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Freelance Orientation in the Sharing Economy: Evidence from Labor Platforms

BY

AVISHEK LAHIRI

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the Robinson College of Business

Of

Georgia State University

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

ROBINSON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

2021

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2021

## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the *AVISHEK LAHIRI* Dissertation Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration in the J. Mack Robinson College of Business of Georgia State University.

Richard Phillips, Dean

## DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Dr. Naveen Donthu (Chair)

Dr. Yi Zhao

Dr. Edward Rigdon

Dr. Kai Zhao (Institute for Insight)

Dr. Aric Rindfleisch (University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign)

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	10
<b>Theoretical Background</b> .....	16
Job Demands-Resources Model: Freelance Orientation.....	16
Exploring Freelance Orientation Traits.....	17
Interdisciplinary literature review.....	15
Semi-structured Interviews - Exploratory.....	20
Content Analysis.....	22
Online Surveys – Exploratory.....	23
<b>Conceptual Framework</b> .....	24
Overview.....	24
FLSP’s Customer Orientation.....	24
FLSP’s Self-efficacy.....	26
FLSP’s Risk-taking Propensity.....	27
FLSP’s Proactivity through Strategic Emphasis (Time Use) .....	28
FLSP’s Work Engagement as a Mediator.....	29
FLSP’s Customer Feedback as a Moderator.....	31
<b>Study Context – Sharing Economy Labor Platforms</b> .....	32
<b>Methodology</b> .....	34
Data.....	34
Measures - Substantive Variables.....	37
Measures - Control Variables.....	40
Model.....	42

<b>Results</b> .....	44
Confirmatory factor analysis.....	44
Stage 1 Model.....	46
Stage 2a Model.....	47
Stage 2b Model.....	48
Stage 3a Model.....	49
Stage 3b Model.....	50
Stage 4 Model.....	51
<b>Discussion</b> .....	51
Academic Contributions.....	51
Managerial Insights.....	54
Limitations and Future Research.....	56
<b>References</b> .....	59
<b>Tables</b> .....	60
Table 1. List of studies on the relationship between marketing employee traits with affective outcomes and behavioral work outcomes.....	70
Table 2. List of Freelance Orientation Buckets based on four Exploratory techniques.....	73
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Substantive and Control variables.....	74
Table 4. Results from Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Customer Orientation, Self-Efficacy, Work Engagement, and Role Identification.....	75
Table 5. Stage 1 Regression coefficients - The effect of orientation traits on freelancer's work engagement.....	76
Table 6a. Stage 2 Regression coefficients - The effect of predicted work engagement on freelancer's work performance.....	77
Table 6b. Stage 2 Tobit Regression coefficients of the effect of predicted work	

engagement on freelancer's probability of turnover.....	78
Table 7a. Stage 3 Regression coefficients of the effect of freelancers' orientation traits and work engagement on their work performance.....	79
Table 7b. Stage 3 Tobit Regression coefficients of the effect of orientation traits and work engagement on freelancer's probability of turnover.....	80
Table 8. Stage 4 - Tobit Regression coefficients of the effect of orientation traits, work engagement, and work performance on freelancer's probability of turnover.....	81
<b>Figures</b> .....	82
Figure 1. Freelance Orientation Traits' Effect on Turnover and Work Performance through Work Engagement.....	82
Figure 2. Sharing Economy Landscape: Labor Platforms.....	82
Figure 3. Non-Linear relationship between Work Engagement and Strategic Emphasis (in hours) .....	83
Figure 4. Simple Slopes Diagram to show the moderation effect of Customer Feedback (Review rate) on the relation between Work Engagement and Performance.....	83
<b>Appendix</b> .....	84
Appendix 1. Comparison between freelancers, contract employees, and company employees.....	84
Appendix 2. Classification of non-firm or contingent workers.....	85
Appendix 3. Steps in hiring of a freelancer (FLSP) on a labor platform.....	86
Appendix 4. Why freelance? – enjoyment versus displeasure reasons.....	87
Appendix 5. Nature of involvement in freelancing.....	90
Appendix 6. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) result of orientation traits and work engagement.....	94
Appendix 7. Mediation analysis of Work Engagement in the absence of the moderator.....	96



## ABSTRACT

Sharing economy labor platforms depend on a voluntary freelance workforce to provide professional or personal services. These platforms cite high freelancer turnover and performance variance as major concerns. Both these concerns affect the platform's customer experience, network growth, and brand image. Prior research proposes extrinsic retention approaches such as incentive-based (e.g., higher pay for better performance) and value-based job resources (e.g., enhanced support through training). The financial precariousness of the labor platforms leaves them with limited scope to pursue costly extrinsic retention strategies. Our study focuses on the freelancer's intrinsic personal resources such as psychological traits within a specific occupational context (professional/personal services) as an alternate yet complimentary cost-efficient way to alleviate the concerns. Influenced by the job-demand resources model, we use exploratory techniques to find customer orientation, self-efficacy, proactivity through strategic emphasis, and risk-taking propensity as orientation traits that makes individuals suitable for freelancing. Confirmatory surveys confirm that the orientation traits predict work engagement. Further, the twin outcomes of freelancer's work performance and intention to turnover are partially mediated by freelancer's work engagement. Customer feedback in the form of reviews positively moderates the relationship between work engagement and work performance. Platform managers can identify and retain freelance-oriented workers through strategic resource allocation, saving acquisition and branding expenses while growing revenue through enhanced customer experience and transactions.

Keywords: *freelancer, engagement, sharing economy, labor platforms, personal resources, turnover*

*FREELANCE ORIENTATION IN THE SHARING ECONOMY: EVIDENCE  
FROM LABOR PLATFORMS*

BY

*AVISHEK LAHIRI*

*31<sup>st</sup> July 2021*

Committee Chair: *Dr. Naveen Donthu*

Major Academic Unit: *Robinson College of Business – Marketing Department*

## Introduction

Imagine a typical consumer buying scenario. A customer wants to buy athletic shoes for running purpose. She gets a targeted email based on her previous purchases with a shoe brand. Clicking on a link in the email, she reads an article on the “Best shoes for running”. She checks out the brand’s website and social media pages. Finally, she decides to go to the brand store, interacts with the helpful frontline staff, and buys the shoe. It is possible that the email marketer, website manager, social media expert, content writer, and the frontline customer facing staff are all freelancers representing the brand. Around 57 million individuals in the US, one-fourth being skilled workers, participated in freelance labor services in 2019, generating an income of \$1 trillion (MBO Partners 2019; Upwork 2019b). The growth in hiring of non-firm workers (including freelancers or independent contractors) between 2005-15 outpaced the growth in hiring of traditional employees (Katz and Krueger 2019). The acceleration is noticed in other developed and emerging economies globally (Wallenstein et al. 2019), driven partly by the rise of the sharing economy services.

Freelancers are hired by customers (individuals/organizations) as independent contractors to perform roles or tasks on behalf of the customer similar to roles of employees. The difference is that they are not employed by the customer, and do not derive fringe benefits or get job resources. Applying the IRS’ definition of freelancer<sup>1</sup> to a marketing perspective, we consider a freelance service provider (FLSP) to be ‘a person or an entity contracted temporarily to perform work or provide service as a nonemployee to another entity(or entities)’ such as individuals or businesses (Kenton 2019). The freelancer ‘rents’ out their labor assets (time/skill/effort)

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<sup>1</sup> A freelancer or an independent contractor is ‘an individual who has the right to control what work will be done and how it will be done, while the payer retains the control over or directs the job results.’

temporarily and voluntarily without any organizational control. It is an economic exchange where the customer pays the freelancer for the hours worked or the job deliverables, often intermediated by a labor platform. Hiring freelance/independent/gig service workers or simply ‘freelancers’ with the ‘right’ skills can fulfill job demands with minimal training helps organizations or individuals get a higher return on labor. One route is through cost efficiency by incurring less operational expenses (Lepak and Snell 1999) like developmental expenses, supervisory costs, fringe benefits, and search costs (Cappelli and Keller 2013). Another route is enhancing the organization’s flexibility and capability to respond quickly and effectively to shifts in customer demand and technological change (van der Weerdt et al. 2011).

Freelancing offers individuals a source of income, either supplemental or complete. Beyond income, it is an opportunity to develop skills, learn market demands and build a personal brand (Harrington et al. 2015). The surge in freelance service providers or FLSPs can be observed from the expansion in sharing economy, including online platforms that monetize labor assets (Associates 2019; Farrell and Greig 2018). The sharing economy is a collection of different platforms mediating economic transactions of a temporary nature between prosumers gathered on a crowdsourced basis (Eckhardt et al. 2019). Kumar et al. (2018) define it as “the monetization of underutilized assets (capital or time/labor) that are controlled by providers (firms or individuals) through short-term rental”. This generic definition includes diverse platforms such as Uber, Turo, Prosper, Airbnb and Upwork. However, the sharing economy platforms can be divided based on the type of asset being monetized – labor or capital (Farrell et al. 2018).

These labor platforms intermediate services, allowing customers (individuals/organizations) to hire workers on demand and pay on a disaggregated job by job basis. Platforms such as Upwork or Fiverr or Freelancer have business-related professional

services such as content marketing, branding, consulting, etc. Platforms such as Handy or Taskrabbit have personal- or home- related services such as tutoring, plumbing, wellness, etc. Our study focuses on FLSPs who provide professional/personal services to individual or organizational customers within the ecosystem of the labor platforms.

FLSPs offer a paradigm quite different from organizational employees, the focal subjects for most extant research. For example, the FLSP's role overlaps a service worker, a salesperson, and an entrepreneur. The unique work arrangements of FLSPs, such as the absence of organizational resources, supervisory guidance, and predictable income, have service implications. Firstly, FLSPs participate voluntarily in temporary non-exclusive contracts. Customers or intermediaries such as platforms cannot enforce FLSPs' behavior (Hazée, Delcourt, and Van Vaerenbergh 2017), putting the onus on FLSPs to maintain the timeliness, product standard, and service quality. In other words, there can be variance in FLSP's performance. However, customers have opaque expectations regarding the quality of service that will be provided at the time of hiring. Secondly, FLSPs take on backend operational responsibilities adapting to differing job complexities while taking on frontline roles as well i.e., understanding customer requirements and negotiating job/price/payment details. Thirdly, FLSPs<sup>2</sup> are responsible for the growth of their own enterprise by acquiring customers through personal initiative, retaining profitable ones, and building relationships to get referrals and reviews upon successful completion (Bhandari 2017). Lastly, FLSPs do not get relational support from supervisors and peer co-workers that creates a caring work atmosphere or a sense of belonging. The absence of relatedness is linked to stress (Facey and Eakin 2010), fatigue, and burnout

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<sup>2</sup> For the study, we consider the FLSP to be an individual, not an entity of multiple individuals. Also, the individual is not contracted to a single customer or an agency. Therefore, the FLSP is responsible for own taxes on earnings from self-employment filed through a Form 1099-Misc

(Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garrett 2017) among virtual and independent workers. Consequently, scholars draw attention to explore further this emerging and unique phenomenon (Cappelli and Keller 2013; Connelly and Gallagher 2004).

Together, voluntary participation, difficult work environment, lack of relational support can be linked to a higher probability of turnover (Du Plooy and Roodt 2010; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Freelancing does suffer from a high turnover as it is not suitable for all individuals. They join due to the low entry barriers but develop turnover intentions soon after as they are not able to cope with the demands of the role (MBO Partners 2019; Schor and Attwood-Charles 2017). Intermediaries such as sharing economy labor platforms recognize variance in FLSP performance and high FLSP turnover due to low exit barrier as two priority issues that drain resources from building network growth and brand equity (Angie's\_List 2016; Freelancer 2019; Upwork 2019a). Platform's customers are adversely affected by unfinished or delayed projects or shoddy work. Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) found that such inconsistency in service delivery affects trust, commitment, and loyalty toward the focal firm (here, labor platform) due to the poor relationship quality. Further, the platform's network growth, brand image, and revenue collection efforts are undermined. Being two-sided markets, turnover of FLSP can lead to labor platform's customer attrition, in turn making the platform less attractive to prospective FLSPs. Due to intense competition and weak financial results, there is a shift in labor platforms' growth strategy toward niche services and dedicated enterprise customers, ensuring predictable revenue stream and lowering expenses to build brand awareness. Regarding FLSPs, the priority changed from acquiring all types of FLSPs to retaining ones who regularly complete jobs with high performance (McIntyre and Srinivasan 2017).

In the absence of organizational job resources, FLSP's survival and growth depend partly on personal resources that help overcome or reduce the physical and/or psychological demands of the freelancing role (Xanthopoulou et al. 2007). Our study proposes an intrinsic trait-based approach to complement extant extrinsic monetary-based or value-based retention approaches to reduce turnover intentions (Eckhardt et al. 2019) and enhance performance with minimal cost implications. Influenced by the job-demand resources model (Demerouti et al. 2001), we investigate the personal resources such as psychological traits that help FLSPs overcome the physical and/or psychological demands of the freelancing role to persist and perform. We call them FLSP's orientation traits as they indicate suitability toward providing services in a freelancing role.

We suggest that FLSP's work engagement mediates the twin outcomes of FLSP's work performance and probability of turnover (or the strength of the intent to turnover from freelancing). Here, work performance entails freelance job-focused performance. Extant research in marketing show engagement as a behavior (Kumar and Pansari 2016; Van Doorn et al. 2010) while we use the managerial psychology conceptualization of engagement as an attitudinal variable. Bakker and Schaufeli (2015) define work engagement "as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." We include customer feedback in the form of reviews as a moderator.

In summary, we seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the relevant personal resources (i.e., psychological traits) that make an individual worker freelance-oriented?
2. What combination of the orientation traits leads to the FLSP's work engagement?
3. Can we attribute the FLSP's lower turnover probability and higher work performance to her engagement level?

4. Does customer feedback moderate the relationship between work engagement and performance?

We apply our framework to sharing economy labor platforms. The platform earns a commission (typically 15-25%) on the transaction value upon completion of the job. The online professional services market is worth \$7.7 billion (Associates 2019), while personal services market is expected to grow by \$870 billion over 2018-2022 (Technavio 2019). We choose labor platforms as (i) services are increasingly offered through platforms (Parker, Van Alstyne, and Choudary 2016); (ii) these platforms exercise low control in matching FLSPs with their customers and deciding job deliverables, mirroring traditional freelancing; (iii) network growth is the principal risk factor due to high FLSP turnover; (iv) shift in business model toward quality FLSPs (Angie's\_List 2016; Upwork 2019a).

We contribute to the academic literature in the following ways: First, we complement extrinsic retention approaches (Kumar, Dogan, and Lahiri 2021; Ming et al. 2019) by proposing an intrinsic traits-based one with minimal cost implications to give a holistic perspective. Our study helps identify the levers that labor platforms can use to improve their customer experience and brand image, enhancing network growth. Second, we contribute to the utilization of job-demands-resources model (Demerouti et al. 2001; Xanthopoulou et al. 2007) in a triadic work environment - the sharing economy and non-traditional work role - freelancing. Earlier application in marketing is in the case of frontline employees (Lee, Patterson, and Ngo 2017; Yavas and Babakus 2011; Zablah et al. 2012) where organizational resources play a major part in overcoming the job demands. Third, we extend the employee/work/role engagement literature (Du Plooy and Roodt 2010; Kumar and Pansari 2014; Schaufeli, Bakker, and Van Rhenen 2009) by applying it to a self-determined role – FLSP’s engagement. These earlier studies focused on engagement with the organization focusing on constructs such as organizational commitment,



organizational identification, and organizational loyalty. Considering the precariousness of the ‘employment’, role factors may affect work engagement, performance, and turnover intentions. Finally, we enhance the understanding of the sharing economy landscape by studying labor platforms that have not received widespread attention and remain under-researched. Oriented FLSPs are likely to proactively look for transaction opportunities increasing their income and platform’s revenue through commissions. Further, they will actively listen to their customer’s demands, strive to satisfy them even if it involves certain amount of risk taking and self-development efforts. Such efforts improve the platform’s brand image and customer experience. Platform managers can retain oriented FLSPs through strategic resource allocation thereby, saving acquisition and brand awareness expenses while growing revenue through enhanced customer experience and job completions. Further, the platform can develop an image for providing quality FLSPs leading to growth by attracting network effects.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Job Demands-Resources Model: Freelance Orientation**

According to the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Demerouti et al. 2001), every occupation has its factors classified into job demands and resources that enhance the worker’s engagement. Job demands are aspects of the job that require sustained physical and psychological efforts or skills e.g., emotional demands, work pressure. These demands drain the worker physically, cognitively, and emotionally. For instance in service settings, the worker’s stress negatively influences in-role performance (Netemeyer, Maxham III, and Pullig 2005). In a traditional employee-employer setting, job resources e.g., supervisory coaching or feedback, help overcome or reduce these demands or psychological costs to achieve work goals. A favorable balance between job demands and resources reduces the worker’s strain

leading to her engagement. In marketing frontline employee context, Zablah et al. (2012) use the model to explain the impact of job resources in the organization on job performance and propensity to leave mediated through job stress and job engagement. Job demands workload and customer orientation serve as moderators. Another application is by Yavas and Babakus (2011) who explore the connection between job demands, job resources, and burnout and suggest coping mechanisms. Using a dyadic survey data, Stock and Bednarek (2014) adapt the JD-R model to create a customer demands-resources model where the authors examine how customers influence their own satisfaction through their interactions with frontline employees. Another study applies the JD-R model to link frontline employee productivity and customer satisfaction (Lee, Patterson, and Ngo 2017).

