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Challenges and key business skills for freelance designers in the creative industry

Abstract This study investigates entrepreneurship within the Creative Industry, emphasizing the challenges and competencies of freelance designers in establishing sustainable businesses. Drawing on a literature review and a questionnaire conducted between April and May 2024, the study identifies key challenges such as pricing, client acquisition, and time management. Although participants exhibited strong communication and organizational skills, they showed deficiencies in financial management and entrepreneurial knowledge. The absence of structured planning also emerged as a critical concern. The study recommends the adoption of tools like the Business Model Canvas to enhance business structuring and suggests that future research examine freelancers' participation in collaborative networks and the effectiveness of continuing education models.

Keywords Design, Entrepreneurship, Creative Industry, Freelancers.

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Desafios e habilidades de negócios essenciais para designers freelancers na indústria criativa

Resumo Este estudo aborda o empreendedorismo na Indústria Criativa, focando nos desafios e competências de freelancers de design para construir negócios sustentáveis. Com base em pesquisa bibliográfica e questionário aplicado entre abril e maio de 2024, identificaram-se como principais desafios a precificação, a prospecção de clientes e a gestão do tempo. Apesar de demonstrarem boas habilidades em comunicação e organização, os participantes revelaram carências em finanças e empreendedorismo. A ausência de um planejamento estruturado também se destacou como fator crítico. O estudo recomenda o uso de ferramentas como o Business Model Canvas para melhorar a estruturação dos negócios e sugere que pesquisas futuras investiguem a atuação de freelancers em redes colaborativas e a eficácia de modelos de formação continuada.

Palavras chave Design, Empreendedorismo, Indústria Criativa, Freelancers.

Desafíos y habilidades empresariales esenciales para diseñadores freelance en la industria creativa

Resumen Este estudio analiza el emprendimiento en la Industria Creativa, enfocándose en los desafíos y competencias de diseñadores freelance para construir negocios sostenibles. Con base en una revisión bibliográfica y un cuestionario aplicado entre abril y mayo de 2024, se identificaron como principales desafíos la fijación de precios, la captación de clientes y la gestión del tiempo. Aunque los participantes demostraron habilidades sólidas en comunicación y organización, mostraron debilidades en finanzas y emprendimiento. La falta de planificación estructurada también fue señalada como un problema crítico. El estudio recomienda el uso de herramientas como el Business Model Canvas para mejorar la estructura del negocio y sugiere que investigaciones futuras exploren la participación de freelancers en redes colaborativas y la efectividad de modelos de formación continua.

Palabras clave Diseño, emprendimiento, Industria creativa, trabajadores autónomos

Introduction

The Creative Industry is one of the most dynamic economic sectors today, continually expanding and adapting. Its foundation lies in creativity and innovation, driving the development of new products and services. According to data from the Federation of Industries of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FIRJAN, 2022), in 2020, the Creative Industry accounted for 2.91% of Brazil's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), totaling R\$ 217.4 billion, demonstrating significant growth and contribution compared to previous research findings.

Within the Creative Industry, the design sector stands out for its capacity to generate value-added solutions, foster innovation within companies, and transform ideas into businesses. These processes often occur in complex problem-solving scenarios involving multiple variables. In this context, the diversity of business models and the prevalence of freelance professionals characterize the sector, while simultaneously presenting challenges for these professionals in the marketplace (SEBRAE, 2013). According to IBGE data, the creative economy in Brazil employs approximately 7.4 million formal workers (IBGE, 2022). However, the lack of specific data on the design segment suggests a high level of informality, with many professionals working as freelancers. This informality hinders their ability to position themselves competitively in the market and to compete with formal businesses.

The research problem addressed in this study seeks to understand the skills required to overcome the main challenges faced by freelance professionals in establishing design businesses. It is posited that a lack of business knowledge, coupled with the absence of management processes and tools, contributes to a lower level of competitiveness among freelancers compared to formal enterprises in the same sector.

