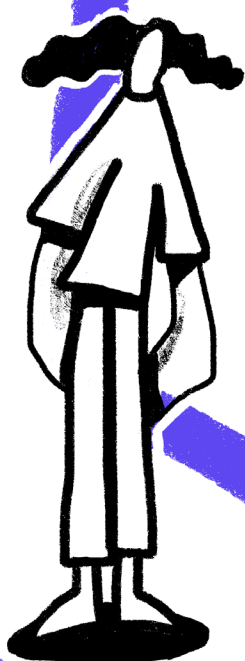


# Business resilience & visual art



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Business resilience  
and visual art:

New directions for  
research in business-  
oriented practice  
for visual artists

June 2021

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# Foreword

Since 2012 SPACE has been delivering business development programmes for visual artists in London to support their resilience. Following the initial COVID-19 crisis, SPACE recognised the need to advocate for artists more than ever, through both communications and research.

Artist freelancers are an under-researched yet vital part of the Creative Industries and the London creative ecosystem. SPACE undertook this research into visual artist freelancers and business resilience to start an ongoing study in this area of interest.

This report identifies a number of key factors for business resilience of visual artist freelancers in London. Strongly suggesting the need for further research and artist support.

The Artist Development team  
SPACE, June 2021

# Executive summary

## Business resilience

Freelancers who work across the spectrum of the creative and cultural economy occupy notoriously precarious labour conditions and positions in the sector. Visual artists are by no means an exception.

‘Business resilience’ has become increasingly important as it speaks to a number of business-oriented factors and practices which help increase survivability and sustainability in sectors such as visual arts. This came to the fore in 2008 during the financial crisis and again in 2020/21 as many sub-sectors which make up the creative and cultural sector suffer the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While resilience is a fuzzy concept, specifically business resilience is understood here in the context of how visual arts freelancers navigate their landscape of work through practice in this highly important sub-sector of the creative and cultural economy.

## Methodology

Using survey data from 325 visual artists in London this research asks what factors increase business resilience for visual arts freelancers. Eleven hypotheses were tested in order to answer the primary research question. These hypotheses were based on survey questions designed to elicit answers to specific areas of working practice for visual artists in London. For the purposes of the analysis business

resilience is synonymous with annual turnover where £0 to £12,500 is considered low; £12,500.00 to £49,999.00 is medium; and anything over £50,000 is high, with anything exceeding £150,000 as extremely high.

## Findings

Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the survey data, the findings show statistically significant correlations in three areas:

- In-house production
- Strength of peer networks
- Collaborative working

This is not to say that no other factors contribute to business resilience. Instead it highlights that these three areas seem particularly salient when discussing increased business resilience as it is measured through annual turnover.

## The implications of the findings

**In-house production** benefits visual arts freelancers more than outsourcing. Business logic would assume that this would be the other way around as outsourcing usually benefits the firms that undertake it. There is an indication here that the particularities of being a visual artist / freelancer necessitates the management of operations in a certain way; namely, where costs might be able to be controlled and production schedules are more flexible.

Keeping things in-house allows for this type of flexibility and agility for this cohort. Further research is needed to determine how and why this is the case.

**Strength of peer networks** speaks to and indicates the benefits of being connected to an ecology of production and consumption networks. Many creative and cultural industries benefit from clustering activities, one of the side effects or spill over effects of clustering is the exposure to formal and informal networks. This benefits all within the cluster in a number of ways but especially through the dissemination and expansion of knowledge and capital. In the case of freelancers this translates into potential increased opportunities for project-based work but with the flexibility to choose which projects to undertake. Further research is needed.

**Collaborative activity** has always been important to artists in the postmodern era. Many art movements emanate from collective action and delivery. What is significant about this finding is how these activities actually increase business resilience capacity and hence survivability for artists. Therefore while there are aesthetic and symbolic advantages to collaboration, monetary advantages have historically been difficult to prove. We can safely say that in the case of visual artists in London, collaboration, far from being something which dilutes financial capital, might in fact be something that increases and facilitates it as it pertains to resilience. Collaborative activities increase flexibility as they allow projects to be influenced in a number of ways and through a number of actors.

Two main considerations can be drawn from these findings:

## Ecology

All three hypotheses can be argued to be related to each other. This is because they reiterate the importance of an ecology perspective that has been highlighted by scholars such as John Holden (2015) as well as Jon Dovey et al. (2016). This connects to, and extends other perspectives in the sociology of art such as the importance of the 'art world' (Becker, 2008) and the production of culture perspective (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Fundamentally visual artists, like other artists, benefit in a number of ways from being part of a networked community, ecology and ecosystem.

## Flexibility

While Holden (2015) argues that ecologies of culture should be understood in non-monetary ways and thus supported as such, this report states while this is true it does not detract from the fact that these networked ecologies do draw some financial benefits from this construct – which can translate into business resilience and therefore be important to economic sustainability, survivability and viability. It does so by supporting flexibility of business-related practices. Flexibility and by extension agility might be argued to be a key to business resilience for visual artists who (in the case of this report) are not understood as firms but freelancers.

## Conclusions

These findings suggest that increasing support for those organisations who facilitate or are important to creative and cultural ecologies might be a way to strengthen artistic practice and make the sector more resilient, especially in visual arts. More research is needed to investigate these areas further.

# Introduction

Creative and cultural workers have become an integral part of the UK economy and are made up of a number of different and often conjoining organisational types including SMEs, micro-enterprises, freelancers and more. Freelancers and small micro-organisations make up the bulk of workers in the creative and cultural sector. Out of these, and as the COVID-19 pandemic is beginning to show, freelancers are in the most precarious position with respect to their medium and long term economic survivability and viability (Virani and Blackwood, In Press). This is especially true for those freelancers who work full-time and do not partake in portfolio careerism where they might have to hold down part-time work due to the intermittency of project-based work. This is worrying given that freelancers are viewed by many as the life blood of the sector (Easton and Cauldwell – French, 2017). As recent work shows they play an important role in sustaining the wider creative and cultural sector in all sub-sectors ranging from arts and crafts to advertising and marketing to games and app development (Easton and Cauldwell – French, 2017).

Surprisingly, relatively few studies exist that ask what resilience looks like for freelancers and this is especially true for visual artists; who are the main focus of this study. This research asks what factors increase business resilience for visual arts freelancers. Specifically this research tests eleven hypotheses in order to answer the primary research question. It draws on survey data taken from 325 visual artists in London. The survey asks questions specifically about business practice which are the variables associated with measuring resilience in this work.

## 1.0 Literature

### 1.1 The instability of the creative and cultural sector

#### Organisational types

The spectrum of organisational types in the creative sector includes, at one extreme end, multi-national corporations and large cultural institutions and at the other are companies working for themselves such as freelancers, small arts and cultural organisations, and small micro-businesses (businesses between 1 and 10 employees) which are the bulk of the sector (Pratt and Virani, 2015). This characteristic of the sector is unusual in that the persons / organisations working for themselves are not in a standard employment relation (Gill and Pratt 2008) but receive income on the basis of a share of intellectual property (IP) rights and potential copyright earnings (Pratt and Virani, 2015). This increases precarity and instability as the foundations of employment are essentially placing much of the risk on the artist (discussed in more detail in the next section).