JD-R model distinguishes between physical/social resources available in the workplace setting and worker-specific personal resources. These personal resources, such as psychological traits are positive self-evaluations linked to individuals' resiliency and ability to control their environment successfully (Hobfoll et al. 2003). The importance of traits has been acknowledged in effectively delivering services (He et al. 2015a), frontline performance, and turnover intentions (Zablah et al. 2012). FLSPs depend to a greater degree on their personal resources than traditional employees. Personal resources strengthen intrinsic work motivation and enhance the positive effect of job autonomy on work engagement (Van den Broeck et al. 2011). We consider the freelance orientation traits as the FLSP's personal resources that balance internal control and autonomy seeking mechanisms. For example, an individual may have chosen freelancing to have more control over her schedule but will have to adapt to changing customer needs and meet strict timelines of all his/her customers.

#### *Exploring Freelance Orientation Traits*

Schaufeli and Taris (2014) in their review on the links between personal resources and engagement state that there is ‘no single best way’ of extending JD-R model to include personal resources. Our introspection reveals that these personal resources or psychological traits need to be explored as per our context and occupational realities. We conduct our investigation in the broad spectrum of freelancing, subsequently narrowing it down to our context of sharing economy labor platforms. In line with recent works in marketing (Homburg, Theel, and Hohenberg 2020; Warren et al. 2019), we draw upon four exploratory approaches to uncover the freelance orientation traits: *interdisciplinary literature review*, *semi-structured qualitative interviews*, *content analysis of popular press articles*, and *surveys* with open- and close-ended questions on Amazon M-Turk. Initially, we start with the literature review to generate a wide range of traits that maybe applicable to frontline/service roles as an employee or an entrepreneur. Through the interviews, we can narrow the applicable traits within the context of providing services as a freelancer. The content analysis is a validation step. We analyze articles pertaining to traits that are important for freelancers to perform and be successful. The articles come mainly from the freelancer forums and the community blogs written by FLSPs. It is supplemented with consultancy and management reports. This triangulation approach consistently yields six traits in a ranked manner. To confirm the ranking and importance of these traits, we conduct surveys with FLSPs. In the nine exploratory surveys, we gathered additional information on the nature of involvement, customer or personal hurdles, platform related issues, motivation, goals etc.

### **Interdisciplinary literature review**

The role of the FLSP overlaps with a service worker, a frontline marketing worker, and an entrepreneur. To ideate the relevant orientation traits, we inspect the literature on our outcomes of interest (i.e., work or job performance, job or role or work engagement, and intent

to turnover). The extant literature on freelancers concentrates on the differences with organizational employees however not in the purview of traits. For example, Gallagher and Sverke (2005) argue that in the absence of employer-employee relationship, multiple competing priorities, and roles that are not bound to an organization, the organizational concepts of identification, involvement, and commitment need to be reconsidered. Accordingly, we limit our findings to non-organization related traits. For instance, we do not consider organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

In the context of service employees, Brown et al. (2002) and He et al. (2015b) explore the role of big 5 personality traits on job performance. They find customer orientation to be a key mechanism to improve performance. For frontline service employees, Karatepe and Aga (2012) suggest that work engagement functions as a full mediator between customer orientation and turnover intentions. Babakus, Yavas, and Ashill (2010) add that both customer orientation and servant leadership significantly reduce burnout (opposite of engagement) and ultimately turnover intentions. Therefore, we find customer orientation is an essential trait in providing service in a frontline role.

Further, literature on entrepreneurs reveals a range of traits that are applicable for FLSPs – self-efficacy, proactivity, tenacity, flexibility/improvisational behavior, and need for achievement (Hmieleski and Corbett 2008; Rauch and Frese 2007). Business owners' personality traits were positively related to business creation and business success (Rauch and Frese 2007). Further, improvisational behavior was found to have a positive relationship with new venture performance (i.e., sales growth) who were high in entrepreneurial self-efficacy and opposite effect for low entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Hmieleski and Corbett 2008). Additionally, we find support for self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience in the managerial psychology literature

(Vink, Ouweneel, and Le Blanc 2011; Xanthopoulou et al. 2007). Personal resources such as self-efficacy (Bandura 2010) shape the way people perceive and react to their work environment and job characteristics. Please refer to Table 1 as a review of interdisciplinary literature with regards to traits of marketing employees with our outcomes of interest.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

### **Semi-structured Interviews - Exploratory**

We conduct 15 qualitative telephonic interviews with FLSPs recruited through varied sources – LinkedIn, labor platforms, and personal contacts. The purpose of the interviews is to understand the experiences of the freelancers. We probe regarding their hurdles to find jobs, issues faced with customers, lifestyle-related challenges, and the support they get from platforms. The knowledge of such experiences helps us get a sense of the traits that FLSPs require to traverse through the freelance environment. Therefore, our sample included freelancers who are providing freelance labor services. The interviews lasted between 45 – 60 minutes each. Respondents were between the age of 23 - 56 years of age, with freelance experience between 6 months to 6 years. They were from different fields – information technology, brand marketing, software consultant, and others. About 30% of the respondents were female. We follow an iterative interview process where the initial responses and discussions finetune the following interview questions (Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012). Data analysis involved a continual process of comparison between interview recording, notes by the one of the authors of the study, interpretations of comments and experiences, and study expectations (Spiggle 1994). After each interview was completed, the researchers discussed the overall takeaway from the FLSP and whether the traits revealed through literature were applicable to the freelance scenario. They discussed further the generalizability to other FLSPs

and how it can be utilized by labor platforms. As the analysis progressed and new categories of experiences and traits emerged from the data, we revised the list of traits derived from the literature.

We allow for open-ended answers to attenuate interviewer influence. The questions revolved around the FLSP's suitability and success in freelancing. For example, "In your opinion, what traits are essential to survive as a FLSP?"; "What are the personality traits that help the FLSP to complete more jobs?"; "What are the traits that help you overcome challenges during freelancing?" Moreover, we interviewed 3 customers of FLSPs and 5 labor platform managers. We ask the customers, "What were the psychological qualities of the FLSP(s) that you were looking for while hiring?" and "Describe the traits of a FLSP that you worked with who successfully completed the job." The labor platform managers responded to "Describe the traits of FLSPs who persist on the platform."; "Are FLSPs with certain traits more likely to turnover/churn? What are those traits?"

Our investigation unfolds the following traits to be vital. Most respondents mention "self-discipline" or "self-control" as an essential trait. FLSPs are expected to be very organized in their work having set timetables as they work independently. The second trait most agree on is being professional or satisfying the customer. Being adaptable or flexible was mentioned primarily in the customer context. Therefore, we place it in the same bucket as customer orientation. The third aspect that came out was being proactive. Respondents mentioned initiative or networking capability or go-getter to indicate proactivity. The fourth aspect is resilience, also referred to as being persistent or patient in the face of adversity or low demand conditions. Some representative quotes are as shown below:

“The most common reason for starting out as a freelancer is the ability to be your own boss. No more working with control-freak management, no more being clocked in and out of the office, no more getting told off for being late you are the master of your own ship, and that's a great way to feel.” – FLSP with 1 year of experience in Social Media Marketing

“Freelancing gives you pride in a job well done. Making your customers happy is a thrill. Seeing them come back time and again for more work is incredibly fulfilling. You make things happen as if you are a business owner, and every business owner comes to love that feeling.”

### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e., text) (Columbia 2020). We conduct a text-based content analysis of 291 popular press articles on freelancing. 148 articles are related to the major freelance labor platforms – Upwork, Toptal, and Freelancer in the form of company reports (18) or community blogs written mostly by FLSPs on these platforms. The second source of 73 articles comes from independent FLSPs’ blogs on Hackernoon, Medium, or other channels, including own blogs. The focus on articles written by FLSPs is deliberate as we extract information from the ‘field’. The sources are verified as they are associated with freelancing. In other case, the FLSPs post regularly with examples from their work. We want to balance the rigor by considering articles written by reporters and academics on popular media outlets such as First Company, Forbes, and strategic management focused channels such as HBR, SHRM, and university blogs. Here, we find 54 articles. Finally, to get the overall picture on freelancing, future of work, and contingent workers, we look at 16 consultancy reports by MBO Partners, BCG, Randstad, and others. All articles are published from 2010 onward till date.

After enforcing a stricter criterion of relevant traits for freelancing success, we narrow down our list to 89 articles using the Quanteda R package. Next, we identify words or phrases e.g., passion, personal brand, stand out or self-motivated, self-discipline. Due to the exploratory nature of the analysis, it was not possible or recommended to completely automate the process by enforcing a certain number of concepts or using a dictionary. Therefore, we manually read the articles keeping a flexible approach, coding traits into five buckets derived from the earlier literature review/interviews. We counted for the frequency of the relevant trait.

### **Online Surveys – Exploratory**

We administer multiple cross-sectional surveys to confirm the important personal resources or psychological traits on Amazon M-Turk. Additionally, we delve into the FLSP's reasons for participation, motivation, aspirations, nature of involvement, experience with their role, among others. To get quality responses, we selected M-Turk Masters qualification who have over 85% HIT (Human Intelligence Task) approval rate and at least 50 HITs. Another qualifying criteria was that they must have provided personal or professional services in the past 6 months. As the M-Turk platform is subject to data quality issues, stringent care is taken to remove low quality respondents, following Buchanan and Scofield (2018). For example, we eliminate 12 participants who completed the survey too fast or too slow ( $\pm 2$  SD from the mean survey time), failed attention checks, missed control questions, or filled the survey multiple times.

We learn the two major reasons for individuals ( $n= 134$ ) to choose freelancing: Autonomy (to do any kind of work) and Extra money. For a sub-section of the sample, personal brand (to be famous) is a priority. Self-learning and development, unpredictable income, and no benefits are ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd as the conditions that respondents dislike about freelancing.



FLSPs want more support and opportunities to be independent. Individuals point to uncertainty in the form of ‘inconsistent jobs’ and ‘unpredictable income’ as reasons to turnover. One possible reason that 71% and 21% of the respondents (n=496) are full-time or part-time employed. Job completion is of primary importance. Of 101 respondents, 32% strongly agree, 30% agree, and 31% somewhat agree that completing a freelance job equates to success in freelancing. Completion of a job has roll-on benefits to get paid, referred, and repeat business.

The most important traits from the survey in order are self-efficacy, customer orientation, proactivity, risk-taking propensity, integrity, and cultural understanding. Overall, we found consistency across all our exploratory methods for the first four traits. Table 2 shows the results of all the exploratory methods. To confirm the face validity of the words and their associated buckets, we asked two academics and two FLSPs. The inter-rater reliability after the first round is 93%. For the detailed results of the exploratory surveys, kindly refer to Web Appendices W4 and W5.

--- Insert Table 2 about here ---

## **Conceptual Framework**

### ***Overview***

As Table 2 shows, we predict that the combination of four orientation traits helps the FLSPs perform better and reduce their probability of turnover from freelancing. Work engagement partially mediates the relationship between the orientation traits and work performance as well as between orientation traits and the probability of turnover.

### ***FLSP’s Customer Orientation***

Empirical studies conceptualize frontline employee customer orientation in one of two ways: (1) as a set of employee behaviors aimed at engendering customer satisfaction (Saxe and Weitz 1982) or (2) as a psychological variable (e.g., attitude or surface trait) that motivates employees to satisfy customers' needs (Zablah et al. 2012). FLSPs are dependent on meeting and satisfying customer needs for their sustenance through repeat business and referrals upon successful completion (Bhandari 2017). FLSPs need to be flexible to changing customer needs, respond effectively, and adapt to non-standard task environments. Our exploratory surveys show that the “unclear freelance job objective” followed by “changing customer requirement” and “customers ask for a lot of rework” rank as the three most important customer-related impediments (n=62) to complete a job. However, unlike frontline service employees, FLSPs do not receive guidance on appropriate behavior with customers through supervisory mentorship, on the job training, and shadowing current employees. Therefore, meeting customer demands can be challenging leading to depletion of psychological resources. In such circumstances, FLSPs will cease to engage with their work with a high level of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Customer orientation is linked with higher job satisfaction in frontline roles (Karatepe and Aga 2012) and service roles (Donavan, Brown, and Mowen 2004). Such FLSPs have the best interests of their customers in mind. Accordingly, they expend effort and enhance their ability to satisfy needs beyond requirement. Simultaneously, they enjoy serving customers stemming from their personal desire and interest. Customer orientation plays a vital role in the individual service person’s work performance (Franke and Park 2006; Zablah et al. 2012) and commitment to service quality (Elmadağ, Ellinger, and Franke 2008). Further, customer orientation influences the worker’s turnover intention (Babakus, Yavas, and Ashill 2010).

H<sub>1a</sub>: FLSP’s customer orientation positively affects FLSP’s work engagement.

EG<sub>1b</sub>: FLSP's customer orientation positively affects FLSP's work performance.

EG<sub>1c</sub>: FLSP's customer orientation negatively affects FLSP's probability of turnover from freelancing.

### ***FLSP's Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy is the individual's belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura 2010). The challenge that FLSPs as frontline workers face is heterogeneity in customers, jobs, software, and platforms. Each customer has unique needs and demands that require the FLSP to adapt their behavior, timelines, and attitudes. Such improvisational episodes tend to impose higher cognitive overload on FLSPs as they lack organization mechanisms that help in coping or adaptation. Organizations have learning tools and knowledge repositories where employees can look at past case studies to find a roadmap. Further, there is no feedback from the supervisor or peers to share the task. Our exploratory surveys suggest that "household responsibilities" and "balancing multiple freelance jobs" are top personal hurdles (n=62) FLSPs face to complete a job. In many cases, the FLSP is also employed full-time or part-time that take away time from fulfilling freelancing responsibilities.

Managing these multiple tasks require a high level of self-discipline, confidence in one's ability to problem solve efficiently, and resilience to unforeseen obstacles. Self-efficacious individuals possess these qualities. Self-efficacy can help them overcome the cognitive load. Self-efficacious FLSPs tend to set challenging goals, persist toward achieving them even in arduous conditions, recover quickly from failure, and be more satisfied with their jobs (Bandura, Freeman, and Lightsey 1999). The FLSPs who aspire to set up and grow their freelance enterprise require confidence in their ability to perform multi-function activities related to finance, marketing, management, and other aspects (Forbes 2005). Therefore, the self-efficacy

trait motivates FLSPs to expend more effort. As per the JD-R theory, self-efficacy is a personal resource related to work engagement (Lorente et al. 2014; Xanthopoulou et al. 2007) and performance (Judge and Bono 2001). As self-efficacious FLSPs persist towards their goal, they are likely to have lower probability of leaving the freelancing role.

H<sub>2a</sub>: FLSP's self-efficacy positively affects FLSP's work engagement.

EG<sub>2b</sub>: FLSP's self-efficacy positively affects FLSP's work performance.

EG<sub>2c</sub>: FLSP's self-efficacy negatively affects FLSP's probability of turnover.

### ***FLSP's Risk-taking Propensity through Competence***

The FLSP is an overlap between a frontline service worker and an entrepreneur. Similar to entrepreneurs, it is necessary for the FLSP to display risk-taking propensity through behaviors such as taking a project with the intention to build relationship with the customer. Risk-taking propensity may be imperative in a work environment with low job resources and limited social support (Meijman et al. 1998). FLSPs do not have a predictable income which has consequences on their ability to fulfill household and work-related expenses. Additionally, certain guaranteed provisions of regular employment are limited or not available such as health/medical insurance, retirement/social security benefits, and holidays/sick leaves.

Customers give priority to the FLSP's ability to 'get the work done' over titular educational credentials. To successfully acquire a work order, the FLSP needs to demonstrate her risk-taking propensity through portfolio of work and relevant experience - freelancing or employment (Sept 2017; Valdez 2019). Such experience serves as a differentiator that helps the customer to narrow the consideration set of FLSPs. It builds the risk-taking ability that explains performance and productivity up to a point as the FLSP acquires the appropriate prior mental programming and 'on the job' training (Chamorro-Premuzic and Frankiewicz 2019). Therefore,

it promotes commitment and loyalty to the role (Martensen and Grønholdt 2006). However, high-risk-taking behavior may hamper work performance.

H<sub>3a</sub>: FLSP's risk-taking propensity has an inverse U-shaped relationship with the FLSP's work engagement.

H<sub>3b</sub>: FLSP's risk-taking propensity has an inverse U-shaped relationship with the FLSP's work performance.