To deepen the understanding of this issue, the study aims to: investigate the landscape of design services within the Creative Industry and the skills associated with professionals in the field; examine management and entrepreneurship aspects essential to businesses in the Creative Industry; collect and analyze data from freelance professionals; and generate insights for the development of tools and support processes tailored to freelancers. A detailed analysis of this scenario, supported by interviews and field surveys with freelancers, will help identify how these professionals can enhance their skills to achieve greater competitiveness and market differentiation.

The methodological procedures adopted in this study include a comprehensive bibliographic review of the Creative Industry's market landscape (specifically the design sector) as well as key aspects of entrepreneurship, business models, business planning, and professional competencies within this segment. The study also explores the competencies of design professionals and their application in business contexts. According to Prodanov and Freitas (2013), bibliographic research is based on previously

published material and aims to place the researcher in direct contact with the existing literature on the subject.

In addition, a survey was conducted with freelance professionals in the design sector to gather data on their challenges, strategies, and competencies. As noted by Prodanov and Freitas (2013), survey research involves questioning individuals through a structured questionnaire to understand their behaviors. The study also seeks to offer practical recommendations to support freelancers in building their businesses and advancing their careers.

The conclusion of this study aims to provide insights into the positioning of independent professionals within the Creative Industry and the challenges they face. Furthermore, it explores the competencies needed to overcome these challenges and offers perspectives for a better understanding of the needs of these professionals.

This article is structured with an initial theoretical foundation based on bibliographic and documentary research, followed by the materials and methods section, a detailed analysis of the results obtained through field research, and finally, the conclusions drawn from the study.

Context of the Creative Industry in Brazil

According to Rafael Cardoso (2016), in his book *Design para um Mundo Complexo* (Design for a Complex World), society operates at a frenetic pace, saturated with information yet lacking the capacity to process it effectively. This phenomenon affects not only personal life but also the business environment, where companies must navigate increasingly demanding clients and complex market scenarios. In this context, transformations in business, consumption, and wealth generation are redefining the role of creative professionals, a shift highlighted by the Federation of Industries of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FIRJAN, 2022) in its Mapping of the Creative Industry.

The Creative Industry is a growing economic sector, characterized by the intensive use of knowledge and creativity to generate value and employment through products and services. According to data from the Brazilian Service of Support to Micro and Small Enterprises (SEBRAE, 2013), the global creative economy generates approximately US\$8 trillion annually, accounting for between 8% and 10% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In Brazil, the Creative Industry also makes a significant contribution to the economy. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2010, the sector contributed R\$104 billion, or 2.84% of Brazil's GDP.

FIRJAN (2010) further reports that approximately 865,881 individuals were employed in formal jobs within the Creative Industry in Brazil in 2010, representing 1.96% of the country's formal employment. FIRJAN also emphasizes the sector's multiplier effect, noting that for every job created in the creative economy, four additional jobs are generated in related areas of the production chain. This reinforces the sector's positive impact on the broader Brazilian economy.

Design is one of the key segments within this creative ecosystem. According to the Secretariat of Creative Economy of the Ministry of Culture (2011), as presented in the Design Diagnosis in Brazil, design belongs to the functional creation sector, which encompasses product creation, multimedia, fashion, graphic design, design management, packaging, architecture, and interior design. Despite its recognized importance, there is a notable lack of official data on the design sector in Brazil, which hinders accurate analysis of its economic contribution and limits access to specific information about professionals in the field. This gap is largely due to the high number of informal positions and the fact that many designers are registered under different occupations in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO) (SEBRAE, 2013).

According to a diagnosis conducted by the Ministry of Development, Industry, and Trade (2014), in 2013 there were 686 formal design offices in Brazil and approximately 4,200 positions in the sector. The distribution of jobs in that year was as follows: Graphic Design and Communication (38%), Digital/Multimedia Design (22%), Product Design (16%), Service Design (14%), Interior Design (7%), and Fashion Design (2%).

The creative economy in Brazil has evolved, and design has become a central component of this industry. In 2011, the design sector accounted for 12.7% of Brazil's creative core, with particular prominence in the Southern region, which hosted one of the country's largest concentrations of creative professionals (Design Diagnosis in Brazil, 2014). Within this broader participation in the Creative Industry, design is increasingly gaining space within companies.