#### Project-based work

Another peculiar characteristic is that the creative and cultural sector tends to be organised on the basis of projects. Projects can last as little as a few weeks, or as much as a year or longer. Teams made up to work on these projects are either drawn from within an organisation, or more commonly from freelancers (Grabher 2002a; Grabher 2002b; Pratt 2006). Organising projects, especially large projects such as those associated with undertaking the



creation of big budget films etc., contributes to an excess of organisational births and deaths which can also be viewed as a marker of the sector's agility (Pratt and Virani, 2015). What is for certain is that project-based work does not provide financial stability for creative and cultural workers in the long term unless sales and subsequent profits are large – and even then long term stability is not guaranteed. Therefore this particular characteristic also contributes to the precariousness of the sector due to the high levels of risk for workers.

### Unpredictability of the market

Another peculiarity is that most cultural producers are organised in one way or another to produce a portfolio of products (Pratt and Virani, 2015). They are all aimed at higher markets but how they sell is unpredictable – especially now with the advent of different types of digital markets and the use of technology to certify ownership. However there exists a desire, especially by large multi-nationals, to shape markets and consumption patterns through information or market domination, but this is not absolute and again is highly unpredictable (Pratt and Virani, 2015) again contributing to the uncertainty of labour dynamics and work.

### Value in creation

Finally, one of the challenges of the sector is that they deal with what can be seen as 'value in creation' (Pratt and Virani, 2015). The value of products is context dependent and relies on a number of value makers, opinion formers and gatekeepers – this also contributes to the sector's precariousness for its workers as they essentially create products with aesthetic and symbolic value as opposed to

utilitarian value. In the case of visual artists (and in a perfect world) copyright and IP exists to protect and provide an identity to a 'cultural product'; whether it is a photograph, painting or other piece of visual art. As a result the sector at large is reliant on a shifting network of 'intermediaries' who link large and small essentially finding buyers and sellers, where the product is not demarcated by price (although price and markets play a role) but rather through 'quality' and the meaning and symbolism imbued within the product (O'Connor, 1998; O'Connor, 2000; Banks et al. 2000).

Cultural products may be 'better' than others, but 'fail' to gain an audience or appreciation (Pratt and Virani, 2015). This is why such an important part of the work in the creative industries is about reputation, critical reception, and appreciation and why there seems to be so many actors occupying a middle space between the 'product' / 'creation' and the 'market' or 'audience'. All cultural producers are aware of the need to make and build audiences and markets, and in the end must navigate the complexities associated with this. These fare in different ways depending on organisational structures, and for freelancers in particular these waters are particularly treacherous due to the non-existence of any safety nets.

Working with cultural products that are prone to such value shifts makes creative and cultural work almost the antithesis of stability since stable markets are elusive. It is a high-risk game, especially for freelancers and those at an early stage in their career, which means that it needs to be managed as such.

## 1.2 Freelancing

### HMRC definition

Mould et al. (2014) examine what it means to be a freelancer in the UK. There are no set definitions but for work purposes the UK government, through HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs), considers an individual to be freelance if they pass the IR35 test (Mould et al. 2014). IR35 forms are essentially anti-avoidance tax legislation designed to tax 'disguised' employment at a rate similar to employment – they are crude but necessary from a tax collection perspective. In this context, disguised employment means work that is paid for through an intermediary. If there is no apparent difference in contracts between an individual who is employed by a company regularly and someone who is contracted through an intermediary, then they are in breach of IR35 which means their tax situation needs to be addressed from a 'being employed by a company' perspective (Mould et al. 2014).

### Freelancers and sole traders

For tax purposes most freelancers are legally classed as sole traders or in a sole proprietorship which is a type of enterprise owned and run by one person and in which there is no legal distinction between the owner and the business entity. Despite the increasingly widespread reference to freelancers within the academic and policy literature in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the UK creative and cultural sector, the concept still remains somewhat vague. Mould et al. (2014, p: 2438) provide a definition; they describe a freelancer 'as an individual who works on a contractual or temporary basis offering their skills,

knowledge and/or expertise to others (people, firms or governments) looking to outsource (and/or add value to) a particular labour'.

### A neoliberalist construct

There are two contrasting views on how freelancers are affected by as well as affect the larger economy. One school of thought views them as an exemplar of an enterprise society (Storey et al. 2005). Some argue that corporate control of freelancers is non-existent and hence they personify talent, acumen, and agility (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006). Another school of thought views them as having less control and essentially being driven to take on as many projects as they can to make ends meet as opposed to having the autonomy to choose according to their capacity (Faulkner, 1983; Oakley, 2014). As a result freelance work is difficult to sustain (Mitchell, 2005) and freelancers suffer from high levels of burnout (Shevchuk et al. 2019).

From a different angle – some scholars have argued that freelancers can be a disrupting force to steady and stable employment within organisations because they undercut costs required for in-house labour (Stanworth and Stanworth, 1997). This is an interesting angle because it essentially blames freelancers for instability in labour constructs for the economy at large. According to this line of thinking freelancing benefits neoliberalist economic policies by giving rise to a workforce that is underpinned by precarity for workers but that benefits corporations (Merkel, 2019). This is because as large companies seek to outsource their work as part of cost cutting strategies they flood the market with work that can essentially be bid for – and while value counts, work might easily go to those freelancers who will do

the work for the cheapest price. Freelancing facilitates the outsourcing of work by corporations who seek to increase their profits by reducing their overheads (a reduction in the structure that underpins vertical integration) and becomes a 'race to the bottom of the barrel'. The creative and cultural sector has been seen by many as the 'canary in the coalmine' with regards to these dynamics, and we now see this type of outsourcing happening across the wider economy especially in economies heavily reliant on services and knowledge – which describes a large part of the UK economy.

### Artist freelancers

The reality is that while freelance labour is vital to the creative and cultural sector because of the peculiarities which underpin the sector, it comes at a cost to the worker as they race to accrue multiple projects for a price deemed acceptable by the market (the client) which results in financial instability; and an unstable work environment underpinned by neoliberalist economic policy. In the particular case of visual artists, who are mostly freelancers, research around how they are able to sustain their business practice (understood in the broadest sense) and through their organisational approach is lacking. Moreover how this is connected to resilience is understudied.

### 1.3 Visual artists and arts entrepreneurship

Visual artists encompass a number of artistic sub-fields such as: painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, installation art, ceramics, digital, photography, video, filmmaking, design and crafts.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report 'resilience' is understood through a business and

practice-oriented lens closely connected to the growing field of arts entrepreneurship.