H<sub>3c</sub>: FLSP's risk-taking propensity has a U-shaped relation with the FLSP's probability of turnover.

### ***FLSP's Proactivity through Emphasis on Strategic Time Use***

Crant (1996) states that a proactive individual is one "who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces and who effects environmental change." Proactive individuals identify opportunities, show initiative and act on them until they bring about meaningful change.

The FLSP works in a flexible work environment that affords her the autonomy to set tasks and short-term goals or to manage their time use. The FLSP acting with a sense of volition chooses when, where, and how to participate. Time-use refers to the amount devoted to work and its allocation over a particular period (Evans, Kunda, and Barley 2004). FLSPs need to assiduously use their freelancing time as it affects work-related outcomes e.g., task completion and work engagement (Sonnetag 2003) and non-work outcomes like personal health, family relationships, and well-being (Moen, Kelly, and Lam 2013). Since the FLSP's time-use is not shaped by social factors such as norms, values, organizational policies, and cultural narratives, its allocation can signal proactivity.

The FLSP can allocate activities between operational and strategic time use. The operational part entails focusing on existing opportunities to harvest cash or firefighting day-to-day crises, for example unforeseen delays. FLSPs need to finish the customer's work on time with minimal rework and provide the desired level of service. Operational time use activities can

form the customers' perceptions (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates 2013). The strategic aspect refers to improving processes, learning/mastering skills, and business development (Yoo, Corbett, and Roels 2016). Strategic time use has subsequent consequences towards building the FLSP's personal brand through activities that lead a person to be known and reputed in their line of service e.g., creating a website, posting on social networks, and others. FLSPs may need to allocate substantial amounts of time to the day-to-day management (i.e., operational activities) balancing with time devoted to shaping the freelance enterprise's future (i.e., strategic activities). However, FLSPs who allocate relatively more time to strategic than operational activities up to a point indicate their forward-looking proactivity (Piva 2018; Rauch and Frese 2007).

H<sub>4a</sub>: FLSP's proactivity through an emphasis on strategic time use has a U-shaped relationship with the FLSP's work engagement.

H<sub>4b</sub>: FLSP's proactivity through an emphasis on strategic time use has a U-shaped relationship with the FLSP's work performance.

H<sub>4c</sub>: FLSP's proactivity through an emphasis on strategic time use negatively influences the FLSP's probability of turnover.

#### ***FLSP's Work Engagement as a Mediator***

Work affects the quality of the life and mental health of the individual (Harter, Schmidt, and Keyes 2003). The advantages of embracing a freelancing role - autonomy, variety, skill development, recognition (e.g., through referrals), and direct customer feedback (e.g., through reviews) get diminished due to role ambiguity, role overload from challenging tasks, reduced support, lack of supervisory feedback and other lifestyle-related obstacles. Therefore, the FLSP needs to be engaged with her work to overcome the disadvantages of the role (Rich, Lepine, and Crawford 2010).

Engagement is a multidimensional construct having behavioral or attitudinal conceptualizations (Kumar and Pansari 2016). To understand freelancer's engagement with the

role, let us consider the extant literature on employee-related engagement concepts. In marketing, (Kumar & Pansari, 2015) define employee engagement as a function of the employee's identification, loyalty, commitment, satisfaction, and performance with the organization. Zablah et al. (2012) consider job engagement to be a combination of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Kahn (1990) proposes the concept of personal engagement - psychological attributes of meaningfulness, safety and availability. Psychological meaningfulness involves job characteristics such as challenging work, variety, personal creativity, and contribution. Safety and availability are not applicable to freelancing as they rely on supervisory relations, co-worker norms and participation in outside activities. Researchers posit engagement as the opposite of burnout (González-Romá et al. 2006). Burnout is a form of psychological strain, while engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter 2001).

We find the definition of work engagement offered by (Bakker and Schaufeli 2015) to be appropriate for FLSP's context. They define engagement "as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." Vigor refers to the level of energy, the mental resilience, and the willingness to invest effort in one's work. Dedication refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption captures the state of being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed, suggesting an enjoyment of the work. They further state that engagement is "a persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state."

Engagement focuses on the duty of effective role performance. Engaged workers use their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to attain their goals (Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Hofmann 2011), while non-engaged ones perform the requirements of the role without revealing

their true identity, ideas, or feelings (Kahn 1990). FLSPs who are engaged with their work continue to work with enthusiasm, pride, and resilience to overcome the initial challenges faced to obtain and complete jobs. Multiple studies link engagement to positive work outcomes: (1) positive work-related attitudes; (2) work performance; (3) creating own job resources; (4) better psychological and physical health (Bakker and Schaufeli 2015; Schaufeli, Bakker, and Van Rhenen 2009). Further, engaged workers satisfy their customers and perform their in-role responsibilities better than non-engaged workers (Salanova, Agut, and Peiró 2005) and harbor lower turnover intentions (Du Plooy and Roodt 2010).

H<sub>5a</sub>: FLSPs' work engagement mediates the relationship between their orientation traits and their work performance.

H<sub>5b</sub>: FLSPs' work engagement mediates the relationship between their orientation traits and their probability of turnover from freelancing.

### ***FLSP's Customer Feedback as a Moderator***

In the absence of peer support and supervisory guidance, FLSPs look for alternative sources to improve their work performance. Feedback is essential since the interaction between the FLSP and the customer is limited to transactional and mostly virtual environments. Personalized constructive feedback bridges the gap created by the lack of supervision by reducing the discrepancy between actual and desired performance (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Feedback, positive (e.g., praise) or negative (e.g., criticism), is related to specific performance measures with the end goal of improving overall work performance (Folger and Konovsky 1989). FLSPs have the advantage of getting feedback directly from their customers. It can be public in the form of reviews or private through customer-FLSP conversations during or post jobs. Engaged FLSPs are likely to take the feedback constructively as they are dedicated to their



work and looking for measures to improve their performance. Moreover, constructive feedback signals that the customer cares about the FLSP's work and may act as a confidence booster and a motivation tool. Therefore, feedback can help providers to understand their current status, goal progress, and course correction, if necessary (Anderson and Oliver 1987).

H<sub>6</sub>: FLSP customer's feedback further enhances the positive relation between FLSPs' work engagement and their work performance.

We present our conceptual framework in Figure 1.

--- Insert Figure 1 ---

### ***Study Context – Sharing Economy Labor Platforms***

We expect the proposed conceptual framework to hold for freelancing in general nevertheless, we illustrate the constructs relating to platforms that monetize labor assets. Labor platforms constitute a substantial and rapidly growing vertical of the sharing economy i.e., professional services and personal services. We can divide professional services platforms into mainstream that provide multiple categories (e.g., Upwork, Fiverr, Toptal) and niche (e.g., Ilmosys for Designers, Samasource for low-income workers in developing countries, MOMentum for stay-at-home working mothers). Professional services encompass any freelance service related to business from marketing roles like SEO consultant, digital marketing strategist, content writer or non-marketing roles such as accountant, legal adviser, and network engineer (Associates 2019). By contrast, personal services cover home improvement or personal enhancement of individual customers. Personal services are poised to grow by USD 1,574.86 billion during 2020-2024, progressing at a CAGR of over 53% during the forecast period (Technavio 2019). Personal services platforms offer various services aimed at individuals or organizations that are not directly business related. Typically, these roles are for skills that

customers hire on demand for a short period like that of a chef (Chefseed), a tour guide (Airbnb Xperiences), a plumber (Taskrabbit, ANGI Homeservices), a researcher (Kolabtree), and others.

Labor platforms, public and private, want to retain effective FLSPs in a cost-efficient manner as they focus on network growth and profitability. Customers select FLSPs and vice versa, emphasizing the relationship, value fit, and growth potential rather than only the listed rate or skills. The reasons we consider labor platforms to be appropriate to test a trait-based strategy are: (1) The individual, including her psychological or non-psychological traits, is the focal deciding point of every transaction creating the urge to have the best profile signaling proactivity.

(2) The matching is jointly decided by the FLSP and the customer, not the platform highlighting negotiations and the use of traits such as risk-taking propensity, proactivity, and customer orientation.

(3) The work-related outcomes such as time milestones, job deliverables, and budget depend on the FLSP's self-efficacy.

(4) The FLSP and the customer communicate directly on multiple occasions emphasizing on the customer-orientation aspect.

(5) The FLSP and the customer can match multiple times presenting a relationship building opportunity for customer centered FLSPs.

(6) The global marketplace offers opportunities for proactive and risk-taking FLSPs to scan the environment.

In capital platforms such as Airbnb (space) or Cohealo (equipment) or Lending Club (money), customers are more concerned about the characteristics of the capital asset rather than the service provider (i.e., freelancer). In mixed platforms such as ridesharing, food or grocery delivery, where both capital and labor are required to fulfill the task (driver plus vehicle), the

matching, the rates, and the assignment details are all controlled by the platform. In these situations, the individual's choice is low as the assignment tends to be local, short duration, and relatively simple. Finally, we surmise that our framework's emphasis on individual traits may not be particularly relevant for crowdsourcing labor platforms such as Amazon M-Turk (all tasks) or Cloudfactory (data labeling). In crowdsourcing platforms, assignments are short and low value. In addition, the matching is FLSP initiated but governed by customers to an extent through qualifications.

--- Insert Figure 2 here ---

## **Methodology**

### ***Data***

We collect data using cross-sectional surveys through the crowdsourcing platform, Prolific Academic. Studies show Prolific to have less naïve and dishonest survey takers and generally higher responses compared to Amazon M-Turk (Peer et al. 2017). We put a pre-condition that the respondent has at least 95% approval rate to get quality responses. We ask two qualifying questions in addition to the consent question. Sixty respondents in total either did not qualify or did not consent. We do not find a systematic difference in the profiles of the non-responders. First, we ask whether they provide professional or personal services after giving definitions and examples of the services. Second, we accept responses of participants who are more than 18 years old. Beyond these qualifications, we do not put any restrictions as we want a representative sample. Before running the survey, we conduct pretests as directed by (Hulland, Baumgartner, and Smith 2018) to check the efficacy, reliability, and validity of items and the constructs measured. We modify the language of the questions to get the most accurate responses.

There are many concerns associated with survey research that we address through our design. To ensure that we are getting the response from the sample of our interest, we ask a qualifying question related to the personal or business service that the respondent provides. We use geographic boundaries to get responses from developed economies such as the USA, the UK, and other OECD countries to reduce the incentive bias. Our sample is 70% European and 25% North American. Acquiescence bias (also known as agreement bias) in which respondents tend to agree with positive response option in agree-disagree format. In our case, pretest results show that the respondents tend to agree with the strongest positive option To alleviate the concern of acquiescence bias (Research 2021), we undertake the following precautions. Based on the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the pretest variables, we retest using slight wording changes. For example, the statement “I enjoy responding to my customer’s requests” is changed to “I enjoy responding to my customer’s requests at any time of the day”. Such wording changes create more specific situations forcing the respondent to choose between the Likert scale options (e.g., agree instead of strongly agree). Additionally, we use reverse coding of the Likert scale items. To avoid primacy or recency bias in responses, we randomize answer choices for non-Likert items.

Common method bias is the variance derivable from research design or data collection rather than the constructs the instrument intended to measure. It is a challenge in surveys where the independent and the dependent variables are gathered from the same source (Hulland, Baumgartner, and Smith 2018). Following these authors’ advice on a priori techniques to control the bias, we implement physical distance between the dependent and independent variables. The dependent variables come first in order so that the respondents are not influenced by the researcher’s hypothesis. Further, we conceal the true purpose of the study by suggesting that we

want to understand FLSP's experience in general. Separately, we implement features in our survey to avoid duplicate or bot responses. We employ negative worded or control questions to ensure the reliability of responses. We exclude 5 responses that were completed too fast or too slow or used 'straight lining'. Further, 7 are excluded due to bots or duplicate entries. We ask general questions first and then specific ones to avoid priming that may lead to question order effect bias. Lastly, given that the survey was about 16-19 minutes long (average time ~18.33 minutes), we put attention checks to confirm the validity of the responses. Only one respondent failed it.

We present a brief outline of our respondents in the final survey. Our total number of respondents is 537. The gender ratio is 57.7%-41.3% in favor of males. The respondents that claim to be single comprise 51.8%, 18.8% are married, and 27.9% have a partner. Of the married or ones with a partner, 76.8% say that their partner earns individually. The respondents do not belong to high income brackets. 30.7% belong to \$0-\$25,000, 28.1% to \$25,001-\$50,000 and 14.2% to \$50,001-\$75,000. 10.4% of the respondents chose not to respond. The three major education brackets that the participants have completed are High School (25.9%), Bachelor's (39.5%), and Master's (19.6%). We follow the generational definition as per Pew Research center (Dimock 2019). Our respondents primarily are from Generation Z (38.4%), followed by Generation Y (43%) and Generation X (14.2%), representative of other reports on freelancing. For example, a recent survey by Payoneer has 70% of their participants under the age of 35 (Payoneer 2020). In our sample, it is 72.7%. According to their global survey, the rate per hour is \$21. Our survey pertains to OECD countries. As expected, the rate is slightly higher at \$30.73. We notice that 43% of our respondents are full-time freelancers, 28.7% are full-time employees, and 28.3% are part-time employees. These numbers are different from our exploratory survey

due to either the platform – Prolific Academic instead of Amazon M-Turk or overinflation in the exploratory surveys due to non-randomization of answer choices.

### ***Measures***

#### ***Substantive Variables***

*Customer orientation:* We adapt the established (Brown et al. 2002) scale using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree – 7=strongly disagree). Therefore, a lower score signifies higher customer orientation. However, to be consistent with other substantive and control variables, we inverted the coding (1=strongly disagree – 7=strongly agree) to reflect higher score as higher customer orientation value. The authors define customer orientation by the employees' tendency to meet customer needs and the extent to which they enjoy meeting these needs. We consider customer orientation as a first order construct including both enjoyment and needs items totaling 8 items. Following Edvardsson et al. (2014), we consider customer orientation as a reflective measure. Based on freelancing context, factor loadings, and item-wise reliability scores, we exclude items that indicate higher Cronbach's alpha when removed. Our final construct has 6 items. We conduct (CFA) of the model. It displays a good fit based on the measures suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). The path coefficients between the indicators and the first-order factors were significant at the  $\alpha = .05$  level. We use the factor score generated through regression. Regression factor scores predict the location of each individual on the factor or component. These predictor variables are weighted by regression coefficients so that each factor's loading is taken into consideration. The coefficients are obtained by multiplying the inverse of the observed variable correlation matrix by the matrix of factor loadings and, in the case of oblique factors, the factor correlation matrix. In our case, we use a maximum likelihood extraction strategy with direct oblimin rotation to preserve obliqueness (non-orthogonality). Maximum-Likelihood factor extraction method produces parameter estimates that are most likely to have produced the

observed correlation matrix if the sample is from a multivariate normal distribution. See Table 3 for more details of the confirmatory factor analysis.

*Self-efficacy:* We adapt a combination of the Generalized Self Efficacy scales developed by (Sherer et al. 1982; Woodruff and Cashman 1993) by measuring it on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree – 7=strongly disagree). FLSP's lower score indicates higher self-efficacy. Similar to customer orientation, we inverted the scale so that high score signals higher self-efficacy. In our specification, self-efficacy is a first order construct consisting of 7 items based on the pretest results. Our CFA of the first order model indicates good fit and the path coefficients of all the items to the factor are significant at the  $\alpha = .05$  level. We use the regression-based self-efficacy factor scores derived from maximum likelihood extraction with direct oblimin rotation. See Table 3 for details of the confirmatory factor analysis.

*Risk-taking propensity:* We measure it by directly asking them to indicate their risk-taking propensity on a 7-point measure (1= Hate taking risk; 7= Love taking risk).

*Proactivity through Strategic Emphasis:* We calculate strategic emphasis as the number of hours spent on strategic matters such as development of the freelance enterprise (or strategic time use). It is positively skewed with a high kurtosis.

*Work engagement:* We use the short version of the UWES work engagement scale developed by (Schaufeli 2004) on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree – 7=strongly disagree) consisting of 9 items. Once again, we inverted the scale so that a higher score implies higher work engagement level. While it consists of three components, we consider it as a monolithic construct based on exploratory pretest results where only 6 items load on one factor. We decide to use the parsimonious work engagement scale in the final survey. In crowdsourcing platforms such as Prolific Academic, attention span is low, and we did not want to burden respondents. It is in line

with (Sonnentag 2003), who did not find a clear 3 factor structure. Our CFA shows a good fit and significant indicator loadings. We use the regression-based factor scores derived from maximum likelihood extraction with direct oblimin rotation. See Table 3 for more details.