According to Sinoma, Fernandes, and Vargas (2017), approaches such as Design Management, Strategic Design, and Design Thinking have underscored the strategic importance of design in business. These concepts promote techniques and values that contribute directly to decision-making processes. Although designers still face challenges in integrating more effectively into strategic planning, they possess a range of skills that position them as key contributors: the ability to deeply explore complex problems and the use of visual tools and techniques to develop and communicate innovative solutions.

The authors further highlight systemic thinking as one of the core attributes of design professionals. This capability enables designers to lead projects with a "generalist-specialist" profile, as defined by Tim Brown (2010), allowing them to understand the system holistically while also focusing on specific details. These qualities reinforce the strategic role of design in the Creative Industry and within organizations, demonstrating that design professionals can be crucial agents of innovation, business development, and entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship in the Creative Industry

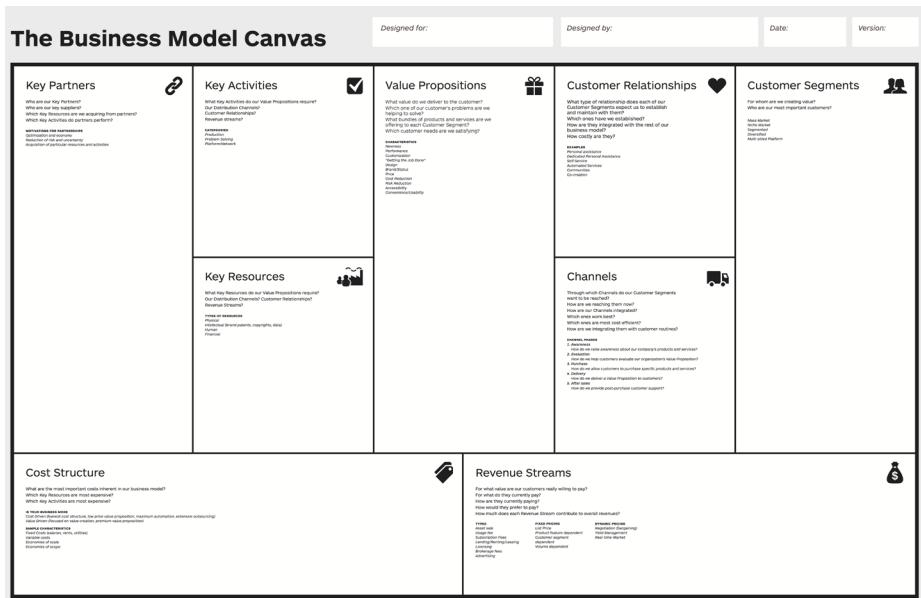
To understand how freelance professionals position themselves as service providers, it is essential to explore concepts directly related to entrepreneurship, particularly as applied to the Creative Industry. The concept of entrepreneurship is closely associated with the creation of new businesses, typically beginning with simple structures that evolve over time into consolidated companies, according to Dornelas (2013). The author further states that entrepreneurship involves transforming ideas into tangible ventures, a process that demands creativity, resilience, and a strong capacity for adaptation. In the Creative Industry, these qualities are especially critical, as the field is shaped by constantly shifting trends and the pursuit of innovation and differentiation.

The design segment in Brazil exhibits a wide diversity of business models. According to the Design Diagnosis in Brazil (2014), this variety ensures a broad range of goods and services, fostering more intense capital circulation across economic sectors. Such diversification is one of the factors that make design a powerful tool for businesses seeking to differentiate their products and services, thereby maintaining a competitive edge in the market. SEBRAE (2013) affirms that design is essential for businesses aiming to add value and expand their market presence.

Despite the dynamism and adaptability required in the Creative Industry, entrepreneurial success depends on effective planning. According to SEBRAE's Guide to Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy, the lack of planning and a comprehensive understanding of the business are among the main causes of company failure. Therefore, developing a business plan is essential to provide entrepreneurs with a clear overview of their venture and to assess its viability. Planning is not merely a bureaucratic requirement but a vital exercise for the survival and growth of businesses in the Creative Industry (Guide to Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy, 2015).