### Towards an economic value

A number of scholars view arts entrepreneurship as a relatively recent phenomenon where changes in the larger economy between 2003 and 2013 affected how the industry / activity traditionally funded and financed itself (Chang and Wyszomirski, 2015). According to Chang and Wyszomirski (2015 p: 13), four shifts occurred in the aforementioned timespan coalescing and resulting in arts entrepreneurship as it exists now. First, cultural philanthropy had been negatively affected through economic disruptions during the decade resulting in a lack of funds; second, demographic shifts meant that marketing needed to adjust in order to focus on younger, more diverse and international consumers; third, technology and the rise of social media transformed the ways in which arts marketing traditionally works; fourth, the creative industries as a concept grew and reframed artistic and creative endeavour towards economic value hence affecting policy. This last point is by far one of the most important because it highlights a shift towards global market forces (Rindzevičiūtė et al. 2016).

### Artists as businesses

Interestingly as a result, policy began to put pressure on the arts to fund themselves as opposed to relying on the public purse, hence exposing the sector to market forces and simultaneously increasing precarity because now artists must be business people as well. All of this has meant that unemployment and / or underemployment remains high even though arts graduates from universities continue to increase

year on year (White, 2015). Kate Oakley (2014) argues that entrepreneurship by artists might in actuality be ‘forced’, as a way to deal with the types of precarious working conditions and lack of stability that the sector has become accustomed to as mentioned earlier.

### Challenges of visual artists

In light of all of this artists, including visual artists, face a number of direct challenges to their internal working practice that are unique to their sector such as: The difficulty in anticipating the demand and market value of creation; the difficulty in determining quality / uniqueness of their skills and talent; the impact of digitisation on their work; lack of financial resources; lack of business acumen and education; lack of confidence and non-financial support (Antunes, 2017 p:05). These specific challenges can be understood as internal and specific to the practice of being an arts entrepreneur which if addressed in a meaningful way might increase the capability to be resilient in the face of such neoliberal market forces; resilience however, is a fuzzy concept.

## 1.4 Business resilience and flexibility

### Resilience as a policy keyword

Gupta and Gupta (2019) point out instead of a definition, Arts Council England put forward ‘resilience’ alongside ‘sustainability’ as a policy keyword. It is essentially understood in two ways: First, as financial management policy directly resulting from the economic crisis of 2008 and subsequent austerity measures; and second, as

something that needs to connect to current challenges such as climate change or social inclusion. Thus as a result ‘resilience’ has become instrumentalised and embedded in public policy in order to further agendas around sustainability beyond a reliance on public funding – a mechanism enabling the neoliberal hamster wheel but also now placing societal agendas on the shoulders of artists. This agenda, it can be argued, has had a profound impact on how we view the ‘utilisation’ of public monies to support the arts. In this way resilience, as it is supported through policy, has a particular political construct which implies a move toward self-sustainability and the market – a quintessentially neoliberal approach. This can result in successful business models but, as we have just witnessed with the COVID-19 pandemic, it can also result in an over reliance on a market structure built on unstable foundations which paradoxically reduces resilience.

### Artists’ resilience

A definition of resilience as it applies to the creative and cultural sector is not clear except to say that it takes a measure of business resilience to be able to work in the sector in the first place given all of the challenges; and this is before you take into account any external shocks that might affect the wider economy such as the recent pandemic or the 2008 financial crash. What is for sure is that business resilience in this context is closely tied to the practice of being a visual artist which includes a manner of different business and non-business related activities and practices. Siddens et al. (2016) argues that with consideration of such artist vulnerabilities there needs to be more explicit understandings of the types of skills artists need in order to navigate the current funding and financing landscape.

Surprisingly there is a limited body of work that specifically explores the concept of resilience as applied to artists, and further, this relatively recent research tends to focus on the performing arts.<sup>2</sup>

### Resilience as a mode of adaptation

Interestingly Pratt (2015) problematizes the issues identified here by addressing the vagueness of the resilience concept as it applies to the creative and cultural economy. As a notion mirrored in this report, Pratt views resilience as a mode of adaptation which enables the creative and cultural economy to thrive especially in local settings. Localism here can be measured in a number of ways either by scale or by product or process. The point is that through mechanisms of cultural production that are facilitated locally resilience becomes a natural non-economic as well as economic outcome as cultural producers tackle systemic problems associated with the sector and by extension the neoliberalist system which frames and underpins it. In this context the notion of 'flexibility' is used as a marker of resilience as it enables agility and autonomy within the sector.

Given this useful approach, the next obvious question is how one measures flexibility? Subsequently how do we identify resilience in this context? These are large questions which cannot be answered here, however we can make a start.

For the purpose of this report, resilience is being understood as 'business resilience' where the focus aims to articulate specific business-oriented practices as they are associated with being a visual artist. Practices like outsourcing, in-house production, network building, client management, branding, financial management and more are all critical

facets of what it means to be running a 'business' in the visual arts sector. Therefore these attributes, and more, have been filtered through a survey of visual artists and tested through eleven hypotheses in order to examine what resilience as a mode of adaptation looks like.

## 2.0 Methods

This research uses quantitative methods through a closed-ended survey that has been filled out by 636 visual artists in London. This number was reduced to 325 usable responses as will be described later. The survey questions allow descriptive statistical analysis where applicable and inferential analysis of eleven hypotheses, based on challenges associated with arts entrepreneurship but also with respect to the specific attributes of running a visual arts oriented business as a freelancer detailed in the next section. The primary research question is:

**What factors (business-oriented practices) increase business resilience for visual arts freelancers?**

Resilience in this research is identified as 'business resilience' seeing as the core concern here is about organisational practice. The main variable being used here to demarcate business resilience is identified in the survey through annual turnover. This variable is our dependent variable which allows us to test hypotheses against other independent variables.

While turnover is not the only measure for business resilience it does provide a concrete measure and has been used in this way before (see: Roberts, 2021).

## Turnover

The data for annual turnover is normally distributed and the average amount (mean) is £16,122; Most artist freelancers' turnover is between £5,000 and £19,999 per year (See Figure 2 in Appendix 2) which falls under the current London Living Wage rate. It should be noted that these are gross figures and don't take into account costs, suggesting that artist freelancers are on even lower net taxable incomes than these values.

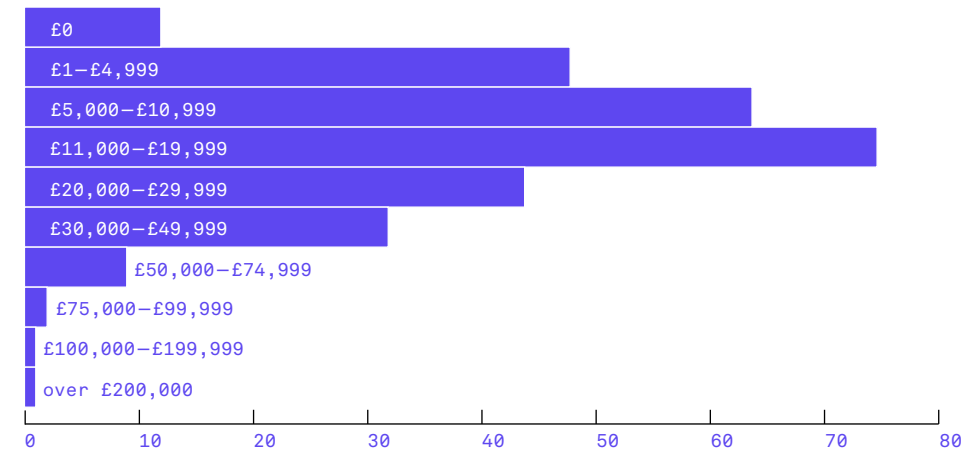
In order to understand how this speaks to business resilience we looked at taxable net income in London and identified from £0 to £12,500 as low; £12,500 to £49,999 as medium; and anything over £50,000 as high, with anything exceeding £150,000 extremely high. This is in alignment with current tax thresholds by HMRC – see Table 1 below.

