
    - Use only when you are guessing at the number of words you cannot hear: [3+ words unclear].
- Curly braces {}:
    - Use when two or more people are speaking at the same time.

———

Format of transcripts

1. **General page format**

Spacing: 1.5 space

Font: Times New Roman

Type size: 12

Number lines in transcript from the beginning: No.

Place page numbers at: Footer center aligned.

Running heads: Yes. Place running heads at: Header center aligned.

Give speakers' names as follows: Initials of first and last name, followed by a colon.

2. **Text format**

Name (as initials) on left, all speech text in new line under the name. Speech text not independent.

Use paragraphs to break speech, either by content or after a pause.

Use em dash as follows: em dash — with space.

Researcher should specify style for the following:

- Numbers up until twelve are written out in word. Beginning from 13, numbers are written in numbers.
- If speakers mention time, write as commonly seen: 22:15.
- If speakers mentions a common acronym write it as commonly seen:
    - Use: Okay.