One useful tool for this planning process is the Business Model Canvas, developed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2011) and illustrated in Figure 01. The Canvas offers an innovative and visual framework for mapping businesses across any sector, encompassing nine key areas: value proposition, customer segments, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partners, and cost structure. This tool is particularly effective for the Creative Industry, which demands a flexible yet structured approach to planning for growth and success.

Figure 1: The Business Model Canvas
Source: Osterwalder e Pigneur, 2011



In general, the use of planning tools and strategic approaches is essential for entrepreneurship within the Creative Industry, a field that demands both innovation and structured planning. According to Simona, Fernandes, and Vargas (2017), the exchange of knowledge between different disciplines, such as design and management, fosters the development of more innovative solutions to complex problems. Moreover, tools like the Business Model Canvas offer a framework that can effectively enhance the process of business mapping and development. This type of multidisciplinary approach is often key to success in a sector that continually seeks novelty, underscoring the importance of reflecting on the competencies designers must possess to meet the demands of this dynamic context.

Design Competencies

Design professionals may work within companies or operate their own businesses, and in both contexts, a diverse set of competencies is required beyond those specific to the design field. Therefore, it is essential to consider and reflect on additional competencies that can be applied across these scenarios.

Traditional organizational structures are undergoing constant transformation and, as previously mentioned and according to Rafael Cardoso (2016), at an increasingly frenetic pace. These structures are shifting from hierarchical models to self-directed, cross-functional models that are increasingly driven by knowledge, data, and information. According to Berge et al. (2002), this shift introduces new challenges for maximizing the competitive potential of businesses and simultaneously demands adaptation from professionals. As companies become more process-oriented, designers face growing expectations to develop competencies not only in design but also in areas such as management, communication, teamwork,

and other skills related to the creative process, from problem identification to the delivery and consolidation of developed solutions.

According to Casenote (2018), the competencies required to operate in contemporary and emerging organizational contexts go beyond traditional design skills. Traditionally, design in Brazil has often been viewed primarily as the development of products or visual systems.

However, Norman and Klemmer (2014) argue that the concept of design has expanded from its historical focus on products to a broader role in the development of services and experiences. Today, designers must understand social and cultural dynamics, business persuasion techniques, and competencies related to sustainable development (Casenote, 2018). This evolution reflects the need for adaptation to an increasingly competitive and globalized business environment.

Designers are also responsible for a wide range of activities, including usability, business strategy, finance, and the management of the full life cycle of their projects (Moes et al., 2008). The ability to engage in dialogue with various disciplines (such as the arts, humanities, engineering, and management) is a key differentiator for professionals (Casenote, 2018). Moreover, design should be viewed as a strategic tool for solving complex problems, rather than merely an operational or aesthetic function (Mozota; Klöpsch; Costa, 2011).

With growing competition in the global market, companies such as Acer, Apple, Philips, and Sony have begun integrating design into their “concept-to-market” processes, enabling designers to participate in strategic planning and product positioning decisions (Yang et al., 2005). This demonstrates that the designer’s involvement throughout the entire process is essential for achieving competitive market positioning and fostering innovation, while also indicating a potential expansion of the designer’s role within organizations.

Consequently, the integration of design into strategic roles within companies requires a broader set of competencies, extending beyond the traditional focus on aesthetics and functionality. According to Horvath (2006), design competence must encompass skills with contextual, behavioral, and problem-solving impact. Munch and Jakobsen (2005) identify three main categories of competencies: contextual impact, behavioral impact, and problem-solving orientation.

Another fundamental competency is resource management, which includes the ability to select appropriate methods, processes, materials, and other resources to ensure the delivery of high-quality results. Additionally, managing human and financial resources is critical to achieving project objectives and maintaining business viability (Casenote, 2018).

Overall, design competencies are becoming increasingly multidisciplinary and complex. Design professionals must continuously develop skills across a broad spectrum of areas to remain competitive and contribute effectively to the success of their businesses. Regardless of their mode of operation, the ability to navigate diverse subjects and contexts, understand

business processes, and manage resources are essential elements for building successful design enterprises. By addressing these competencies, this section underscores the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in order to thrive in a constantly evolving business environment.