Looking at the numbers it can be assumed that the majority of artists are on a low taxable income. This research uses turnover as the main variable to demarcate business resilience but additional investigation is needed to explore artist freelancers' taxable net income and how that correlates with their ways to operate.

Table 1: HMRC tax bands 2021. Source: HMRC

Band	Taxable income	Tax rate
No tax	£0–12,499	0%
Basic rate	£12,500–£50,000*	20%
Higher rate	£50,000–£150,000*	40%
Additional rate	over £150,000*	45%

Table 2: Annual Turnover (2016-2020)



## Full-time vs Part-time

Importantly the problem of full-time work versus part-time work in the arts sector is very much intertwined with the peculiarities of the creative and cultural sector. In most cases, especially at the early stages, most freelancing visual artists are part-time within a portfolio career where they might be working outside of the sector or for another organisation. This being said this research is concerned with the overall viability of working in the sector as a full-time (over 30 hours a week) visual artist freelancer in order to gauge what business resilience looks like.

## The sample

In light of this the sample of 636 was controlled for part-time workers thereby only focussing on full-time freelancers resulting in the sample being brought down to 325 usable survey respondents. According to DCMS (2017) figures there are approximately 56,000 self-employed artists in the UK.



According to the ONS (2021), as of January 2020, in London that figure is approximately 13,000. This means that the sample needed to make the research representative of the sector in London at a 95% confidence level and with 6% margin of error is 262; therefore the sample of 325 is viable. Lastly the survey examined those visual artists who are registered as sole traders and hence freelancers.

### The hypotheses

The hypotheses can be understood as a portfolio of business-oriented practices that indicate readiness and benefit visual artists and therefore contribute to resilience. They have been developed through the survey questions which were carefully put together through experienced practitioners in the field. The questions were formulated by the Artist Development team at SPACE, London.

#### 2.1 Hypotheses tested using inferential statistical analysis

The hypotheses being tested cover four important areas of visual arts oriented business practice: **Management, operations, skills and knowledge, networks.**

Management is covered by hypothesis 7; operations is covered by hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 6, 10; skills and knowledge is covered by hypotheses 8, 9, 11; and networks is covered by hypotheses 4, 5.

- 01 Producing products in-house does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 02 Increasing promotional activities does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 03 Having access to affordable workspace does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 04 Having access to a strong peer network does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 05 Working in collaboration does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 06 Outsourcing does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 07 Financial management does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 08 Web presence and social media does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 09 Sales and negotiation skills does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 10 Branding and profile development does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.
- 11 Knowledge of copyright and legal matters does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.



## 3.0 Findings and analysis

### 3.1 Descriptive statistics – profile of the respondents

#### **Gender**

The majority of respondents are female – see Figure 3 in Appendix 2. This correlates with ONS data which shows that as of December 2021 7000 artists in London are female whereas 6100 are male. However the data here is skewed towards females slightly more than the average generated through the ONS database. 4% of respondents indicated no majority when it comes to gender.

#### **Disabled-led and person with Dyslexia-led**

The majority of respondents were not disabled and did not have dyslexia – see Figures 4 and 5 in Appendix 2. This being said collecting more data on groups not usually represented is needed as comparable data is difficult to find. As the creative sector has been seen to be notoriously non-inclusive in a number of areas these types of figures must be collected and analysed further in order to test hypotheses about the state of inclusion for disabled people and people with dyslexia across the sector. Moreover different types of disabilities need to be addressed.

### BAME-led<sup>3</sup>

15% of respondents are from a Black and / or Minority Ethnic background. Statistics now show that the UK is becoming more diverse at work with an increase of 12.5% in BAME creative workers (Easton, 2015). This being said, and once all data and regions are weighted to take into consideration concentrations of BAME workers regionally, a more representative number should be around 17.8% (Easton, 2015). Moreover while visual artists only make up a fraction of this, the numbers are still encouraging but much more work needs to be done.

### Longevity (Years on operation)

Most survey respondents have been in operation for between 3 – 6 years while a sizable number of 25.5% have been in operation for between 6 – 10 years. This suggests a relatively established survey group.

## 3.2 Correlation analysis – hypotheses testing

### Hypothesis 01

Producing products in-house does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

There is an inverse statistically significant correlation. This means that producing products in-house does have a statistically significant correlation with turnover. While it shows an inverse relationship, this makes sense given the question design which asks how important in-house production needs are where the highest score (10) indicated the most need and the lowest (0) the least need – this

assumes that those respondents who replied with lower numbers already had their in-house production requirements met. Thus the lower the need for in-house production the higher the turnover. Responses here were normally distributed – see Figure 7 in Appendix 2. In this case the null hypothesis can be rejected.

### Hypothesis 02

Increasing promotional activities does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between turnover and promotional activities. Importantly this is not to say that promotional activities do not matter. In this case promotional activities do not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as demarcated by turnover. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

### Hypothesis 03

Having access to affordable workspace does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between turnover and affordable workspace. Clearly affordable workspace is vital to the arts and creative sector in London, however in this case it does not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as demarcated by turnover. This highlights that resilience is a complex concept that goes beyond turnover. Further research is required. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

#### Hypothesis 04

Having access to a strong peer network does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

There is a statistically significant relationship between turnover and connection to peer network. This is not surprising given the importance of networks for freelancers. It is not insignificant that peer networks elevate themselves to even higher importance when questions of resilience are discussed. Responses were normally distributed — see Figure 8 in Appendix 2. The null hypothesis can be rejected.

#### Hypothesis 05

Working in collaboration does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

There is an inverse statistically significant correlation between turnover and working in collaboration. Given how the question is framed in the survey this means that higher turnover has a relationship to working in collaboration. Responses were normally distributed — Figure 9 in Appendix 2. The null hypothesis can be rejected.

#### Hypothesis 06

Outsourcing does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between turnover and outsourcing activities. Importantly this is not to say that outsourcing activities do not matter. In this case these activities do not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as

demarcated by turnover. This result is also perhaps affected by the sample who are freelancers registered as sole traders. While sub-contracting is an important part of work for freelancers, in the case of visual arts it is difficult to outsource and sub-contract important elements of the practice.

#### Hypothesis 07

Financial management does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between financial management and turnover. Importantly this is not to say that financial management does not matter. In this case it does not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as demarcated by turnover.

While financial management might help make freelance work more efficiently, it would be difficult to see how it might contribute to actual turnover in this case. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

#### Hypothesis 08

Web presence and social media does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between turnover and web presence. In this case web presence does not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as demarcated by turnover.