*Work Performance:* There is a concern of common method bias due to self-reported measures. As a result, we utilize multiple self-reported measures to get weighted scores. *Work performance* consists of the following freelance job-related components: (i) completion rate measured as the percentage of completed freelance job(s) that were started; (ii) overbudget rate measured as the percentage of jobs that were completed above the customer's budget; (iii) late completion rate measured as the percentage of jobs that were completed after deadline; and (iv) revision rate measured as the percentage of jobs completed with rework or revisions. Completion rate has a positive skew while the other three components have negative skews. Therefore, to compute the weighted score, we invert overbudget, late completion, and revision rates (i.e., 1- overbudget rate, 1- late completion rate, and 1- revision rate) and take an average of the four scores.

Each aspect in our work performance score is equally weighted or 25%. Established platforms use similar weighted scores. Upwork's job success score is a combination of feedback, repeat contracts, earnings per transaction (Upwork 2021). Freelancer.com aggregates number of reviews, job completion rate, jobs completed on time, jobs completed on budget, repeat hire rate, earnings score, and average star rating (Freelancer 2021).

*Probability of turnover:* We ask respondents to indicate their probability of leaving freelancing on a scale of 0-100 (0 means definitely not leave, 100 is definitely leave). The action of turnover is preceded by its immediate determinant of the intent to turnover or leave/quit (Ajzen and Fishbein 1974), where the FLSP considers returning to traditional employment or any other form of activity separate from freelancing e.g., entrepreneurship. The stronger the intention to perform



the behavior, the more likely the behavior will be performed. Hence, the probability of turnover refers to the strength of the FLSP's intention to leave freelancing. Theoretically and in cases where data is scarce, intent to turnover is a good predictor of actual turnover (Van Breukelen, Van der Vlist, and Steensma 2004). We determine the probability of turnover instead of asking their intent in order to get a continuous measure. Since it is a probability score, we use the log probability of turnover in our estimations.

*Customer Feedback:* We can measure customer feedback only through public measures as private feedback is privy between the customer and the FLSP. Reviews are a direct form of feedback. Online reviews can be of positive, negative, mixed, and neutral valence. As we don't have access to FLSP's profiles, we ask FLSPs for the volume of reviews received in the past 6 months. We calculate the review rate by dividing the number of reviews by the number of jobs started. The reason for this operationalization is to be consistent across FLSPs belonging to different service verticals. The time taken to complete a job is diverse. For example, a website developer may take 3 months to create the website whereas a handyman can do multiple jobs in a day.

### ***Control Variables***

We include control variables to account for alternative explanations:

*Freelance Time:* The total number of hours per week spent by the FLSP on all freelancing-related activities.

*Personal Development:* The importance given on a scale of 1-7 to activities that develop a person's capabilities and potential e.g., learning skills, knowledge to be successful as FLSP. Personal development activities are an indicator of intrinsic goals. Higher number indicates higher importance on personal development.

*Personal Branding:* The transactional work environment is designed to reward extrinsic signals. For example, on sharing economy labor platforms, the FLSPs' profiles show the total earnings (financial success), platform recognition like Top talent (fame), and ratings (image) as signs of quality and trustworthiness of the FLSPs. Thus, personal branding is an indicator of giving priority to extrinsic goals. The importance given on a scale of 1-7 to activities that lead to be known and reputed in the FLSP's line of service e.g., recognition, achievement to be successful as a FLSP.

*Autonomy:* The importance given by the FLSP to autonomy at work on a scale of 1-7. A higher value indicates higher importance on autonomy.

*Role Identification:* Individuals who identify with the role are likely to perform well and harbor lower turnover intentions. We adapt the employee identification scale used in (Baron et al. 2009) to the freelancing role by using three items on 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree – 7=strongly disagree). We reverse coded the items to suggest that a higher value indicates higher identification. We use the regression-based identification factor score derived from maximum likelihood extraction with direct oblimin rotation. See Table 3 for details regarding the CFA.

*Level of Education:* The educational attainment of the FLSP may have a bearing on the opportunities to get absorbed back into the traditional workforce.

*Income:* Our respondent indicated their household income based on pre-determined categories. The categories are \$0-\$25000; \$25001-\$50000; \$50001-\$75000; \$75001-\$100000; \$100000 and above.

*Participation Motivation:* Participation motivation has a relation with work engagement (Schaufeli and Salanova 2007). Following (Tremblay et al. 2009), we compute a self-determination index score for motivation by summing the means of each of the three self-

determined positive (Intrinsic, Integrated, and Identified) and two non-self-determined negative (Introjected and Extrinsic) motivation subscales as per self-determination continuum (Deci and Ryan 2008). We do not measure amotivation as part of non-self-determination as we collect responses from respondents who are participating in freelancing. Accordingly, we apportion the sum among two negative subscales to match the three positive subscales. The range of possible scores on the self-determination index is between +/- 36 for a 7-point Likert-type scale reflecting individuals' relative level of self-determination. A positive score indicates a self-determined profile, and a negative score indicates a non-self-determined profile.

*Role Stress:* If a FLSP is not able to cope with the expectations associated with the multiple roles, she will experience role stress. Among frontline service workers, role stress a negative impact on work satisfaction and employee turnover (Bettencourt and Brown 2003; De Ruyter, Wetzels, and Feinberg 2001). We calculate role stress by asking respondents to specify their level of role stress on a 1-7 scale (extremely low-extremely high).

*Jobs Started:* The number of freelance jobs started in the past 6 months.

*Repeat Hire rate:* The number of times the FLSP was repeat hired divided by the number of jobs started in the past 6 months.

*Referral rate:* The number of times the FLSP was referred by a customer divided by the number of jobs started in the past 6 months.

*Review rate:* The number of times the FLSP was reviewed by a customer divided by the number of jobs started in the past 6 months. We present the descriptive statistics of all substantive and control variables in Table 3.

--- Insert Table 3 ---

## **Model**

Following the pattern laid out in the conceptual framework, we assess our conceptual model in four stages. In the first stage, we look at the effect of the four orientation traits on FLSP's work engagement. We include six individual-level control variables that may explain variation in the dependent variable. Specifically, the importance given by the FLSP to personal development as well as to personal branding, role stress, FLSP's identification with the role, participation motivation type, and the number of hours spent on freelancing related activities.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{WorkEngagement}_i = & \alpha_1 + \beta_1 \text{CustomerOrientation}_i + \beta_2 \text{SelfEfficacy}_i + \beta_3 \text{RiskPropensity}_i + \\ & \beta_4 \text{StrategicEmphasis}_i + \beta_5 \text{StrategicEmphasisSq}_i + \beta_6 \text{RoleStress}_i + \beta_7 \text{PersonalDevelopmentImp}_i + \\ & \beta_8 \text{CausalityOrientation}_i + \beta_9 \text{ParticipationMotivationType}_i + \varepsilon_i^1 \quad \text{--- Equation 1} \end{aligned}$$

In the second stage, to account for the correlation of errors across equations in different stages, we use the predicted work engagement estimate from stage one and check its impact on the probability of turnover and separately on work performance. In this stage, we check whether work engagement takes the explanatory power of the orientation traits. Here, we incorporate six control variables related to work performance (Equation 2a) and seven control variables related to probability of turnover (Equation 2b). Our dependent variable logarithm probability of turnover has two cut-off points, zero and two. We specify a Tobit Type 2 regression.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Work\_Performance}_i = & \delta_{1a} + \gamma_{1a} \text{Predicted\_WorkEngagement}_i + \gamma_{2a} \text{ReferralRate}_i + \\ & \gamma_{3a} \text{RepeatHireRate}_i + \gamma_{4a} \text{ReviewRate}_i + \gamma_{5a} \text{PersonalBrandingImp}_i + \gamma_{6a} \text{Ln\_FreelanceTime}_i + \\ & \gamma_{7a} \text{Education}_i + \varepsilon_i^{2a} \quad \text{--- Equation 2a} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Probabilty\_Turnover}_i = & \delta_{1b} + \gamma_{1b} \text{Predicted\_WorkEngagement}_i + \gamma_{2b} \text{ReferralRate}_i + \\ & \gamma_{3b} \text{RepeatHireRate}_i + \gamma_{4b} \text{ReviewRate}_i + \gamma_{5b} \text{JobsStarted}_i + \gamma_{6b} \text{AutonomyImp}_i + \gamma_{7b} \text{Income}_i + \\ & \gamma_{8b} \text{Education}_i + \varepsilon_i^{2b} \quad \text{--- Equation 2b} \end{aligned}$$

In stage three, we include the orientation traits and work engagement value together to predict turnover and separately, to explain work performance. We can assess the direct effect of orientation traits and the mediating effect of work engagement on the respective dependent variables – work performance (Equation 3a) and probability of turnover (Equation 3b). For turnover, we specify a Tobit type 2 regression.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Work\_Performance}_i &= \lambda_{1a} + \theta_{1a}\text{WorkEngagement}_i + \theta_{2a}\text{CustomerOrientation}_i + \theta_{3a}\text{SelfEfficacy}_i + \\
 &\theta_{4a}\text{RiskPropensity}_i + \theta_{5a}\text{StrategicEmphasis}_i + \theta_{6a}\text{StrategicEmphasisSq}_i + \\
 &\theta_{7a}\text{WorkEngagementXReviewRate}_i + \theta_{8a}\text{RoleStress}_i + \theta_{9a}\text{RoleIdentification}_i + \theta_{10a}\text{ReferralRate}_i + \\
 &\theta_{11a}\text{PersonalBrandingImp}_i + \varepsilon_i^{3a} \quad \text{---} \\
 &\text{--- Equation 3a}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Probabilty\_Turnover}_i &= \lambda_{1b} + \theta_{1b}\text{WorkEngagement}_i + \theta_{2b}\text{CustomerOrientation}_i + \\
 &\theta_{3b}\text{SelfEfficacy}_i + \theta_{4b}\text{RiskPropensity}_i + \theta_{5b}\text{StrategicEmphasis}_i + \theta_{6b}\text{StrategicEmphasisSq}_i + \\
 &\theta_{7b}\text{ReferralRate}_i + \theta_{8b}\text{RepeatHireRate}_i + \theta_{9b}\text{AutonomyImp}_i + \theta_{10b}\text{RoleStress}_i + \\
 &\theta_{11b}\text{RoleIdentification}_i + \varepsilon_i^{3b} \quad \text{---} \\
 &\text{--- Equation 3b}
 \end{aligned}$$

In stage four, we evaluate whether the orientation traits, work engagement, and work performance influence our focal dependent variable - probability of turnover (Equation 4). In the process, we test if there is any impact of work performance on turnover.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Probabilty\_Turnover}_i &= \varphi_1 + \psi_1\text{WorkPerformance}_i + \psi_1\text{WorkEngagement}_i + \\
 &\psi_2\text{CustomerOrientation}_i + \psi_3\text{SelfEfficacy}_i + \psi_4\text{RiskPropensity}_i + \psi_5\text{StrategicEmphasis}_i + \\
 &\psi_6\text{StrategicEmphasisSq}_i + \varepsilon_i^4 \quad \text{---} \\
 &\text{--- Equation 4}
 \end{aligned}$$

## **Results**

*Confirmatory factor analysis:* As specified in our structural model, we have four latent variables – customer orientation, self-efficacy, work engagement, and role identification. Before conducting the analysis, we check Harman’s single factor test to assess whether a single latent factor would account for all the manifest variables. It indicates that the variance extracted is less than 50 percent (approximately 23.27 percent), so there is a low threat of common method bias.

Further, we apply the marker variable technique as suggested by Lindell and Whitney (2001) as a check. We include experience while playing video games as a theoretically unrelated ‘marker’ to our substantive variables. The lowest and the second lowest correlations are 0.003 and -0.007 respectively. As these methods have their critiques, Hulland, Baumgartner, and Smith (2018) recommend testing a CFA-based approach by modeling individual items as loading both on their theoretical construct and on a single unobserved latent method factor. We compare the fit of the two models, – one with [CFI=0.984; TLI=0.979; RMSEA=0.046; SRMR= 0.047] and other without the single latent factor [CFI=0.982; TLI=0.978; RMSEA=0.047; SRMR= 0.049], to observe a marginal increase in fit with similar substantive conclusions. Therefore, our results are not biased due to CMB.

We conduct CFA on each of the latent variables using their respective items. As reported earlier, all path coefficients between the indicators and their respective first-order factors are significant at the  $\alpha = .05$  level. Additionally, the Cronbach’s alpha and the composite reliability for each of the latent variables meets or exceeds 0.70 (See Table 3). We report a battery of fit statistics - relative (comparative fit index or CFI; Tucker-Lewis index or TLI) and absolute (Root mean square error of approximation or RMSEA; standardized root mean square residual or SRMR as recommended by (Hu and Bentler 1999). For customer orientation [Chi-Square (df)=20.773(9); CFI= 0.993; TLI= 0.988; RMSEA= 0.049; SRMR= 0.037]; for self-efficacy [Chi-Square (df)=62.248(14); CFI= 0.987; TLI= 0.981; RMSEA= 0.080; SRMR= 0.047]; for work engagement [Chi-Square (df)=27.244(9); CFI= 0.995; TLI= 0.992; RMSEA= 0.060; SRMR= 0.035]; and for role identification [Chi-Square (df)=2126.487(3); CFI= 1.000; TLI= 1.000; RMSEA= 0.000; SRMR= 0.000]. When we run the confirmatory factor analysis for the entire model, the fit statistics are Chi-Square (df)=461.82(213); CFI= 0.985; TLI= 0.982;

RMSEA= 0.047; SRMR= 0.047. We calculate and report the average variance extracted or AVE for convergent validity. We find moderate-to-high convergent validity with AVE ranging from 0.367-0.657. Finally, for discriminant validity, we check the inter-factor correlations and compare it to the square root of AVE or the Fornell-Larcker test. The results specify that the factors are discriminant. Please refer to W6 for the path diagram of the orientation traits with their factor loadings, variances, covariances, and regression outputs.

--- Insert Table 4 ---

*Stage 1 Model:* In the stage 1 model, our linear regression results indicate that each of the orientation traits influences work engagement at varying levels. For customer orientation, we find a positive impact on work engagement ( $\beta_1=.316, p<.000$ ). Customer oriented freelancers enjoy serving customers that enriches their freelance work experience. It outlines the importance of satisfying a customer's needs as it is not only key to get referrals, reviews, and repeat business but also to be more involved with one's work and enjoy it. Hence, H1a is supported. We observe a significant and positive relationship between FLSP's self-efficacy and work engagement ( $\beta_2=.364, p<.000$ ). Self-efficacious FLSPs are more likely to be confident in their abilities and resilient to obstacles in the environment to develop their profile. They adapt well to the dynamic work environment to fulfil their assignments with vigor and dedication. H2a is supported. Risk-taking propensity has a positive association with work engagement at  $\alpha=0.05$  level ( $\beta_3=.048, p<.015$ ), indicating that FLSPs who are risk-takers are likely to be engaged. We expected a non-linear inverse U-shaped relationship. While the effect flips, the quadratic term is non-significant. Therefore, H3a is not supported. Strategic emphasis or time use on development of the freelance enterprise enhances work engagement ( $\beta_4= .034, p<.000$ ). The quadratic term strategic time squared is marginally negative and significant ( $\beta_5=-.001, p<.001$ ). Therefore, we do observe a

non-linear that we depict in Figure 3. Hence, H4a is supported. Currently, respondents on average spend 20.68% of their time on strategic matters. Thus, most respondents prioritize operational day-to-day freelance work leaving less time to develop their freelance enterprise. Our finding offers insight to create a balance between the strategic and operational time allocation.

For the control variables, we find a significant negative association between role stress and work engagement ( $\beta_6 = -.086, p < .000$ ). We posit those FLSPs who deal with a greater amount of stress are unable to focus on their work or enjoy it with vigor and absorption. Importance given to personal development, that is aligned with intrinsic goals, is positive and significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level ( $\beta_7 = .052, p < .032$ ). It is in line with the self-determination theory research regarding personal goals (Kasser and Ryan 1996). It states that individuals prioritizing intrinsic goals relative to extrinsic goals experience higher work and life satisfaction. We include two other covariates that relate to self-determination – causality orientation and participation motivation type. However, we do not find any support of their influence on work engagement.

--- Insert Table 5 ---

*Stage 2a Model:* The predicted value of work engagement from stage 1 model is positively related to freelancer's work performance ( $\gamma_{1a} = .073, p < .000$ ). We can interpret it as work engagement goes up, work performance goes up as well. Currently, platform managers do not take into account the FLSP's work engagement in their strategies. Of our control variables, review rate negatively influences work performance ( $\gamma_{4a} = -.098, p < .000$ ). In our case, we are only able to observe the volume of reviews, not the valence. However, we postulate that reviews act as a feedback for the FLSP. We find importance given to personal branding to negatively affect work performance ( $\gamma_{5a} = -.014, p < .004$ ). FLSPs who give importance to personal branding are likely to invest time and effort to build their profile through personal websites, social media



pages and other activities such as visiting conferences and networking. This focus may leave less time for working on the freelance projects and for personal development activities. Next, we observe that the FLSP's work performance decreases as he/she devotes more time to freelancing activities ( $\gamma_{6a} = -.031, p < .002$ ). We note that about 57% of our respondents already hold a part-time or full-time employment as per our final survey. Further, the respondents work 23.62 hours per week on freelancing jobs. They may be overworked but it may be necessary to continue working in multiple roles for supplemental income to support themselves and their families. Finally, education has no effect on work performance citing that in freelancing, the ability to do the work is more valued.