Materials and Methods

The methodology of this research is based on the inductive method, as described by Prodanov and Freitas (2013). The application of the inductive method is appropriate for exploratory research, where the objective is to understand little-known or emerging phenomena, allowing the researcher to derive insights directly from empirical observation. According to Prodanov and Freitas (2013), the inductive method is widely used in the social and human sciences, fields in which the studied phenomena are complex and multifaceted, requiring an approach capable of capturing this complexity in a comprehensive manner.

Initially, a bibliographic review was conducted to examine the landscape of design services within the Creative Industry and the competencies associated with professionals in the field. As noted by Prodanov and Freitas (2013), a bibliographic review is constructed from previously published material and aims to provide the researcher with direct access to the existing literature on the research topic. Various sources were consulted, including books, academic articles, and industry reports, to gain insight into the management and entrepreneurship aspects essential for businesses in the Creative Industry.

For primary data collection, a survey research method was employed. According to Prodanov and Freitas (2013), this method involves questioning individuals whose behavior is the subject of investigation. The questionnaire was distributed between April 24, 2024, and May 15, 2024, via WhatsApp groups and private LinkedIn messages to approximately 50 freelance professionals. The questionnaire addressed various aspects of freelance work, including city of residence, age, level of education, mode of work, years of experience, services offered, education related to the services provided, knowledge of business and commercial aspects, tools used, challenges faced, and competencies considered important.

The research was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical principles of scientific inquiry, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, except for those who voluntarily provided their full names and contact information for follow-up interviews. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research and gave their consent to participate, ensuring transparency and ethical integrity throughout the data collection process.

The adopted approach can be classified as qualitative, as outlined by Prodanov and Freitas (2013). The collected data were categorized to identify patterns and trends among freelancers. This categorization involved grouping similar responses, enabling the identification of relevant patter-

ns concerning the challenges and competencies of freelance professionals working in the design field.

As a result, the study aims to identify patterns and generalizations that clarify the main challenges faced by freelancers in the design sector. Additionally, it seeks to determine the essential competencies required to overcome these challenges.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

The sample of respondents in this survey consists primarily of freelance professionals based in cities such as Porto Alegre, Novo Hamburgo, Florianópolis, and other locations in the South and Southeast regions of Brazil. A total of 21 individuals participated in the survey, with ages ranging from 21 to 52 years, the majority being between 23 and 30 years old. Regarding educational background, most respondents hold or are currently pursuing a university degree, while a minority have technical education or have completed professional development courses.

Freelance work arrangements include both full-time freelancers (48%) and individuals who combine freelance work with formal employment (52%). Most participants have been working in this freelance model for less than one year, although some report over five years of experience. The services offered by respondents are diverse and include graphic design, UX/UI design, social media management, digital marketing, visual identity, branding, advertising campaigns, and consultancy, among others. Most professionals have formal education related to the services they provide, with an emphasis on university-level or postgraduate training in the field.

Freelancers were asked about the challenges they face in their business and commercial activities. Each response was analyzed qualitatively and categorized into thematic groups to identify the most common issues. Table 01 presents the number of responses within each category.

Table 01: Freelancers' Challenges

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

Challenges	Count
Pricing	8
Client Prospecting	3
Lack of Initial Structure	3
No Current Challenges	4

The analysis of the responses reveals that the most significant challenge faced by freelancers is pricing their services, with eight direct mentions. Many professionals reported difficulty in determining appropriate pricing, indicating that pricing skills are a critical area requiring further attention and development. A lack of confidence and clarity in setting fair and competitive prices can directly affect the viability and sustainability of a freelancer's business.

Another frequently cited challenge is client prospecting, mentioned three times. Freelancers expressed difficulties in attracting and converting clients, as well as a lack of training during their formal education in how to market and sell their services. This gap in training can limit opportunities for growth and success in the marketplace.

The lack of initial business structure was also mentioned by three respondents. This reflects the early stage of many freelancers' careers, during which they are still adapting and attempting to establish more solid and efficient processes for managing their businesses. Additionally, four freelancers indicated that they currently do not face significant challenges.