This being said the data here was collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and web presence has been cited by other more recent studies as being of vital importance. More research is needed in this area. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

#### Hypothesis 09

Sales and negotiation skills does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between turnover and sales and negotiation skills. Importantly this is not to say these activities do not matter. In this case they do not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as demarcated by turnover. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

#### Hypothesis 10

Branding and profile development does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between turnover and branding and profile development. It is not clear how these activities interact with artistic practices of visual artists. In this case they don't not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as demarcated by turnover. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

#### Hypothesis 11

Knowledge of copyright and legal matters does not contribute to business resilience for visual artists in London.

Correlation analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between turnover and copyright and legal matters. Importantly this is not to say that these do not matter. In this case these activities do not make a significant difference to questions of resilience as demarcated by turnover. This requires further research as the sector has been hit by the pandemic and has begun to depend on online activities. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

## 4.0 Discussion

As a result of the findings we can tie 'business resilience' as demarcated by annual turnover to three factors: (1) the ability to maintain in-house production systems, (2) the strength of peer networks, and (3) the ability to work in collaboration. Importantly however while this study does not take into consideration the effects of the pandemic it acknowledges that further research will be needed in those areas associated with business resilience that have been impacted by the pandemic such as the importance of web presence. Nonetheless most hypotheses however are still relevant to this sector analysis post-pandemic as their importance would not have been diminished by the pandemic.

Importantly, all three hypotheses seem connected to each other. Arguably they reiterate the importance of an 'ecology perspective' that has been highlighted by scholars such as John Holden (2015), Ann Markusen (2011), as well as Jon Dovey et al. (2016). This perspective connects to and extends other perspectives in the sociology of art such as the importance of the 'art world' (Becker, 1982) and the production of culture perspective (Peterson and Anand, 2004). While Holden (2015) argues that ecologies of culture should be understood in non-monetary ways and thus supported as such, this report states while this is true it does not detract from the fact that these networked ecologies do draw some financial benefits from this construct – which can translate into business resilience and therefore be important to sustainability and survivability. In addition, the notion of flexibility (as outlined by Pratt, 2015) becomes central to resilience in this context as it facilitates it.

#### 4.1 In-house production

In-house production essentially means that artists are able to develop and produce their cultural products within their own space without the need for outsourcing. This highlights the importance of redirecting and having control of some facets of a local production chain. Interestingly in this case it might allow artists to cut costs whereas the normal logic is that outsourcing is the key to cost cutting and savings. This might be the case for larger and more established companies however when it comes to freelancing visual artists in an expensive city like London this might not be the case. In-house production benefits visual arts freelancers more than outsourcing because the particularities of being a visual artist / freelancer necessitates the management of operations in a certain way; namely, where costs might be able to be controlled and production schedules are more flexible.

Flexibility (as indicated by Pratt, 2015) and by extension agility might be argued to be a key to business resilience for visual artists who (in the case of this report) are not understood as firms but freelancers. Keeping things in-house is a practice which allows for this type of flexibility and agility for this cohort. These results therefore beg further investigation into the role of in-house production and what the specificities of this type of work entails. A number of questions now pop up tied to this finding such as: What is the nature of in-house production for freelancers? What differentiates this work from other organisational forms such as small firms etc.? And how do we optimise it to increase flexibility and subsequent resilience as it pertains to visual artists?

#### 4.2 Strength of peer networks

This finding represents one of the most significant outcomes of this research. While much is made of the importance of peer networks, how peer networks are tied to turnover is not always clear. We see in other work the importance of 'sharing' resources using perhaps a cooperative model of working and we know that ecosystemic and ecological approaches to understanding creative economy work is a popular way to understand the activities associated here as stated earlier; but more needs to be done to establish these links. Strength of peer networks speaks to and indicates the benefits of being connected to an ecology of production and consumption networks.

Many creative and cultural industries benefit from agglomerative activities — see the work on creative clusters (Virani et al. 2018), as one of the side effects or spill over effects of this is the exposure to formal and informal networks. This benefits all within the ecosystem / ecology in a number of ways but especially through the dissemination and expansion of knowledge and social capital.

In the case of freelancers this translates to potential increased opportunities for project-based work, but also flexibility and autonomy resulting in the availability of choice of project as opposed to being forced into a position where as many projects as possible must be taken on. This needs further research.

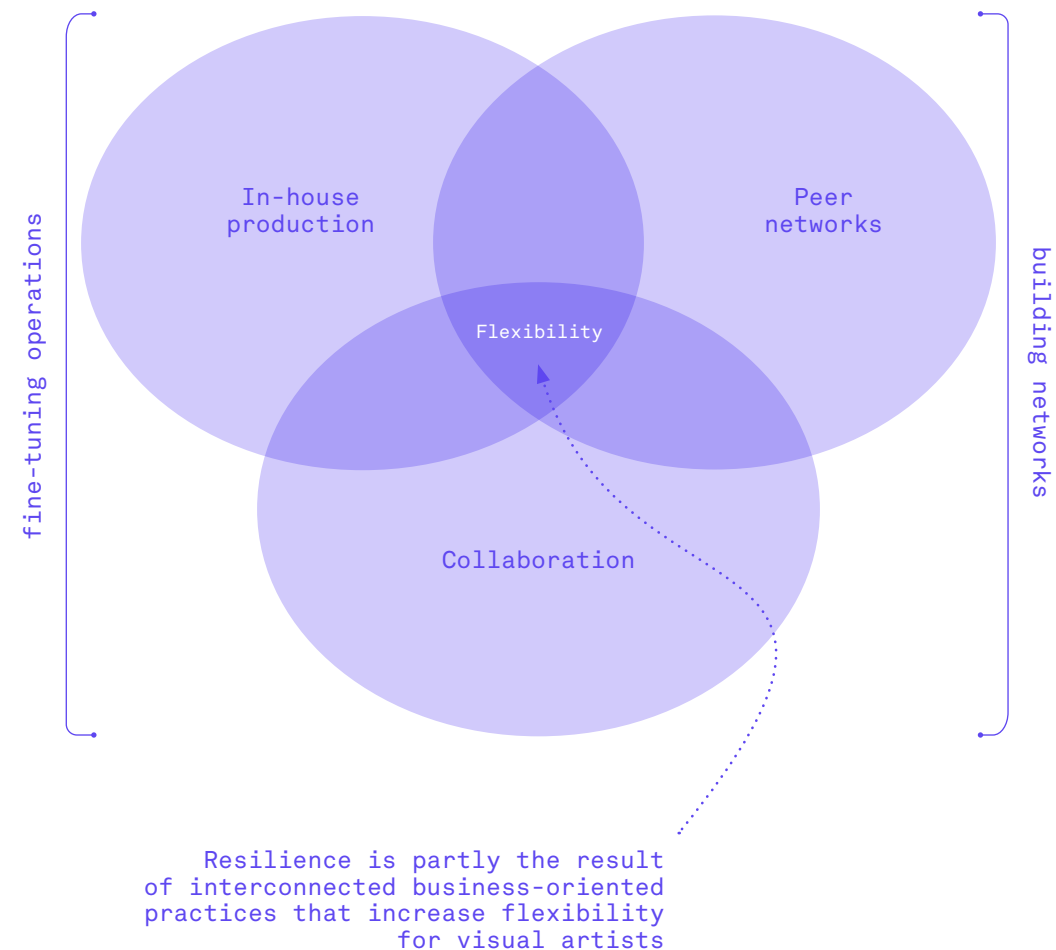
### 4.3 Ability to work in collaboration

This finding solidifies what many artists and scholars view as the importance of collaboration within their chosen art forms. What differentiates this from other work is that we are now assigning 'business resilience' to this notion.