--- Insert Table 6a ---

*Stage 2b Model:* The predicted value of work engagement from stage 1 model is negatively related to probability of turnover ( $\gamma_{1b} = -.281, p < .000$ ). Therefore, the more engaged the FLSP is, the lesser the probability of her turnover in line with Du Plooy and Roodt (2010). Therefore, our independent variables or orientation traits explain both dependent variables. The results are in congruence with earlier research on work engagement (Bakker and Schaufeli 2015). Platform managers should prioritize accordingly to address the critical issue of high turnover. We include referral rate as a control variable that does not have a significant increase in the probability of turnover ( $\gamma_{2b} = .129, p < .139$ ). Repeat hire rate reduces the probability of turnover at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level ( $\gamma_{3b} = -.185, p < .040$ ). This result further strengthens the finding from exploratory studies that successful job completions are essential for FLSPs to continue freelancing. Review rate explains turnover positively at  $\alpha = .10$  level ( $\gamma_{4b} = .143, p < .081$ ). It is unclear why the relation is positive without capturing the valence of the reviews. Negative reviews may indicate bad quality freelancer while positive may hint toward platform exploitation by forming a direct relation with

the customer. The number of jobs started has a significant but weak relation with turnover. The importance placed on autonomy by the FLSP reduces turnover probability ( $\gamma_{6b} = -.066, p < .004$ ). Individuals prioritizing autonomy prefer the flexible work environment of freelancing over organizational employment. As autonomy at work is the principal reason for joining freelancing, it is in line with our earlier finding. Income and education do not have any influence on the FLSP's decision to turnover.

--- Insert Table 6b ---

*Stage 3a Model:* We find that work engagement does not have a significant relationship with work performance ( $\theta_{1a} = -.012, p < .372$ ). Hence, H5a is not supported. On the other hand, customer orientation ( $\theta_{2a} = .030, p < .006$ ), self-efficacy ( $\theta_{3a} = .028, p < .010$ ) have positive influences on work performance at  $\alpha = .05$  level. Thus, EG1b and EG2b are supported. Strategic emphasis negatively impacts work performance ( $\theta_{5a} = -.006, p < .002$ ). Thus, H4b is supported but the effect size is minimal. The quadratic term is significant indicating a U-shaped relationship. Risk-taking propensity is the only orientation trait that does not predict work performance ( $\theta_{4a} = -.007, p < .127$ ). Therefore, H3b is not supported. Consequently, work engagement does not mediate the relation between orientation traits and work performance. We provide detailed mediation analysis results using Hayes Process 4 on all our substantive variables in W7.

Furthermore, we note that review rate positively moderates the relation between work engagement and performance at  $\alpha = .05$  level ( $\theta_{7a} = .048, p < .028$ ). Hence, H6 is supported. Reviews play a crucial role in helping freelancers perform better as it provides feedback. Additionally, prospective customers pay close attention to reviews of previous customers in the

decision process (Jang, Prasad, and Ratchford 2012). Before hiring the FLSP, they may contact the previous customer to get an in-depth opinion and assessment. Kindly refer to Figure 3 for the simple slopes diagram to show the moderation effect. Among the control variables, role stress attenuates work performance ( $\theta_{8a} = -.025, p < .000$ ). We posit that role stress implies an environment where the FLSP is overworked and is not clear on the role requirements. Therefore, role stress plays a negative role for the FLSP to do the work to the best of her ability. Role identification ( $\theta_{9a} = -.020, p < .000$ ) and referral rate ( $\theta_{10a} = -.045, p < .028$ ) have negative influences on work performance at  $\alpha = .05$  level, respectively. We explore the role of these variables by controlling for it and observe the nature of the relationship. Future research can possibly elaborate on the reasoning as we only speculate in this study. Lastly, the personal branding importance does not have an influence on work performance ( $\theta_{11a} = -.006, p < .236$ ).

--- Insert Table 7a ---

*Stage 3b Model:* FLSP's work engagement predicts turnover intentions negatively at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level ( $\theta_{1b} = -.086, p < .041$ ) in line with previous work (Du Plooy and Roodt 2010). Therefore, H5b is supported. Among the orientation traits, only self-efficacy meaningfully explains reduction in the probability of turnover ( $\theta_{3b} = -.137, p < .001$ ). Hence, EG2c is supported. Customer orientation, risk-taking propensity, and strategic emphasis are not significant indicating a partial mediation through work engagement. Thus, EG1c, H3c, and H4c are not supported. In control variables, referral rate enhances the probability of turnover ( $\theta_{7b} = .192, p < .013$ ). While this result may seem counterintuitive, we posit that it may be an evidence of platform exploitation. As Zhou et al. (2021) show that the best quality contractors or FLSPs, who are likely to get referred regularly, exploit the platform to directly establish relationship with the customer. Since turnover is from freelancing so it signifies that these quality FLSPs have more

opportunities to set up their business or establish themselves as entrepreneurs. Our open-ended exploratory survey answers point out that one of the primary motivations of individuals for leaving freelancing is to create a business of their own. Repeat hire rate does not impact the probability of turnover ( $\theta_{8b} = -.129, p < .118$ ). FLSPs who give more importance to autonomy at work are more likely to stay in freelancing ( $\theta_{9b} = -.070, p < .001$ ). As per our exploratory study, autonomy at work is one of the primary reasons for joining freelancing. We notice that role stress is a reason for turnover ( $\theta_{10b} = .051, p < .007$ ). In further studies, role stress specific to freelancing needs to be investigated in detail. Finally, role identification reduces the probability of turnover ( $\theta_{11b} = -.174, p < .000$ ). FLSPs who identify themselves as freelancers have accepted the role with its advantages overcoming the disadvantages.

--- Insert Table 7b ---

*Stage 4 Model:* In our stage four tobit regression, we observe that FLSP's work performance reduces her probability of turnover only at  $\alpha=0.10$  level ( $\psi_1 = -.266, p < .097$ ). As per our earlier observation, FLSPs are leaving freelancing to either get stable employment with predictable pay and benefits or to set up their own business to have complete autonomy and direct customers. In both cases, how the FLSP performs does not have a significant bearing on their turnover outcome. In line with previous results, FLSP's work engagement ( $\psi_2 = -.185, p < .000$ ) and FLSP's self-efficacy ( $\psi_4 = -.160, p < .000$ ) negatively affects turnover. Self-efficacious FLSPs are confident in their abilities and knowledge to do the freelancing jobs. They are also resilient to the continuous adaptation and unforeseen challenges to continue in a freelancing role. Customer orientation, risk taking propensity, and strategic emphasis do not significantly explain turnover. This confirms work engagement's role as a partial mediator.

--- Insert Table 8 ---

## **Discussion**

### ***Summary of Key Findings***

This investigation, comprising of exploratory and confirmatory studies explores the concept of freelance orientation. Results from the stepwise exploratory process – literature review, interviews, content analysis, and surveys – consistently show that a set of four traits are extremely important for suitability in freelancing. These orientation traits are customer orientation, self-efficacy, risk taking propensity, and strategic emphasis through time use on developmental activities. Thus, the use of mixed methods helped us to validate the traits from the literature, field, and popular press. Freelance orientation provides a toolkit to the sharing economy labor platforms to identify effective FLSPs even at an early stage. The confirmatory survey tests our conceptual framework empirically. We find that each of the orientation traits explain work engagement, that in turn predicts work performance and the probability of turnover. Self-efficacy, customer orientation, and strategic emphasis is related to work performance. Additionally, self-efficacious FLSPs are likely to have a lower probability of turnover. Therefore, work engagement partially mediates the relationship between orientation traits and our dependent variables, work performance and probability of turnover. Our studies add to frontline employee, service employee, and entrepreneurship literatures taking the unique overlap perspective of the FLSP. In recent years, the growth in freelancers partly fueled by the emergence of sharing economy has been faster than traditional employment. Our study in the context of labor platforms shows that intrinsic aspects are vital even in this transactional exchange environment. They can complement extant extrinsic retention approaches.

### *Academic Contributions*

Two major problems of variance in performance and provider turnover that sharing economy platforms experience were identified in a recent study by Kumar, Lahiri, and Dogan (2018). Sharing economy labor platforms recognize these issues in their annual reports as major impediments for their growth and profitability (Angie's\_List 2016; Upwork 2019a). Our study builds on that research by taking an intrinsic perspective to address the discerned problems. We ask the FLSPs “What are the personality traits that makes them suitable to providing services in the freelancing role?” We find four traits that come up consistently through our exploratory studies. The unique combination of traits shows the interdisciplinary nature of our study i.e., customer orientation (from marketing), self-efficacy (from managerial psychology), risk-taking propensity and proactivity (from entrepreneurship). FLSPs conduct various service roles on behalf of their customers. Labor platforms will benefit from the knowledge of these orientation traits to enhance the quality of the FLSP-customer interaction. A favorable interaction will lead to more transactions for the platform through repeat business, referrals, and reviews.

We expand the relevant literature by utilizing the job-demand-resources model in a self-determined role with no organization support. Previous applications of the JD-R model in marketing are for frontline employees where job resources such as training, development, role clarity, supervision play an important role (Lee, Patterson, and Ngo 2017; Yavas and Babakus 2011; Zablah et al. 2012). As suggested by the model and our findings, we find that FLSPs depend on their personal resources rather than organizational job resources that form our orientation traits. Further, we contribute to the JD-R model in a triadic work environment that involves the platform as an intermediary between the FLSP and the customer. Here, the FLSP deals with multiple stakeholders to work and complete freelance jobs – customers, platforms,

peer FLSPs, and household members. It requires a unique skillset composed of the orientation traits in addition to motivation and competence to do the job.

We uncover autonomy as a fundamental job resource that forms the FLSP's primary motivation to participate in the sharing economy. The work engagement literature from the employee perspective is rich in explaining a diverse set of outcomes including work performance and turnover intentions (Du Plooy and Roodt 2010; Karatepe and Aga 2012; Kumar and Pansari 2014; Schaufeli, Bakker, and Van Rhenen 2009). We extend the engagement literature by focusing on the sharing economy labor platforms and a non-traditional work role – freelancing where traditional determinants of work engagement (e.g., organizational commitment, organizational identification) do not hold. We show that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between the orientation traits and probability of turnover. While the predicted value of work engagement explains work performance, we are unable to establish a mediation association between the orientation traits and work performance. Further, we find certain results in the control variables that are contrary to our expectations. For example, review rate, role identification, and referral rate have negative relationships with work performance. Role stress increase work engagement as well as work performance. We hope to explore these counterintuitive findings in our follow-up study. Scholars have called attention to the concept of engagement in the context of marketing employees (Kumar and Pansari 2014; Zablah et al. 2012). However, it is important to understand FLSP's engagement with the role as traditional constructs such as organizational commitment or job safety are not applicable. Considering the precariousness of the 'employment', work and lifestyle factors are jointly considered. Finally, we enhance the understanding of the sharing economy landscape by studying labor platforms that have not received widespread attention and remain under-researched.

### ***Managerial Insights***

Using a mixed method approach, we uncover four orientation traits – customer orientation, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity, and proactivity - that makes individual FLSPs suitable for providing services in the freelancing role. Our study context is in the sharing economy labor platforms that suffer from variance in work performance and high FLSP turnover even after prioritizing network growth (Angie's\_List 2016; Upwork 2019a). As a result, they need to spend on acquisition of FLSPs through brand awareness campaigns, referral schemes, and others. Moreover, turnover hurts platform network growth as FLSPs attract customers (cross-side network effects), which in turn attracts more FLSPs on the platform (same-side network effects)(Chu and Manchanda 2016). Lastly, it hurts customer perceptions of the platform brand due to shoddy or incomplete jobs.

Orientation traits form personal resources that aid the FLSP to overcome the demands of their work environment. Drawing insights from our study, platforms can identify oriented FLSPs possessing the four traits through objective and subjective measures. Our study provides a toolkit for the purpose. Platforms can measure the FLSP's orientation traits during onboarding and at regular intervals. Managers can focus on creating environments where autonomy is preserved yet uncertainty is reduced by promoting job completions. Accordingly, labor platforms need to integrate tools (i.e., job resources) in the FLSP's user interface that help them to complete more jobs effectively. Firstly, recognizing that a substantial number of FLSPs are working in organizations, time management softwares can allocate time according to multiple projects and flag when the FLSP is overworked. Special emphasis must be paid to strategic time use and development of the freelance enterprise. Our findings show that FLSPs succumb to the pressure of customers and end up spending a lot of time on operational matters. However, finding a



balance should be the priority. Secondly, FLSPs should be able to access materials related to their work at minimal cost e.g., online courses or software. Lastly, another avenue to explore is how the FLSP can manage their role stress. Platforms can employ counselors or mentors who guide oriented FLSPs with less experience on how to navigate the freelancing environment.

Our exploratory study findings confirm the uncertainty surrounding FLSPs' work, due to ambiguous objectives, ever-changing job deliverables, self-learning, and unpredictable income stream, plays an important role in FLSP's voluntary turnover intentions. Platforms can use our toolkit to allocate resources to oriented freelancers. We identify from FLSPs that self-learning and development as the most challenging aspect of freelancing. Labor platforms have tied up with various productivity, marketing, and educational apps such as Vault, Hootsuite, etc. However, it might be more useful if the platform identifies the specific learning needs of individual FLSPs based on the profile, the type of job, customers, and the goals. Then, the platform can design a course that will meet the specific developmental needs. Further, the platform can organize virtual or physical conferences or webinars on multiple topics such as taxation, legal advice, profile building etc. to educate the FLSPs.

In sum, platforms can strategically invest in job resources to retain oriented FLSPs. Platforms will gain immensely on network growth if they have a critical pool of FLSPs who perform well i.e., finish jobs on time, on budget, with minimal rework, and offer high level of customer service. Successful job completion leads to positive reviews, referrals and repeat business. By extension, platforms will garner positive brand evaluations and revenue in the form of commission.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

Our study suffers from a few limitations. First, as this is one of the first studies on Freelance Orientation, it is cross sectional in nature with the confirmatory surveys conducted at one point in time. A longitudinal approach is likely to reveal intertemporal dynamics and heterogeneity that is important to understand orientation. Second, we exclude high control and mixed platforms where the orientation traits may work similarly or differently. There may be other traits that are important there. Third, we limit our sample from the USA, the UK and a OECD countries leading to the WEIRD sample stereotype. A global study may account for heterogeneity among FLSPs including cultural factors, language, and values. In our sample, the respondents are mainly from the OECD countries. However, we were not able to match them to countries to establish measurement invariance across countries or languages. Fourth, we acknowledge that there may be presence of the acquiescence or social desirability bias. In our follow-up study, we will employ item-specific questions. Instead of providing a statement and 'agree/disagree' response option, one can transform the statement into a direct question and response options present a range that captures the extremities of an attitude or behavior. One can ask the same questions with regards to our substantive variables in third person and measure the difference in mean responses. Further, the authors should include the social desirability BIDR scale to check correlation with our substantive variables (Bobbio and Manganelli 2011). Fifth, as we gather data from crowdsourcing platforms, it is difficult to follow non-respondents. Future studies should supplement surveys with firm-level secondary data. Field experiments with labor platforms is likely to offer insights on the firm-level strategies such as autonomy support or relation support that works to complement FLSP's personal resources.

Future studies can also expand on the implementation of freelance orientation concept. Strategies can be developed that helps to build and develop each of the orientation traits in

FLSPs. Such development is a challenge as labor platforms do not employ the FLSPs. Even if the labor platform bears the cost, they may not get the benefits. The FLSP may use the platform strategically to build direct contacts with the customers. The FLSP may switch to another labor platform or may be associated with multiple platforms simultaneously. Finally, there is a possibility the FLSP may drop out completely. Therefore, a perspective to explore is that if the labor platform supports FLSPs in their development, does it create loyalty or identification toward the platform? More work is necessary on the optimum combination of these orientation traits. Our findings show that each have different effect size magnitude, but a more concrete understanding is necessary. For example, what should be the division between strategic and operational time use. Additionally, our study does not consider the temporal element. A few questions can be answered by taking it into account. Does the FLSP need to be more or less risk taking in the initial phase of their freelancing career? Should the strategic emphasis recede as the FLSP gets established?