Overall, the main challenges reported by freelancers align with the issues highlighted by SEBRAE in the *Guia Empreender na Economia Criativa* (2013), which emphasizes the importance of planning and a comprehensive understanding of the business. Inadequate pricing strategies and difficulties in client acquisition may indicate a lack of structured planning and a clear vision of the enterprise. According to SEBRAE (2013), developing a business plan is essential to provide entrepreneurs with an overview of their venture and to assess its viability. This reinforces the notion that planning is not merely a bureaucratic requirement but a fundamental exercise for building and growing businesses in the Creative Industry (SEBRAE, 2013).

In addition to commercial challenges, issues related to project and service management were also addressed. The analysis shows that time management is a significant concern, with four responses indicating difficulty in balancing freelance projects with other responsibilities, such as full-time employment and academic commitments.

Further analysis was conducted based on a question regarding competencies in project and service management. Freelancers were asked to self-assess using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated "little mastery" and 5 indicated "high mastery," across the following aspects: defining execution and delivery deadlines; meeting execution and delivery deadlines; mapping involved activities; and organizing materials and files. Table 02 summarizes the average, highest, and lowest scores for each competency.

Table 02: Project Management

Competencies

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

Competence	Média
Define execution and delivery deadlines	4,05
Meet execution and delivery deadlines	4,33
Map activities involved	4,05
Organize materials and files	4,57

The data analysis indicates that respondents consider themselves most proficient in "Organizing materials and files," with an average score of 4.57. The competency "Meeting execution and delivery deadlines" also received a high average score of 4.33, suggesting a strong level of commitment and effective time management to meet client expectations.

Conversely, the competencies “Defining execution and delivery deadlines” and “Mapping involved activities” both received an average score of 4.05. While these areas are still positively rated, they present opportunities for improvement. Notably, “Defining execution and delivery deadlines” received the lowest individual score (2), which may indicate that some freelancers experience challenges in this area.

Respondents were also asked to evaluate aspects of their business and commercial processes. This assessment was conducted using a Likert scale, where individuals self-rated their proficiency from 1 (little proficiency) to 5 (high proficiency). The average scores are presented in Table 03.

Table 03: Self-assessment of

business aspects

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

Aspect	Average
Find new clients	2,71
Talk to clients	4,00
Price services	2,90
Create portfolio	3,95
Maintain and update portfolio	3,35
Negotiate with clients	3,50
Organize finances	3,30
Self-marketing	2,85

The data analysis reveals that the competency “Conversing with clients” is where freelancers feel most confident, with an average score of 4.0. This suggests that most respondents consider themselves highly proficient in this crucial area for maintaining productive client relationships. “Creating a portfolio” also appears as a strength, with an average score of 3.95, indicating a solid ability to present their work effectively to attract potential clients.

In contrast, competencies such as “Finding new clients” (average score of 2.71) and “Pricing services” (average score of 2.90) emerge as areas in need of further development. These are critical elements for the sustainability of freelance work, suggesting that many professionals may struggle with expanding their client base and establishing appropriate pricing strategies. “Self-marketing” also appears as a challenge, with an average score of 2.85, indicating difficulties in effectively promoting their services.

“Maintaining and updating the portfolio” and “Organizing finances” received average scores of 3.35 and 3.30, respectively, reflecting a moderate level of proficiency in these areas. “Negotiating with clients,” with an average score of 3.50, suggests that freelancers feel relatively comfortable with negotiation, although there is still room for improvement.

In addition to these competencies, one of the survey questions aimed to assess how freelancers perceive their own business-related skills. Based on the collected data, an analysis was conducted to highlight both strengths and areas requiring development among the respondents. This evaluation was carried out using a Likert scale, where freelancers rated their proficiency from 1 (low competency) to 5 (high competency).

Table 04: Business Competencies**Source:** Prepared by the authors, 2024

Competence	Average
Entrepreneurship	3,0
Strategic vision	3,57
Communication	4,1
Data analysis	3,52
Finances	3,05
Negotiation	3,29
Innovation	3,57
Time management	4,1
Networking	3,71

Table 04 summarizes the average self-assessments for each competency. The data analysis indicates that the strongest competencies among respondents are communication and time management, both with an average score of 4.1. This suggests that most freelancers consider themselves highly proficient in these areas, which are essential for effective freelance work. Networking also emerges as a notable strength, with an average score of 3.71.