Sociologists of art such as Alexander and Bowler (2014), Howard Becker (1982, 2008) and Peterson and Anand (2004) have all examined how art is by its very nature a collaborative activity and that the myth of the lone genius is just that – a myth. Charles Green (2001) states that 'collaboration was a crucial part of the transition from modernist to postmodernist art' and specifically that the existence of teamwork from the 1960s on provided a new frame for the imaging and conceptualisation of art.

Here we have indicative proof (which needs to be substantiated further) that in actuality collaboration might lead to financial rewards as well which might allow visual artists in particular to be more resilient. This is closely tied to peer networks and in-house production because it finishes what looks like a triumvirate of working practices which seem to come together to provide a semblance of stability through flexibility. Flexibility here is provided through the act of collaboration where cultural products benefit from multiple inputs and influence and are thus imbued with culturally relevant meaning as they are exposed to more people. Collaborative activity increases financial capital and capacity as well, as artists come together to fund certain projects. More research is needed to expand on this further. Figure 1 highlights how these three findings conjoin to provide a potential frame of reference for future work stability.

Figure 1: Business resilience in visual arts, a work-oriented perspective



# Conclusion

In conclusion this research tested eleven hypotheses generated from survey data with visual artists in order to answer the question — What factors (business-oriented practices) increase business resilience for visual artists? While the concept of resilience as it pertains to the creative and cultural economy is still vague we can agree that it partly stands for practice oriented approaches that allow creative and cultural organisations (including freelancers) to be able to increase their survivability, their sustainability and their viability. When we focus this around business practice we can surmise that this would entail those practices which allow for the accruing of business-related benefits in order to increase (again) survivability, sustainability and viability.

In the case of this work the findings suggest that increasing support for flexibility as a means to become an agile visual artist might be a way to strengthen artistic practice and make the sector resilient. Figure 1 illustrates how these might connect and that business resilience is partly the result of interconnected business-oriented practices that increase flexibility for visual artists through the ecology. In-house production increases flexibility around production schedules, and production costs; strong peer networks increase flexibility around the types of project-based work that might be available; and collaborative activities allow for the generation of new ideas and knowledge as well as increasing capital which is vital to the arts.

All of these are a result of an ecology which serves to provide a semblance of stability within a neoliberal work scape underpinned by risk and precarity. Further research and support for visual artists are more vital than ever.



## Endnotes

- 1 For the purpose of this report we have applied SPACE's definition of visual artists.
- 2 see: Wiggins, 2011; Dobson, 2011; Burland and Pitts, 2007; Moyle, 2013, 2009; Morton, 2012; Gaut, 2012; Elias and Berg-Cross, 2009
- 3 Although we use the term BAME, we acknowledge that it's imperfect and it does not fully capture the racial, cultural and ethnic identities of people that experience structural and systematic inequality.

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# Appendix 2

## Tables & figures

Figure 2: Normal distribution of Turnover

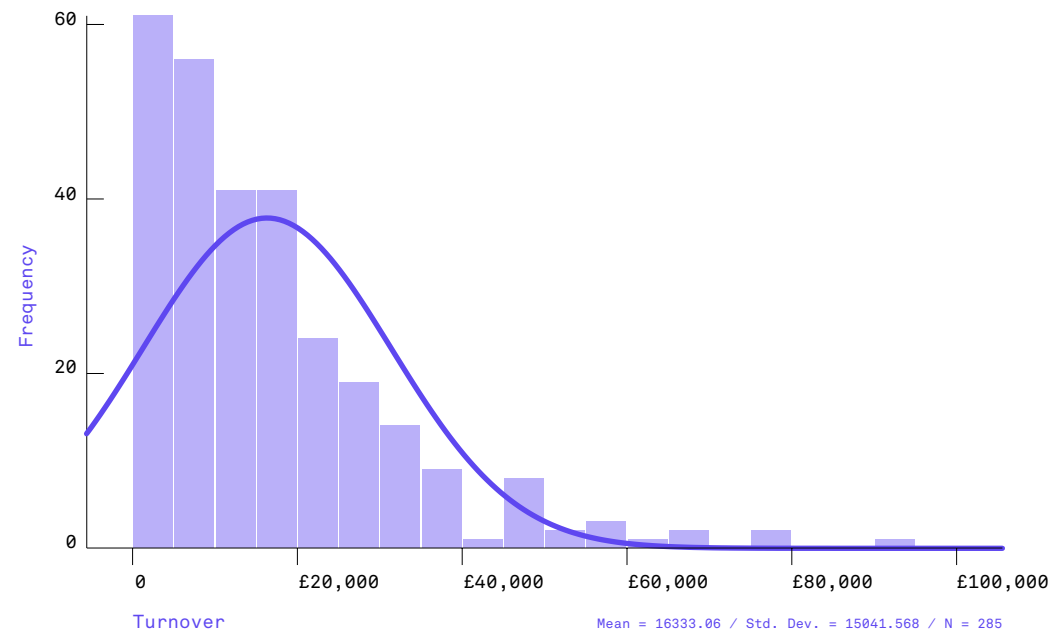


Figure 03: Is the business/practice majority male- or female-run?

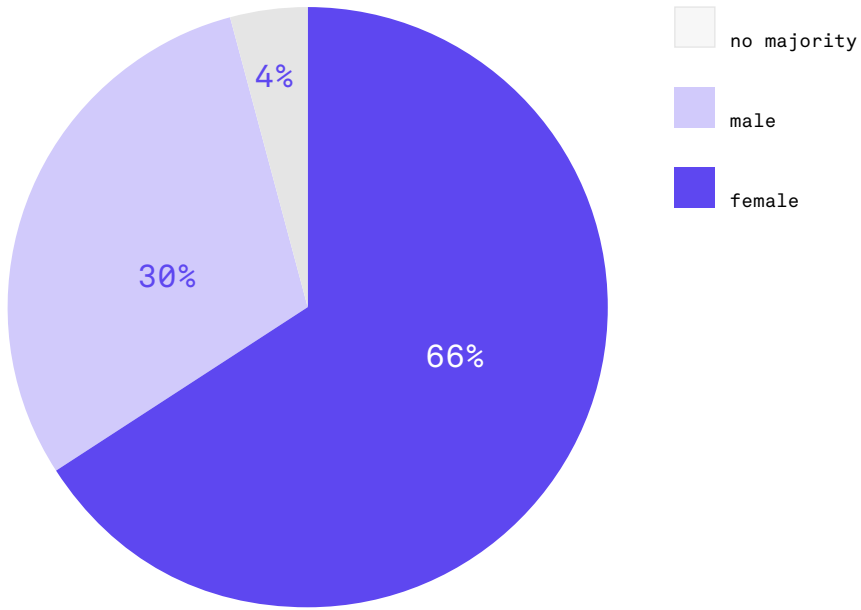


Figure 05: Is the business majority-owned by a person with dyslexia?