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**Table 1. List of studies on the relationship between marketing employee traits with affective outcomes and behavioral work outcomes**

Authors	Context	Discipline	Independent Variable(s)/Constituents	Moderator(s)	Mediator(s)	Dependent Variable(s)/Construct	Methods	Data Sources	Key Findings
<b>Brown, Mowen and Donavan 2002</b>	Service employees	Marketing	Big 5 Personality traits; Need for activity		Customer Orientation (CO)	Performance Ratings (Self); Performance Ratings (Supervisor)	SEM; Questionnaire	Data firms	1. 3 basic personality traits (emotional stability, agreeability, and the need for activity) --> CO. 2. CO and conscientiousness --> self-rated performance. CO plus direct effects of conscientiousness and agreeability-->12% of the variance in manager rating
<b>Kumar and Pansari 2014</b>	Service employees	Marketing	Employee Satisfaction,		Employee-level Identification, Commitment, and Loyalty	Employee Performance	SEM; Questionnaire	Managerial Interviews	1. Employee satisfaction has a positive influence on employee identification. 2. Employee identification has a positive impact on employee commitment. 3. Employee commitment has a positive impact on employee loyalty. 4. Employee loyalty leads to better employee performance.
<b>He et al. 2015</b>	Service employees	Marketing	Big 5 Personality traits	Customer Orientation (CO)	Organizational Identification	Job Performance			1. CO strengthens the relationship between organizational identification and service workers' job performance. 2. CO enhances the mediating effect of organizational identification on the relationship between service workers' personality traits (i.e., agreeableness) and their performance.
<b>Zablah, Frank and Brown 2012</b>	Frontline employees	Marketing	Job resource	Job demands workload; customer orientation	Job stress (role conflict and role ambiguity); Job engagement (employee satisfaction and organizational	Job Performance; Propensity to leave	Meta-analytic study		1. CO is antecedent to job stress and job engagement and that these variables influence frontline employees' job outcomes. 2. CO is a psychological resource that leads to desirable job outcomes because it helps shape employees' perceptions of and attitudes.

<b>Elmadağ, Ellinger and Frank 2008</b>	Frontline Service Employees	Marketing	Formal Training; Manager Coaching; Rewards	Relative manager to employee commitment to service quality	Frontline Commitment to Service Quality	Affective - Job Satisfaction; Commitment to Firm; Behavioral - Job Performance; Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Survey	119 firms	1. Frontline service employee's commitment to service quality increases job satisfaction, commitment to the firm, self-rated job performance and organizational citizenship behavior.
<b>Franke and Park 2006</b>	Frontline Sales employee	Marketing	Experience and Gender	Adaptive Selling Behavior (ASB), Customer Orientation (CO)		Performance, Job Satisfaction			1. ASBs have stronger effects than customer-oriented selling on salesperson performance and satisfaction 2. Sales experience increases performance but not job satisfaction. 3. Satisfaction increases performance - self-rated, manager-rates and objective
<b>Karatepe and Aga 2012</b>	Frontline Service employees	Marketing	Job Resourcefulness, Customer Orientation		Work Engagement	Job Satisfaction, Affective Organizational Commitment, Turnover Intentions	Repeated Measure Surveys - SEM	195 employees	Work engagement functions as a full mediator of the impacts of job resourcefulness and customer orientation on job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and turnover intentions.
<b>Donavan, Brown and Mowen 2004</b>	Service employees	Marketing	Customer Orientation (CO)	Contact time		Job Sat; Commitment and OCB	Field studies		All relations significant plus Job Sat --> OCB CO (a personal variable) and contact time (a situational variable) interact to predict job satisfaction and commitment; CO has a stronger influence on the job responses of workers who have higher levels of contact
<b>Emin Babakus , Ugur Yavas &amp; Nicholas J. Ashill (2010)</b>	Frontline service employees	Marketing	Servant leadership; Customer Orientation		Person-job fit; Burnout	Turnover Intention	Survey		1. Both customer orientation and servant leadership significantly reduce burnout and ultimately turnover intentions. 2. Results also show that person-job fit mediates the influences of customer orientation and servant leadership on burnout and turnover intentions.



<b>Andreas Rauch &amp; Michael Frese (2007)</b>	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneurship	Personality traits matched to entrepreneur - Self efficacy, Proactive personality, Tenacity, Need for autonomy, need for achievement, Flexibility, Passion for work			Business creation, Business success	Survey	<p>1. Business owners' personality traits were positively related to business creation and business success.</p> <p>2. <math>r=.378</math> (generalized self-efficacy with business creation) and <math>r=.304</math> (need for achievement with success).</p> <p>3. Need for achievement, risk taking, innovativeness, proactive personality, generalized self-efficacy, stress tolerance, need for autonomy, and internal locus of control were related to entrepreneurial behaviour.</p>
<b>Brandstätter 2010</b>	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneurship					Meta-analysis	<p>1. (Mediator) entrepreneurial orientation (with the components of innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy) on performance (efficiency, growth, and profit) - Li, Huang, and Tsai (2009).</p> <p>2. (Moderator) perceived desirability (attitude to ownership) and perceived feasibility (entrepreneurial self-efficacy).</p> <p>3. Risk propensity, Achievement motivation, Need for autonomy</p>
<b>Hmieleski and Corbett 2007</b>	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneurship	Improvisational behavior	Entrepreneurial self-efficacy		Performance of startups; Individual work satisfaction		<p>1. Improvisational behavior was found to have a positive relationship with new venture performance (i.e., sales growth) who were high in entrepreneurial self-efficacy and opposite effect for low entrepreneurial self-efficacy.</p> <p>2. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy was found to have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between entrepreneur improvisational behavior and work satisfaction.</p>
<b>This study</b>	Freelance Service Workers (FLs)	Marketing	Orientation Traits - Customer Orientation; Self Efficacy; FL Strategic Emphasis; Risk Taking Propensity	Review rate	Work Engagement	Work Performance; Probability of Turnover	Linear and Censored Regression	<p>Interviews; Content Analysis; Survey - 537 respondents</p> <p>1. The orientation traits positively influence work engagement.</p> <p>2. Work engagement partially mediates the relation between orientation traits and probability of turnover but does not mediate between traits and work performance.</p> <p>3. Work engagement is positively related to turnover. It may indicate FLs are leaving freelancing to either get stable employment with predictable pay and benefits or to set up their own business to have complete autonomy and direct customers.</p>

**Table 2. List of Freelance Orientation Buckets based on four Exploratory techniques**

<b>Buckets</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Representative words/terms</b>	<b>Inter-rater reliability</b>	<b>Qualitative Interviews (n=12)</b>	<b>Surveys (n=81)</b>	<b>Relevant Literature (n=13)*</b>	<b>Content Analysis (n=89)*</b>
<b>Customer-orientation</b>	Behavioral - set of behaviors aimed at engendering customer satisfaction (Saxe and Weitz 1982); Psychological - attitude or surface (contextual) trait that motivates employees to satisfy customers' needs (Zablah et al. 2012).	Adaptable; Professional; Reliable; Responsible	0.958	2nd	2nd	Customer-orientation (8 articles); Adaptable/flexible (3)	Customer-orientation (28 articles); Adaptable/flexible (32) articles
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Individual's belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura 1977).	Self-discipline; Self-motivated; Resilient; Decisive	0.944	1st	1st	Self-efficacy (4); Resilience (1)	Self-discipline (62 articles); Resilience (34)
<b>Proactivity</b>	Self-starting individuals who influence their environment by founding, identifying and acting upon opportunities (Rauch and Frese 2007).	Initiative; Passion; Resourceful	0.857	3rd	3rd	Proactivity or Proactive personality (3)	Proactivity or Proactive personality (38)
<b>Risk-taking propensity</b>	An individual's orientation to take risks (Antoncic et al. 2017)	Entrepreneurial; Fearless; Willingness to fail	0.927	4th	4th	Risk-taking propensity (3)	Risk-taking propensity 15 articles
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	Includes all other non-monolithic themes	Integrity; Exploratory; Cultural empathy	0.429	5th	5th		10 articles

\*Number of articles citing the relevant trait critical for our outcomes of interest

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Substantive and Control variables**

<b>Variables (n=537<sup>^</sup>)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>St. Dev</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
<i>Substantive Variables</i>							
Customer Orientation (factor score)*#	0.00	0.05	1.33	6.69	0.86	-1.09	3.29
Self-Efficacy (factor score)*#	0.00	0.05	1.47	5.01	0.88	-0.63	0.74
Risk-taking Propensity	3.81	4.00	1.00	6.00 (1-7)	1.65	-0.01	-0.96
Strategic Emphasis (Time Use in hours)	5.57	2.00	0.00	80.00	8.83	3.39	15.88
Work Engagement (factor score)*#	0.00	0.11	0.76	4.93	0.92	-0.79	0.72
Log Turnover	1.23	1.35	0.00	2.00	0.61	-0.83	-0.38
Work Performance Score	0.83	0.88	1.00	0.92	0.19	-1.59	2.47
<i>Control Variables</i>							
Freelance Time Use (Natural log)	2.88	3.00	3.00	4.64	0.87	-0.57	-0.01
Operational Time Use (in hours)	19.51	15.00	20.00	100.00	18.59	2.07	5.46
Role Identification (factor score)*#	0.00	0.04	1.53	3.75	0.92	-0.32	-0.58
Personal Branding Importance	4.63	5.00	7.00	6.00 (1-7)	1.81	-0.53	-0.73
Personal Development Importance	5.47	5.87	7.00	6.00 (1-7)	1.47	-1.21	1.18
Participation Motivation	0.39	0.40	0.00	13.00	2.24	0.23	-0.31
Education (categorical)	1.82	2.00	2.00	5 (1-6)	1.36	0.28	-0.26
Income (categorical)	1.27	1.00	0.00	4 (1-5)	1.26	0.79	-0.41
Autonomy Importance	5.31	5.34	7.00	6.00 (1-7)	1.41	-0.90	0.50
Jobs Started	26.64	15.00	10.00	150.00	31.79	2.05	4.22
Role Stress	3.58	3.54	3.58	6.00 (1-7)	1.53	0.30	-0.64
Referral rate	0.49	0.44	1.00	1.00	0.38	0.17	-1.49
Rehire rate	0.38	0.29	0.00	1.00	0.35	0.64	-0.94
Review rate	0.38	0.30	0.00	1.00	0.38	0.49	-1.26

<sup>^</sup>Missing values for non-categorical variables, typically 2% of cases, are computed using the series mean

\*Items measure – 1-> Strongly agree to 7-> Strongly disagree inverted to 1-> Strongly disagree to 7-> Strongly agree

#Factor score generated through Regression using Maximum Likelihood extraction with Direct Oblimin rotation

**Table 4. Results from Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Customer Orientation, Self-Efficacy, Work Engagement, and Role Identification; n=537**

Dimension and Measurement Items <sup>1</sup>	Chi-Sq (df)	CFA Model Statistics <sup>2</sup>		Factor Loadings	Reliability <sup>3</sup> – AVE, CR (Cronbach's Alpha – Standardized items)
		CFI (TLI)	RMSEA (SRMR)		
<b>(A) Customer Orientation</b> (1) I enjoy respond quickly to my customer's requests at any time of the day. (2) It comes naturally to me to understand my customer's feelings. (3) I get satisfaction from making my customers happy. (4) I don't enjoy serving my customers. (Negatively coded) (5) My primary aim is to help customers achieve their goals. (6) I am truthful if I cannot meet my customer's needs.	20.773 (9)	0.993 (0.988)	0.049 (0.037)	0.540 0.700 0.768 0.593 0.590 0.497	0.367, 0.743 (0.709)
<b>(B) Self-Efficacy</b> (1) When I make plans for my freelance job(s), I am certain I can make them work. (2) I don't give up on things before completing them. (3) I cannot get down to work on my freelance job(s) when I should. (Negatively coded) (4) I believe in my capability to complete freelance jobs. (5) If I cannot do a freelance task the first time, I keep trying until I can. (6) When I set freelance work-related goals, I rarely achieve them. (Negatively coded) (7) When trying to learn something new, I stop trying if I am not successful.	62.248 (14)	0.987 (0.981)	0.080 (0.047)	0.703  0.742 0.528  0.739 0.598  0.619 0.607	0.405, 0.772 (0.766)
<b>(C) Work Engagement</b> (1) I am not enthusiastic about my freelancing jobs. (Negatively coded) (2) I am proud of the freelance work that I do. (3) While doing my freelance work, I feel full of energy. (4) When I start my day, I feel like working on my freelancing job(s). (5) While working, I am absorbed in my freelance job(s). (6) Time goes very slowly when I'm working on my freelance job(s). (Negatively coded)	27.244 (9)	0.995 (0.992)	0.060 (0.035)	0.692  0.634 0.826 0.820 0.547 0.471	0.496, 0.755 (0.790)
<b>(D) Role Identification</b> (13) I feel like I chose the life of a freelancer. (14) I identify myself as a freelancer. (15) Wherever I go, I introduce myself as a freelancer.	0.000 (0)	1.000 (1.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.685 0.927 0.769	0.657, 0.852 (0.798)
<b>(E) Entire model</b>	461.862 (213)	0.985 (0.982)	0.047 (0.047)		

1. Measured on Likert Scale with NA Option: Strongly Agree—Agree—Somewhat Agree—Neither Agree Nor Disagree—Somewhat Disagree—Disagree—Strongly Disagree—Not Applicable
2. For good fit – CFI and TLI should be closer to 1; RMSEA and SRMR should be closer to 0.
3. CR refers to composite reliability and AVE refers to average variance extracted.

**Table 5. Stage 1 Regression coefficients - The effect of orientation traits on freelancer's work engagement**

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Work Engagement<sup>1</sup></b>								
	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Diagnostics	
	Beta	Std. Error			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	-0.209	0.158	-1.324	0.186	-0.520	0.101		
<i>Independent</i>								
Customer Orientation <sup>1</sup>	0.316***	0.043	7.297	0.000	0.231	0.401	0.728	1.374
Self Efficacy <sup>1</sup>	0.364***	0.043	8.407	0.000	0.279	0.449	0.698	1.433
Risk-taking Propensity	0.048**	0.020	2.436	0.015	0.009	0.087	0.951	1.052
Strategic Emphasis	0.034***	0.008	4.381	0.000	0.019	0.049	0.217	4.610
Strategic Emphasis Squared	-0.001**	0.000	-3.290	0.001	-0.001	0.000	0.225	4.450
<i>Controls</i>								
Role Stress	-0.086***	0.022	-3.887	0.000	-0.130	-0.043	0.891	1.122
Personal Development Importance	0.052**	0.024	2.154	0.032	0.005	0.099	0.836	1.196
Causality Orientation	-0.085	0.066	-1.281	0.201	-0.215	0.045	0.978	1.023
Participation Motivation Type	-0.084	0.065	-1.295	0.196	-0.211	0.043	0.972	1.029
<b>R-squared</b>	<b>0.420</b>							
<b>Adjusted R-squared</b>	<b>0.410</b>							

<sup>1</sup> We used regression factor scores using items for the variable following Maximum Likelihood extraction and Direct Oblimin rotation.

**Table 6a. Stage 2 Regression coefficients - The effect of predicted work engagement on freelancer's work performance**

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Work Performance</b>								
	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Diagnostics	
	Beta	Std. Error			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.036	0.036	28.918	0.000	0.965	1.106		
<i>Independent</i>								
Predicted Work Engagement	0.073***	0.015	4.835	0.000	0.043	0.102	0.889	1.125
<i>Controls</i>								
Review Rate	-0.098***	0.022	-4.523	0.000	-0.141	-0.056	0.964	1.038
Personal Branding Importance	-0.014***	0.005	-2.886	0.004	-0.024	-0.005	0.869	1.151
Ln_Freelance Time	-0.031***	0.010	-3.177	0.002	-0.051	-0.012	0.914	1.094
Education	-0.005	0.006	-0.897	0.370	-0.017	0.006	0.994	1.006
<b>R-squared</b>	<b>0.120</b>							
<b>Adjusted R-squared</b>	<b>0.111</b>							

**Table 6b. Stage 2 Tobit Regression coefficients of the effect of predicted work engagement on freelancer's probability of turnover**

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Probability of Turnover</b>				
	Beta	Std. Error	z	Sig.
Intercept 1	1.625	0.147	11.078	0.000
Intercept 2	-0.479	0.039	-12.337	0.000
<i>Independent</i>				
Predicted Work Engagement	-0.281***	0.053	-5.271	0.000
<i>Controls</i>				
Referral Rate	0.129	0.087	1.481	0.139
Repeat Hire Rate	-0.185**	0.090	-2.059	0.040
Review Rate	0.143*	0.082	1.744	0.081
Jobs Started	-0.003***	0.001	-2.766	0.006
Autonomy Importance	-0.066***	0.022	-2.918	0.004
Income	-0.014	0.024	-0.594	0.553
Education	0.001	0.022	0.067	0.946
<b>Log-Likelihood</b>	<b>-442.935</b>			
<b>Degrees of freedom</b>	<b>892.000</b>			

**Table 7a. Stage 3 Regression coefficients of the effect of freelancers' orientation traits and work engagement on their work performance**

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Work Performance</b>								
	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Diagnostics	
	Beta	Std. Error			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.021	0.031	33.196	0.000	0.960	1.081		
<i>Independent</i>								
Freelancer's Work Engagement	-0.012	0.014	-0.894	0.372	-0.039	0.015	0.359	2.787
Customer Orientation <sup>1</sup>	0.030***	0.011	2.756	0.006	0.009	0.052	0.645	1.550
Self Efficacy <sup>1</sup>	0.028***	0.011	2.571	0.010	0.007	0.050	0.619	1.615
Risk-taking Propensity	-0.007	0.005	-1.529	0.127	-0.017	0.002	0.945	1.058
Strategic Emphasis	-0.006***	0.002	-3.131	0.002	-0.010	-0.002	0.184	5.420
Strategic Emphasis Squared	0.000**	0.000	2.103	0.036	0.000	0.000	0.203	4.926
<i>Moderator</i>								
Work Engagement X Review Rate	0.048**	0.022	2.201	0.028	0.005	0.092	0.545	1.834
<i>Controls</i>								
Role Stress	-0.025***	0.005	-4.634	0.000	-0.036	-0.014	0.844	1.185
Role Identification <sup>1</sup>	-0.020**	0.010	-2.014	0.044	-0.039	0.000	0.704	1.421
Referral rate	-0.045**	0.021	-2.209	0.028	-0.086	-0.005	0.942	1.062
Personal Branding Importance	-0.006	0.005	-1.185	0.236	-0.015	0.004	0.802	1.247
<b>R-squared</b>	<b>0.180</b>							
<b>Adjusted R-squared</b>	<b>0.163</b>							

<sup>1</sup> We used regression factor scores using items for the variable following Maximum Likelihood extraction and Direct Oblimin rotation.