Conversely, areas such as finance (average score of 3.05) and entrepreneurship (average score of 3.0) show potential for improvement. Many freelancers rated themselves as moderately competent in these domains, indicating a possible need for further training or support to enhance financial management and foster a more entrepreneurial mindset.

The questionnaire also explored the practical application of various aspects of business planning and business models. Each response was analyzed quantitatively using a Likert scale to determine the level of application for each aspect. Table 05 presents the average scores for each item.

Table 05: Business Planning**Source:** Prepared by the authors, 2024

Aspect	Average
Value proposition	3,50
Clients (target audience)	3,24
Customer relationship	4,00
Infrastructure	3,62
Finances	3,10

The average score of 3.50 for the value proposition indicates that most freelancers apply this aspect at a moderate to high level, with few applying it minimally. This suggests that freelancers have a reasonable understanding of what they offer to the market, although there is room for deeper insight and clearer definition of their value proposition. With an average score of 3.24, the application of client-related aspects varies significantly among freelancers. While some demonstrate a solid understanding of their target audience, others still need to better define their client base. This highlights the importance of conducting more in-depth market research to effectively identify and segment the target audience.

Customer relationships received the highest average score, at 4.00, suggesting that freelancers generally maintain strong communication and interaction with their clients. This positive relationship is essential for client satisfaction and loyalty, indicating that it is a key strength among freelancers. The average score of 3.62 for infrastructure suggests that the application of necessary business resources is at a reasonable level, though there remains room for improvement. The financial aspect, with an average score of 3.10, was the least applied among freelancers, indicating challenges in managing costs and revenues. This could represent a critical area requiring attention to ensure the financial sustainability of freelance businesses.

As previously noted, a lack of business planning can significantly impact sustainability (SEBRAE, 2013). In this context, the Business Model Canvas, developed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2011), can serve as an extremely valuable tool for freelancers, helping them to better structure their businesses, identify gaps, and plan more effective strategies. The Canvas provides a visual and structured approach that enables freelancers to adapt their planning to market demands. This not only enhances their understanding of various business components but also improves decision-making, helping to address current challenges such as pricing and financial management.

Finally, the survey included an open-ended question asking respondents to identify the competencies they consider most relevant. The responses were analyzed qualitatively and grouped into categories, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends in the competencies deemed essential.

The most frequently mentioned competencies were organization, communication, time management, and relationship-building. Organization was cited 15 times and classified under the “Management and Planning” category, reflecting the need to effectively structure and plan work and business-related activities. Communication, mentioned nine times and grouped under “Relationship and Communication,” underscores the importance of interacting effectively with clients and partners. Time management, with five mentions and also placed in the “Management and Planning” category, highlights the need to manage time efficiently to meet deadlines and maintain productivity. Relationship-building, cited four times within the “Relationship and Communication” category, emphasizes the importance of maintaining strong client relationships.

Other notable competencies include meeting deadlines, discipline, and financial management, each mentioned three times and categorized under “Management and Planning.” Personal competencies such as sincerity, maturity, curiosity, commitment, and responsibility were mentioned less frequently but are still considered important for professional success.

The data analysis shows that the “Management and Planning” category was the most cited, with a total of 30 mentions, followed by “Relationship and Communication” with 17 mentions, and “Personal Competencies” with 13 mentions. Technical competencies received only one mention,

which may suggest a perception that while technical skills are fundamental, they are not the primary differentiator.

Based on these results, correlations can be drawn with the perspectives of authors such as Rafael Cardoso (2016), who discusses the increasing complexity of the market and the need to manage information efficiently, requiring design professionals to develop a broad range of competencies. In this regard, it is understandable that management and communication skills are gaining greater relevance. Furthermore, the multidisciplinary approach emphasized by Sinoma, Fernandes, and Vargas (2017) reinforces the importance of integrating knowledge from various fields to address complex design challenges.