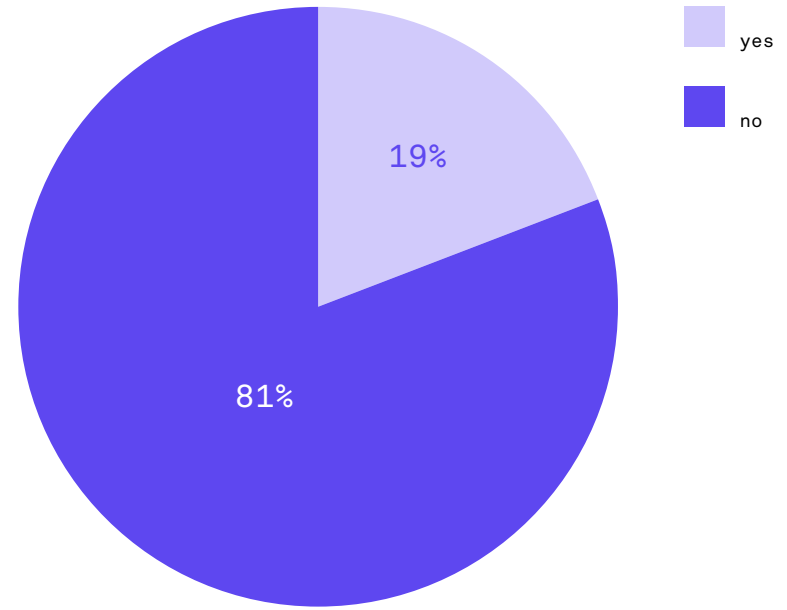


Figure 04: Is the business/practice majority-led by a person with a disability?

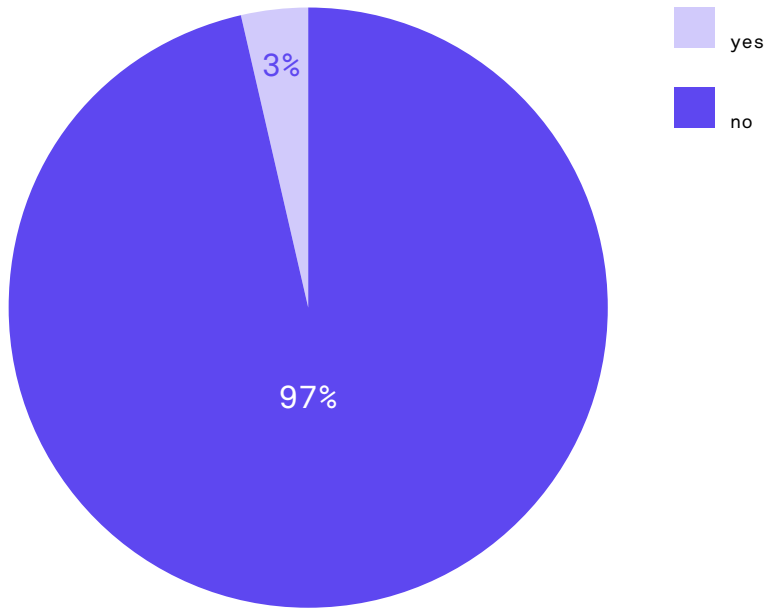


Figure 06: Is the business/practice majority BAME-led?

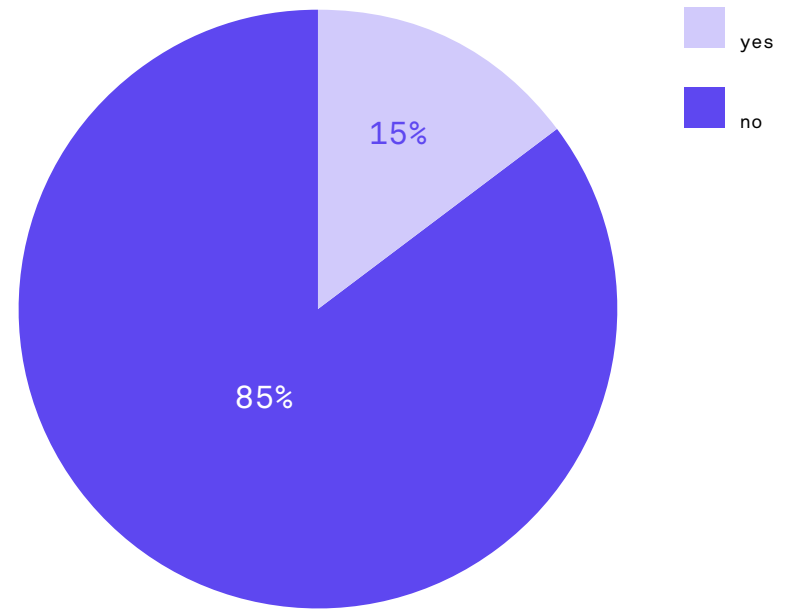


Table 3: When did you start your business/practice? (longevity)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid under 3 years	29	8.9	11.7	11.7
" 3 - 5 Years	74	22.8	30.0	41.7
" 6 - 10 years	63	19.4	25.5	67.2
" 11 - 15 Years	45	13.8	18.2	85.4
" 16 - 20 Years	16	4.9	6.5	91.9
" over 20 Years	20	6.2	8.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>76.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Missing System	78	24.0		
<b>Total</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Table 4: Turnover and In-house production

		Turnover	In-house production
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
		N	286
	In-house production	Correlation Coefficient	-.178*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
		N	270