**Table 7b. Stage 3 Tobit Regression coefficients of the effect of orientation traits and work engagement on freelancer's probability of turnover**

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Probability of Turnover</b>				
	Beta	Std. Error	z	Sig.
Intercept 1	1.333	0.146	9.140	0.000
Intercept 2	-0.486	0.036	-13.445	0.000
<i>Independent</i>				
Freelancer's Work Engagement	-0.086**	0.042	-2.048	0.041
Customer Orientation <sup>1</sup>	0.038	0.040	0.966	0.334
Self Efficacy <sup>1</sup>	-0.137***	0.040	-3.390	0.001
Risk-taking Propensity	0.008	0.017	0.494	0.621
Strategic Emphasis	-0.003	0.007	-0.446	0.656
Strategic Emphasis Squared	0.000	0.000	0.347	0.729
<i>Controls</i>				
Referral Rate	0.192**	0.077	2.475	0.013
Repeat Hire Rate	-0.129	0.083	-1.564	0.118
Autonomy Importance	-0.070***	0.021	-3.300	0.001
Role Stress	0.051***	0.019	2.678	0.007
Role Identification <sup>1</sup>	-0.174***	0.036	-4.894	0.000
<b>Log-Likelihood</b>	<b>-508.745</b>			
<b>Degrees of freedom</b>	<b>1035.000</b>			

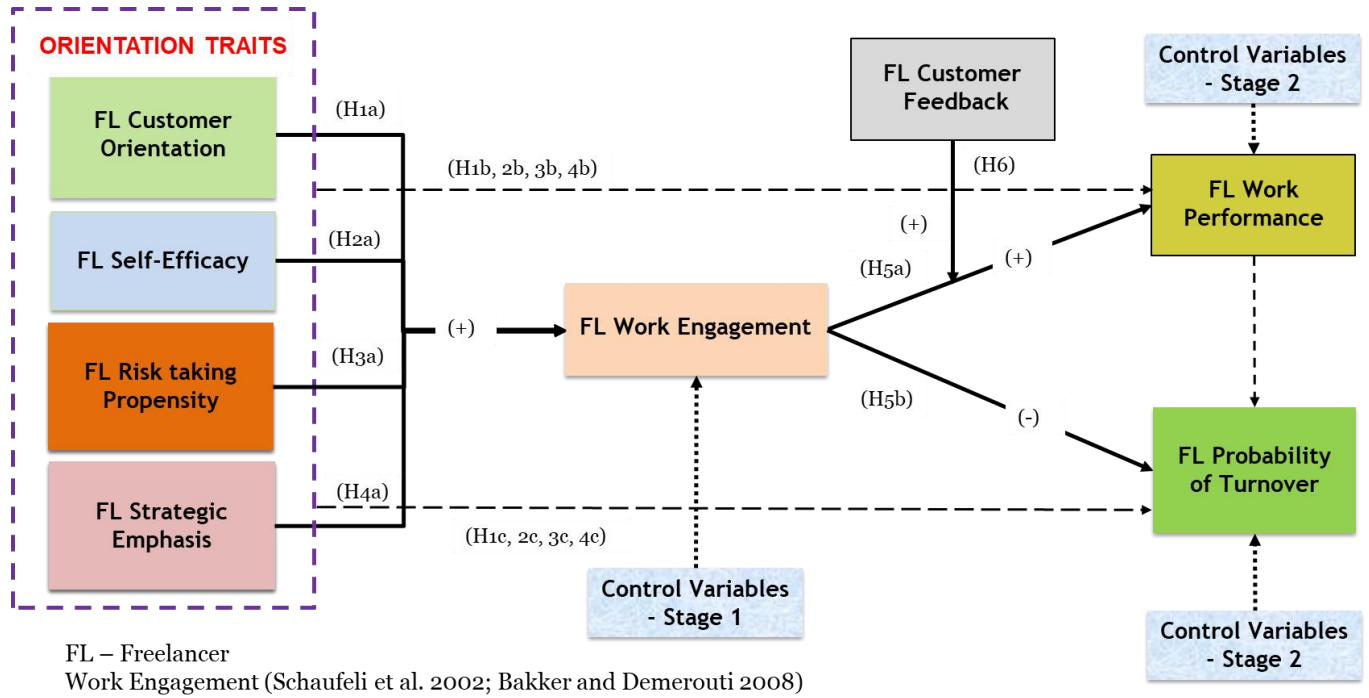
<sup>1</sup> We used regression factor scores using items for the variable following Maximum Likelihood extraction and Direct Oblimin rotation.

**Table 8. Stage 4 - Tobit Regression coefficients of the effect of orientation traits, work engagement, and work performance on freelancer's probability of turnover**

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Probability of Turnover</b>				
	Beta	Std. Error	z	Sig.
Intercept 1	1.423	0.165	8.644	0.000
Intercept 2	-0.443	0.036	-12.231	0.000
<i>Independent</i>				
Freelancer's Work Performance	-0.266*	0.160	-1.661	0.097
Freelancer's Work Engagement	-0.185***	0.037	-4.615	0.000
Customer Orientation <sup>1</sup>	0.051	0.041	1.261	0.207
Self Efficacy <sup>1</sup>	-0.160***	0.042	-3.845	0.000
Risk-taking Propensity	0.012	0.017	0.716	0.474
Strategic Emphasis	0.010	0.018	-1.230	0.219
Strategic Emphasis Squared	0.000	0.000	1.030	0.303
<b>Log-Likelihood</b>	<b>-531.362</b>			
<b>Degrees of freedom</b>	<b>1039.000</b>			

<sup>1</sup> We used regression factor scores using items for the variable following Maximum Likelihood extraction and Direct Oblimin rotation.

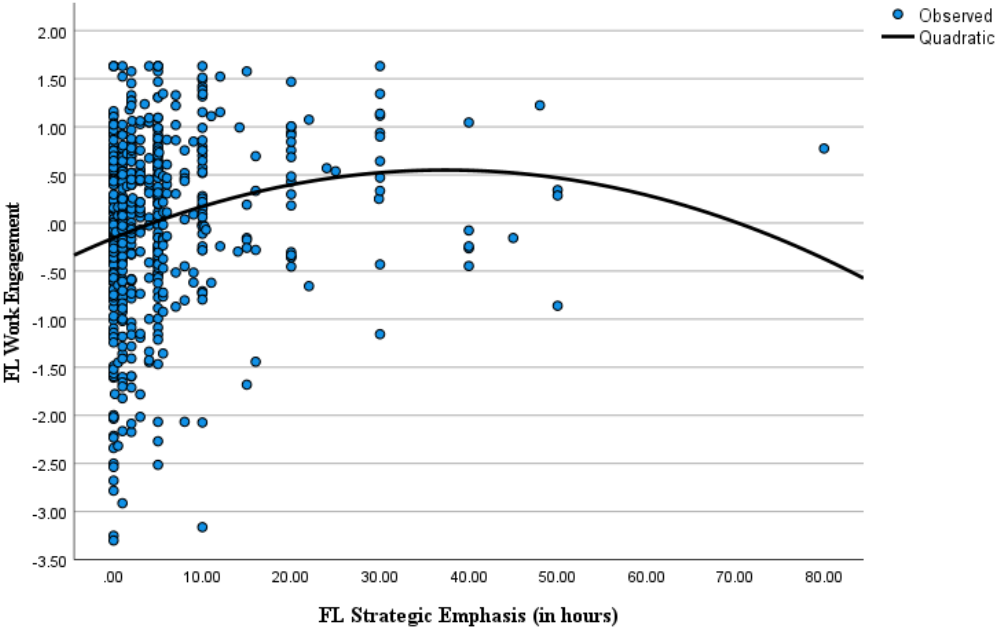
**Figure 1. Freelance Orientation Traits' Effect on Turnover and Work Performance through Work Engagement**



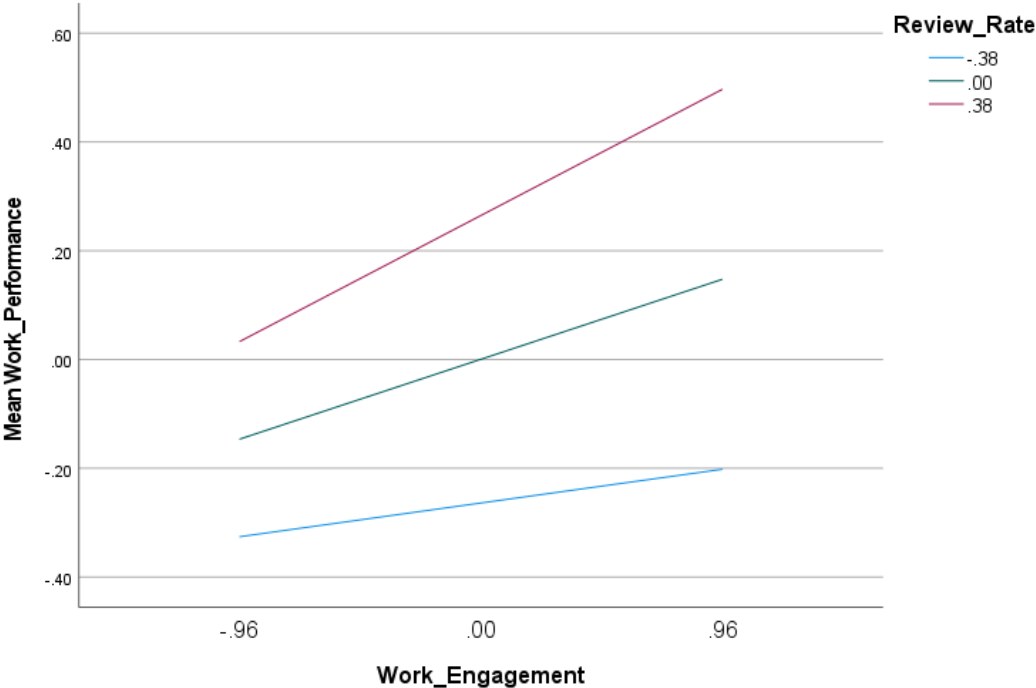
**Figure 2. Sharing Economy Landscape: Labor Platforms**



**Figure 3. Non-Linear relationship between Work Engagement and Strategic Emphasis (in hours)**



**Figure 4. Simple Slopes Diagram to show the moderation effect of Customer Feedback (Review rate) on the relation between Work Engagement and Performance**

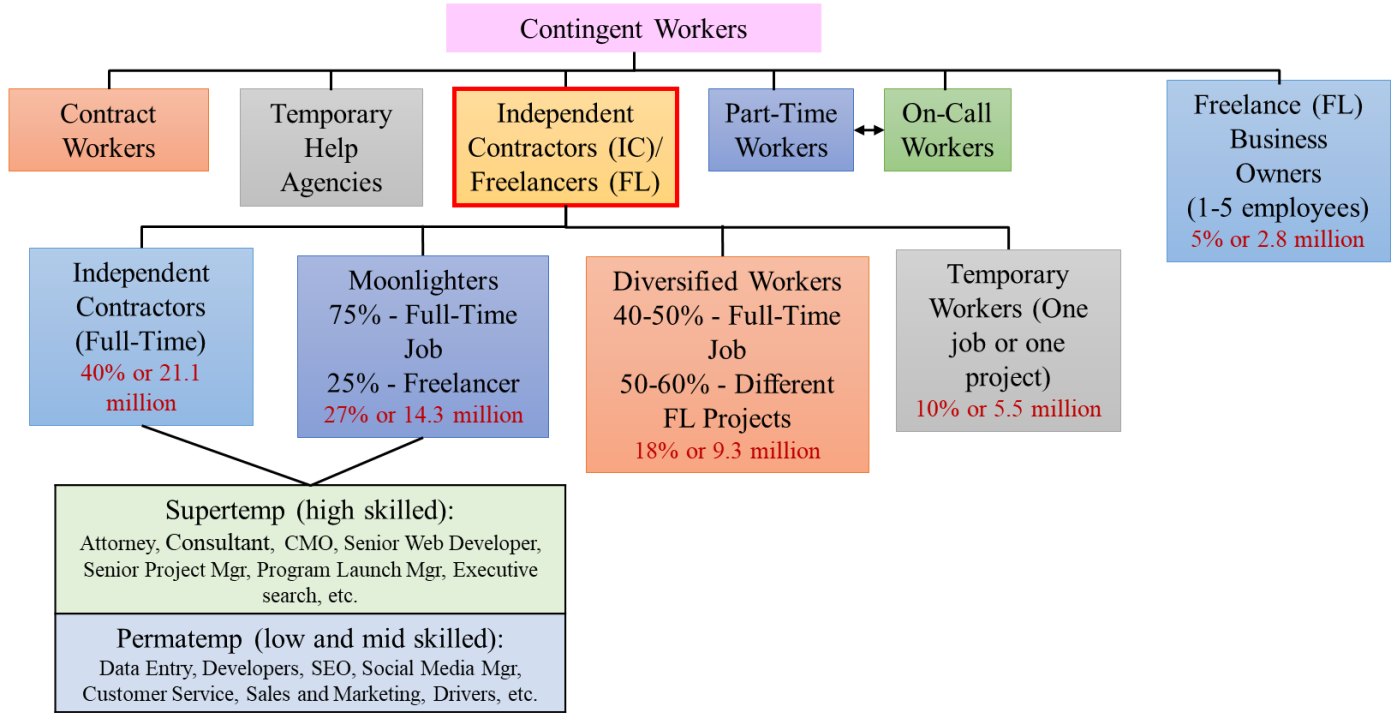


**APPENDIX 1**  
**COMPARISON BETWEEN FREELANCERS AND EMPLOYEES**  
**(CONTRACT AND COMPANY)**

	<i>Freelancer</i>	<i>Contract Employee</i>	<i>Company Employee</i>
<b>Contract Term</b>	<b>Short-term (job by job)</b>	Short-term/long-term (project basis)	Long-term
<b>Benefits Provider (Health, Medical)</b>	Self	Contractor	Company
<b>Retirement / Social Security</b>	Self	Contractor	Retirement pension 401(k) (partly company)
<b>Supervision</b>	<b>Low – periodic basis</b>	Dedicated - project manager (contractor and company)	Dedicated – manager on a continuous basis
<b>Relational Support at Workplace</b>	<b>Minimal – informal or platform community</b>	Available through supervisors, peers, and subordinates (if applicable)	Available through supervisors, peers, and subordinates (if applicable)
<b>Participation</b>	<b>Voluntary (maybe intermittent)</b>	Contractor/company defined	Company defined job
<b>Job Involvement</b>	<b>Single or multiple jobs at a time</b>	Single	Single
<b>Training &amp; Development</b>	<b>Self</b>	Contractor/company	Company
<b>Office Space</b>	<b>Virtual</b>	Physical or virtual (decided by contractor/company)	Physical or virtual (decided by company)
<b>Tools &amp; Equipment</b>	Self-owned	Contractor/company provided	Company provided
<b>Timing/Meetings</b>	Self-directed	Company enforced	Company enforced
<b>Termination</b>	On-demand/end of project	Contractor	Discharge notice as per procedure
<b>Taxes by Company</b>	None	Paid by contractor	Social security (6.2%) and Medicare (1.45%)
<b>Remuneration</b>	<b>Payment upon completion of job</b>	Salary plus commission	Salary (fixed or fixed plus variable) - Company payroll
<b>Federal Holiday/Sick leaves</b>	None	As per contractor policy	As per company policy

## APPENDIX 2

### CLASSIFICATION OF NON-FIRM OR CONTINGENT WORKERS



Source: Freelancing in America Upwork and Freelancers Union (2018)