Authors such as Kotler (2014), who focus on entrepreneurship and business strategy, stress the importance of effective management and strategic planning for success in competitive environments, reflected in the emphasis freelancers place on management and planning competencies. In the field of strategic design, Best (2010) argues that the ability to plan and manage projects strategically is essential for achieving meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Additionally, Mozota, Klöpsch, and Costa (2006) highlight the need for designers to adopt a management approach that integrates both creative and business perspectives, emphasizing the importance of communication and negotiation skills.

Finally, Brown (2010) introduces the concept of the generalist-specialist designer, who combines a broad skill set with deep expertise in specific areas. This perspective is supported by the diversity of competencies mentioned by freelancers in the survey, indicating that, to succeed, they must be both specialists and generalists, capable of navigating multiple disciplines and contexts. Table 06 presents the main insights derived from the analysis.

Table 06: Key Insights from the Results Analysis

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2024

Category	Insights
Business and Commercial Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pricing services is one of the biggest challenges faced by freelancers;Client prospecting is a significant challenge, regardless of experience or educational level;
Project and Service Management Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Balancing multiple responsibilities, such as formal work and freelancing, affects time management efficiency;Effective communication with clients and meeting deadlines and expectations is highly valued by freelancers;

Category	Insights
Business Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Communication and time management are well-developed competencies among freelancers;There is a need for improvement in areas such as finance and entrepreneurship to enhance competitiveness in the market;
Planning and Business Model Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Planning regarding the clear definition of the value proposition and target audience is lacking among freelancers;Effective financial management is critical and often underestimated by freelancers;Business planning and management tools are not commonly used.

These insights underscore the importance of developing competencies and a comprehensive understanding of business and management practices for freelancers. Moreover, the application of management and entrepreneurship tools can support freelancers in better structuring their businesses, identifying gaps, and planning more effective strategies.

Final Considerations

The research conducted revealed significant insights into the challenges faced by freelancers in the design industry, as well as the competencies required to overcome them, aligning with the initial research problem. Regarding the study's objectives, they were achieved at various stages. First, it was possible to examine the design services landscape within the Creative Industry and identify the competencies associated with professionals in the field. Essential aspects of management and entrepreneurship for businesses in the Creative Industry were also explored, and data were collected and analyzed from active freelancers. Finally, insights were generated to support the development of tools and processes aimed at assisting freelancers, in alignment with the specific objectives proposed.

Among the most relevant findings, difficulties related to service pricing, client prospecting, and effective time management stood out, particularly among those who combine formal employment with freelance activities. Additionally, while competencies such as communication and client relationship management are well-developed, there is a clear need for improvement in critical areas such as finance and entrepreneurship to enhance market competitiveness.

The analysis also emphasized the importance of structured planning and a comprehensive understanding of business operations. Many freelancers struggle to clearly define their value proposition and target audience, which can hinder their market positioning. Effective financial management, often underestimated, emerged as a critical and sensitive area for business

sustainability. While some tools were identified as effective in helping freelancers structure their businesses and plan strategies, there remains a need for more comprehensive solutions that address diverse professional needs.

Throughout the research process, certain difficulties and limitations were encountered. The lack of specific data on freelancers in the Brazilian design industry posed challenges for conducting a more detailed analysis. Additionally, the sample size may have affected the representativeness of the results, limiting the ability to draw broader conclusions about the overall freelance landscape. The heterogeneity of responses also pointed to the need for a deeper understanding of individual variations in practices and challenges.

New questions emerged from this study that warrant further investigation. The integration of freelancers into collaborative networks and the impact of these networks on the development of business competencies is a promising area for future research. Furthermore, the effectiveness of different training and qualification models for freelancers in the design field (particularly those aimed at enhancing management and entrepreneurship skills) deserves closer attention. Longitudinal studies could track the progress of freelancers who adopt strategic planning tools, assessing their long-term impact.

In summary, this study contributed to a deeper understanding of the main challenges and competencies required by freelancers in the design industry. However, it also opens avenues for future research that can expand and refine the findings presented here, contributing to the development of a more robust and effective framework for entrepreneurship within the Creative Industry.

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