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 7: In-house production

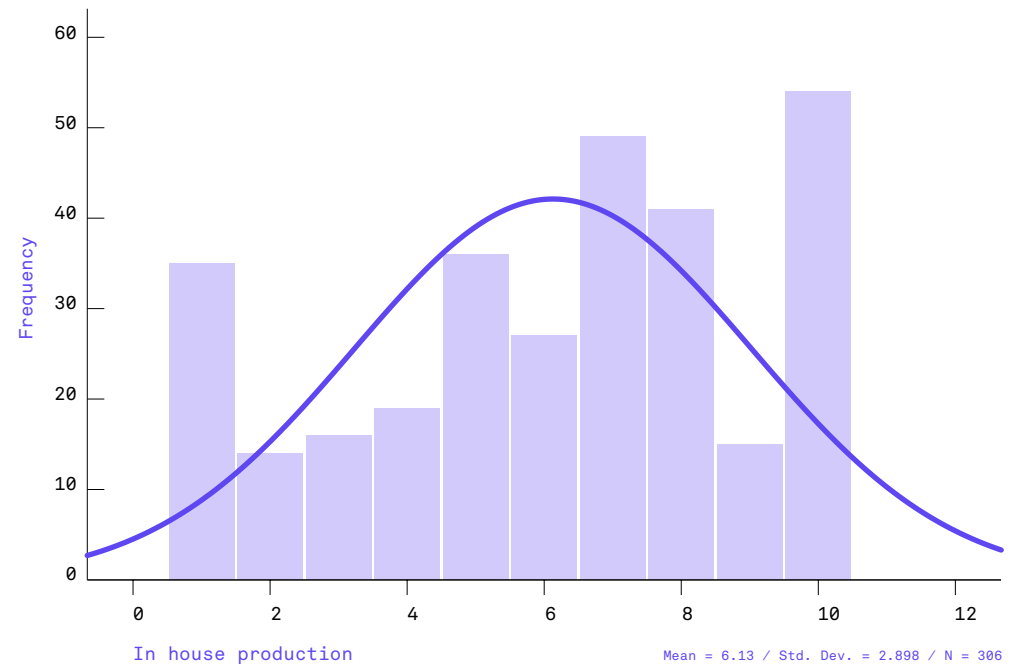


Table 5: Turnover and promotional activities

			Turnover	Promotional
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.065
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.270
		N	286	286
	Promotional	Correlation Coefficient	-.065	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.270	.
		N	286	323

Table 7: Turnover and connection to peer networks

			Turnover	Connection to peer networks
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.149*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.012
		N	286	283
	Connection to peer networks	Correlation Coefficient	.149*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.
		N	283	320

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6: Turnover and affordable workspace

			Turnover	Affordable workspace
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.006
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.925
		N	286	216
	Affordable workspace	Correlation Coefficient	.006	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.925	.
		N	216	248

Figure 8: Connection to peer networks

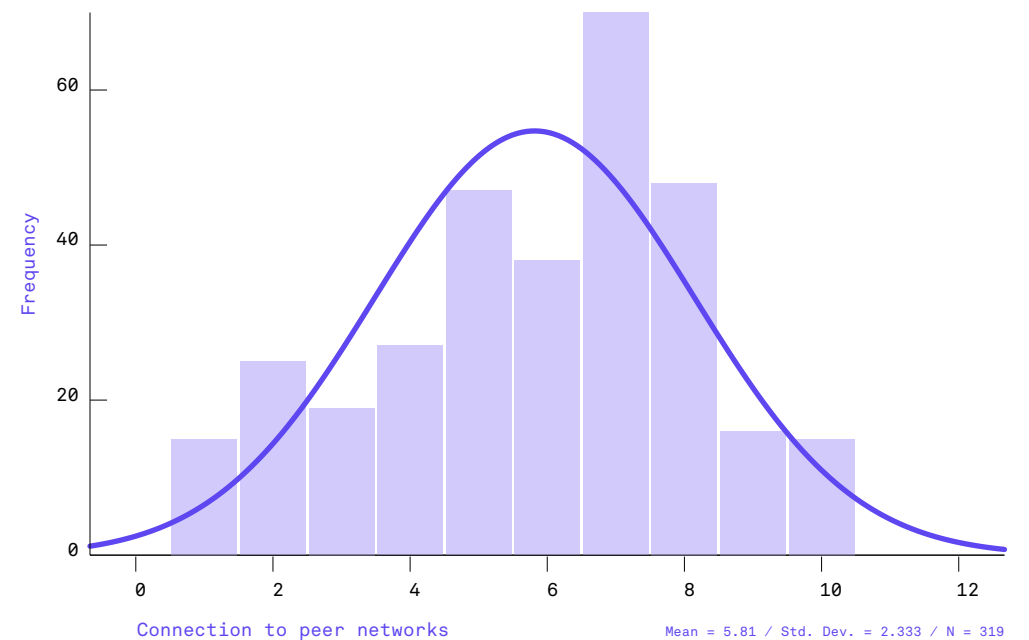


Table 8: Turnover and working in collaboration

		Turnover	Working in collaboration
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	286
	Working in collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	-.124*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.036
		N	325

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 9: Turnover and outsourcing

		Turnover	Outsourcing
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	286
	Outsourcing	Correlation Coefficient	-.007
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.914
		N	309

Table 10: Turnover and financial management

		Turnover	Financial management
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	286
	Financial management	Correlation Coefficient	-.002
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.979
		N	319

Figure 9: Working in collaboration

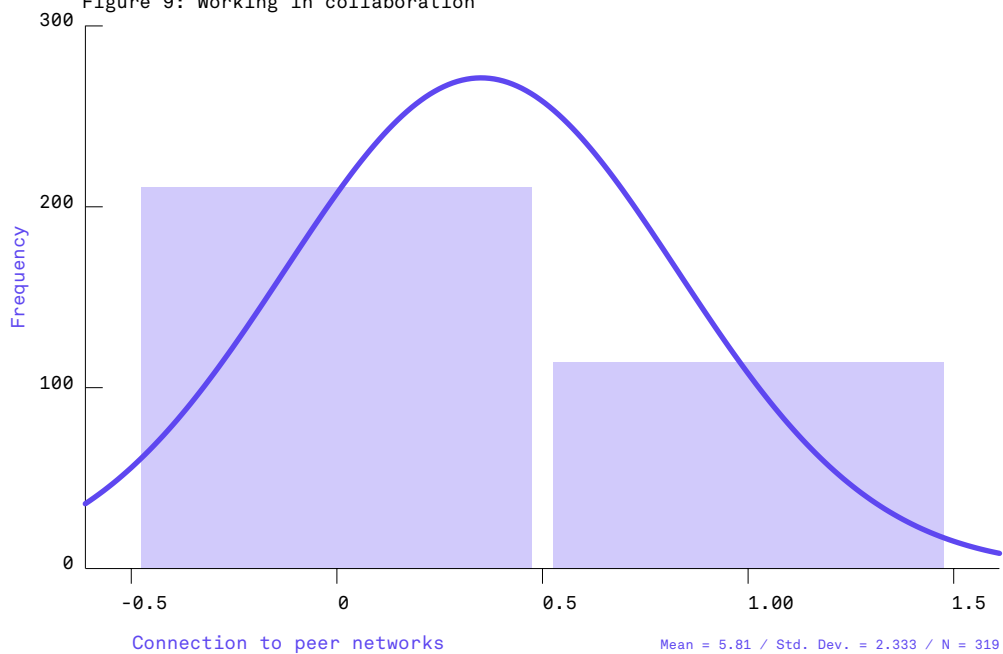


Table 11: Turnover and web presence

			Turnover	Web presence
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.056
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.349
		N	286	283
	Web presence	Correlation Coefficient	-.056	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.349	.
		N	283	320

Table 13: Turnover and branding

			Turnover	Branding
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.071
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.243
		N	286	269
	Branding	Correlation Coefficient	.071	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.243	.
		N	269	305

Table 12: Turnover and sales & negotiation

			Turnover	Sales & negotiation
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.117
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.051
		N	286	278
	Sales & negotiation	Correlation Coefficient	-.117	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.
		N	278	316

Table 14: Turnover and copyright & IP

			Turnover	Copyright & IP
Spearman's rho	Turnover	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.082
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.178
		N	286	271
	Copyright & IP	Correlation Coefficient	-.082	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.178	.
		N	271	308