### APPENDIX 3

#### STEPS IN HIRING OF A FREELANCER (FLSP) ON A LABOR PLATFORM (PROFESSIONAL SERVICES)

1. Project Posted on Platform

(by Customer)

2. Customized Proposals (By

FLSPs)

3. Review and short-listing of  
Proposals

(by Customer)

4. Negotiation between  
Customer and FLSP

(Price; Deliverables; Time)

5. Offer extended to FLSP to  
work on the project

(by Customer)

6. Acceptance of offer

(by FLSP)

7. Project Completion

(Payment by customer to FLSP minus  
platform commission)

## APPENDIX 4

### ENJOYMENT VERSUS DISPLEASURE REASONS IN FREELANCING

Enjoyment Reasons (unique respondents = 134)							Displeasure Reasons (unique respondents = 118)						
Reasons/Frequency	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority	Total frequency	Weighted ranking	Reasons/Frequency	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority	Total frequency	Weighted ranking
<b>Weight</b>	4	3	2	1			<b>Weight</b>	4	3	2	1		
<i>Become famous (personal brand)</i>	21	13	0	0	34	3.617647	<i>Self-learning and development</i>	55	0	0	0	55	4.000
<i>Autonomy (to do any type of work)</i>	58	0	0	1	59	3.949153	<i>Unpredictable Pay</i>	38	9	2	1	50	3.720
<i>Extra money</i>	41	43	10	0	94	3.329787	<i>No benefits</i>	14	21	2	0	37	3.324
<i>Flexibility (schedule)</i>	9	32	25	8	74	2.783784	<i>No supervisory guidance</i>	9	5	6	2	22	3.136
<i>Personal Growth</i>	1	19	26	11	57	2.561404	<i>No peer or colleague support</i>	2	12	5	3	22	2.864

We learn the two major enjoyment reasons for individuals (n= 134) to choose freelancing: Autonomy (to do any kind of work) and Extra money or income. For a sub-section of the sample, personal brand (to be famous) is priority. Self-learning and development, unpredictable income and no benefits are ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd as the conditions that respondents dislike about freelancing. Freelancers want more support and opportunities to be independent. Individuals point to uncertainty in the form of ‘inconsistent jobs’ and ‘unpredictable income’ as reasons to turnover. One possible reason that 71% and 21% of the respondents (n=496) are full-time or part-time employed. Of 101 respondents, 32% strongly agree, 30% agree, and 31% somewhat agree that completing a freelance job equates to success in freelancing. Completion of a job has roll on benefits to get paid, referred and repeat business. Additionally, the freelancers receive feedback directly from the customers in the form of reviews. Separately, the survey results confirm that freelancers are likely (81.25% of time; n=32) to ask for a referral and want to work with the same customer (100% of time; n=32) if there is a successful job completion. With reference to main problems faced with customers to complete jobs, freelancers indicate ‘unclear job objective’, ‘changing requirements’ and ‘unreasonable



rework demands'. Freelancers need to be ready to deal with for an everchanging environment. In terms of personal problems for job completion, household responsibilities are the main hurdle followed by balancing multiple jobs.

Open-ended survey answers (n=89) by a separate set of freelancers confirm the above reasons. The most 34 respondents say that freelancing enhances their autonomy. It is expressed in variety of ways, the most common being: 'freedom to choose time and schedule'; 'starting your own business'; 'own boss'. Here, we infer that freelancing is a mid-choice between organizational employment and entrepreneurship, hence they are referred as 'micro-entrepreneurs'. Based on these results, we believe that freelancers tend to have an autonomy orientation (generally in charge of my behavior) rather than a control orientation (work well with deadlines). Of our 318 respondents, 73% are autonomy oriented and 25% are control oriented. As expected, supplemental income follows autonomy with 27 respondents expressing freelancing is a good way to 'extra income to pay off debt or save for future'; 'make more money hourly than a job'; 'extra income while keeping my main job'. An interesting aspect is that the supplemental income in many cases is linked with the autonomy. Personal growth is a distant third with 10 respondents noting it along with other reasons above. They enhance themselves through 'knowledge'; 'confidence'; 'networking skills' primarily. Those freelancers who intend to choose freelancing full-time mention 'passion', required work situations such as work from home and high earnings as their reasons. Finally, freelancers who intend to turnover cite the unstable nature of the work arrangement. They plan to leave as soon as they find an organizational employment or are able to start their business.

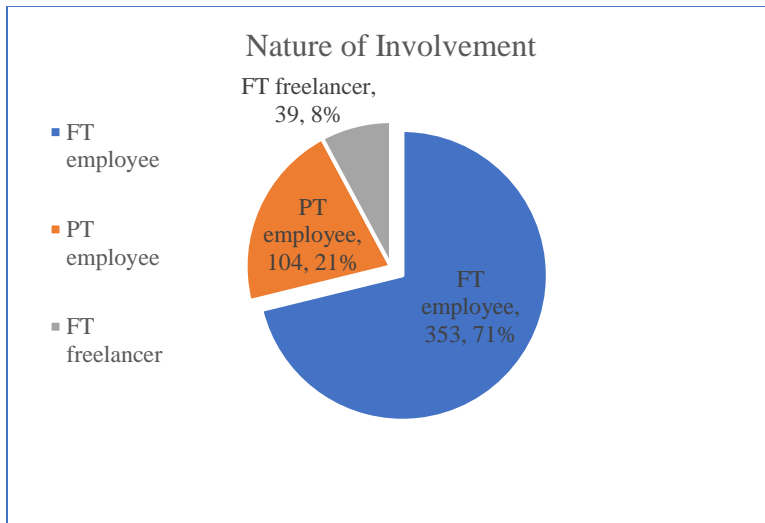
Success in freelancing in the words of the respondents refer to 'do the work I enjoy the most'. It follows that they are able to maintain their autonomy while pursuing enriching paid

work. In the surveys of 80 freelancers, most agree in some form that completing the job and getting paid is success (Somewhat agree 25; Agree 19; Strongly agree 30, mean on a 7-point scale 5.725). Therefore, we suggest platforms that help freelancers complete more jobs so that they maintain the autonomous working style and promote their learning and development through tools are likely to retain them.

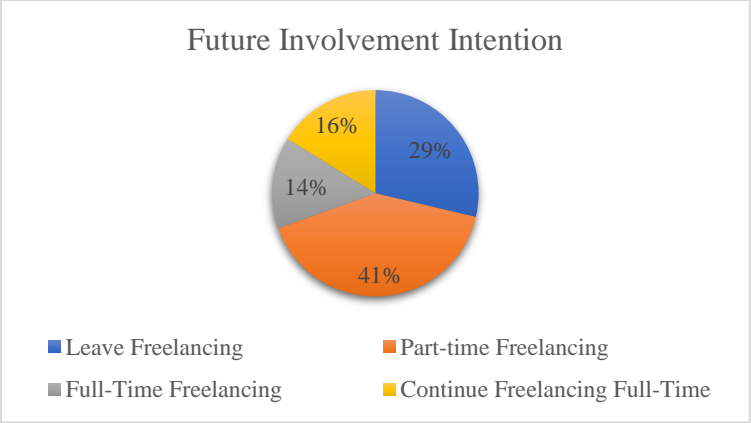
## APPENDIX 5

### NATURE OF INVOLVEMENT IN FREELANCING

Based on our exploratory surveys, we find that most respondents are involved with freelancing in a part-time (PT) capacity either holding a full-time (FT) or part-time employment in an organization. We don't observe a pattern across different tenures of involvement indicating that many individuals treat it either as a supplemental income or an outlet for hobbies/passions.



On a separate sample, we find that respondents are divided in their opinion on their future involvement. About 41% would like to continue treating it as a part-time 'gig'. 29% plan to leave freelancing to pursue other opportunities. On the other hand, 14% wish to take up or 16% continue freelancing full-time.



In relation to the preferences of freelancers in their customer type, respondents choose to work with an individual (16%), or small firm (27%), or medium firm (39%). Only 8% want to work with a large firm. Possibly, freelancers do not want a disequilibrium of power between them and the customer. Or they are not able to secure such projects as they lack the visibility or the trust of the customer. There is an opportunity for freelancers to attract large firms for long-term sustenance i.e., continuous revenue stream with longer duration projects (Upwork 2019a). Platforms are responding with business models aimed at capturing enterprise customers. For example, 10% of Upwork’s revenue comes from a single enterprise customer.

Freelancers prefer to work with global customers over local ones. The reason may be currency and rate arbitrage. Freelancers operating in emerging economies such as India, Indonesia and others prefer to work for customers in advanced economies for higher rates per hour or stronger currency. Further, there does not seem to be a clear preference in the type of transaction with customers. An equal number prefer one-time transaction as it is an earning opportunity and repeated transactions where freelancer-customer relationship is important. In terms of the pricing strategy, freelancers prefer a job-based one time payment in place of hour-

based pay. Possibly, it is difficult to keep track of time spent on a particular freelance job as each freelancer may work on multiple ‘jobs’ simultaneously.

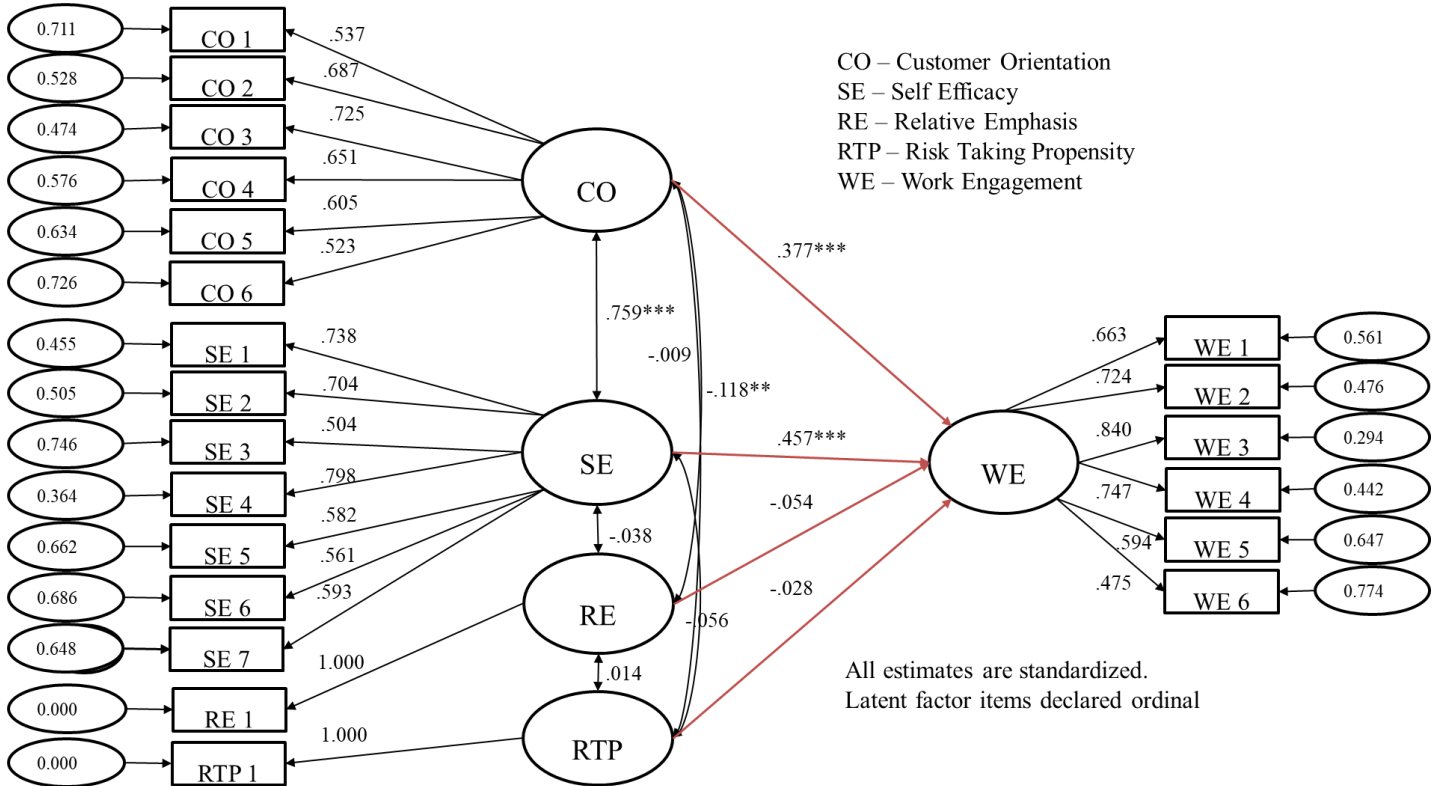
Labor platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr, or Taskrabbit are just one of the modes to get freelance jobs. Referral from customers is another important mode. Referrals suggest (i) completing the job successfully with good relations is important and (ii) prospective customers prefer hiring freelancers based on a previous customer’s approval that reduces opacity regarding their psychological traits. Third source is job boards such as Indeed.com, LinkedIn, Craigslist or Ziprecruiter. Job boards are a type of search engine which aggregate, and display jobs posted by employers seeking new workers. Customers use job boards to post open positions and search resume databases. Table WA.4 displays the freelancers’ preferences regarding jobs.

<b>Preferred Freelance Customer Types</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Individual	31	16%
Small firm (1-50 employees)	51	27%
Medium firm (50 to 500 employees)	73	39%
Large firm (more than 500 employees)	16	8%
No preference	18	10%
<i>Total</i>	189	
<b>Type of Freelance Jobs sought by Location</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Local	42	22%
Global	91	48%
Both	56	30%
<i>Total</i>	189	
<b>Type of Freelance transaction (with customer)</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
One-time transaction	67	36%
Repeated ongoing transactions	67	36%

Both	52	28%
<i>Total</i>	186	
<b>Preferred Pricing Strategy</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Freelance Job-based	17	53%
Hour-based	7	22%
Both	8	25%
No preference	0	0%
<i>Total</i>	32	
<b>Mode of finding Freelance Jobs</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Referrals from other freelancers	13	14%
Referrals from customers	28	29%
Platforms	28	29%
Job Boards	23	24%
Personal contacts	3	3%
Any other	0	0%
<i>Total</i>	95	

## APPENDIX 6

### CFA RESULT OF ORIENTATION TRAITS AND WORK ENGAGEMENT



We run a confirmatory factor analysis of our latent variables – customer orientation (CO), self-efficacy (SE), and work engagement (WE). Strategic emphasis (RE) and risk-taking propensity (RTP) are single indicator variables. Our results indicate that all the factor loadings of the item to factor are significant. Each set of indicators show midrange-to-high item-to-total loading (0.3-0.8). This is the first representation of convergent validity. The covariance between the factors is low and insignificant suggesting discriminant validity. The exception is customer orientation and self-efficacy. Intuitively, it is expected as self-efficacious freelancers are likely to be confident in their abilities stemming from their knowledge or experience. Furthermore, they are resilient to adaptations or changes in the customer’s demands. Both are qualities that aid in

the freelancer's customer orientation. We regress work engagement on the orientation traits and find customer orientation and self-efficacy to be significant.



**APPENDIX W7**  
**MEDIATION ANALYSIS - WORK ENGAGEMENT**  
**(WITHOUT MODERATION AND COVARIATES)**

Hypothesis	Sample size	R-squared Full Model	IV Beta on Mediator	IV Direct Beta on DV	Mediator-DV Beta	Indirect Beta	Mediation type observed
Customer Orientation - Work Engagement - Log Probability to Turnover	537	0.113	0.530***	0.013	0.148***	0.115***	Full
Self-Efficacy - Work Engagement - Log Probability to Turnover	537	0.145	0.554***	0.146***	0.217***	0.082***	Partial
Risk Taking Propensity - Work Engagement - Log Probability to Turnover	537	0.115	(-)0.147***	0.025	0.228***	(-)0.033***	Full
Strategic Emphasis - Work Engagement - Log Probability to Turnover	537	0.137	(-)0.137**	(-)0.001	0.236***	(-)0.032***	Full
Hypothesis	Sample size	R-squared Full Model	IV Beta on Mediator	IV Direct Beta on DV	Mediator-DV Beta	Indirect Beta	Mediation type observed
Customer Orientation - Work Engagement - Average Work Performance Score	524	0.02	0.533***	0.157*	0.014	0.008***	Partial
Self-Efficacy - Work Engagement - Average Work Performance Score	524	0.039	0.565***	0.242***	(-)0.037	(-)0.021	None
Risk Taking Propensity - Work Engagement - Average Work Performance Score	524	0.018	(-)0.144***	0.108**	0.105**	(-)0.015*	Partial
Strategic Emphasis - Work Engagement - Average Work Performance Score	524	0.064	(-)0.014**	0.024***	0.168***	(-)0.02**	Partial
<b>Additional Analysis</b>							
Work Engagement - Average Work Performance Score - Log Probability to Turnover	524	0.122	0.087*	0.217***	0.55**	0.005	None

## APPENDIX 8

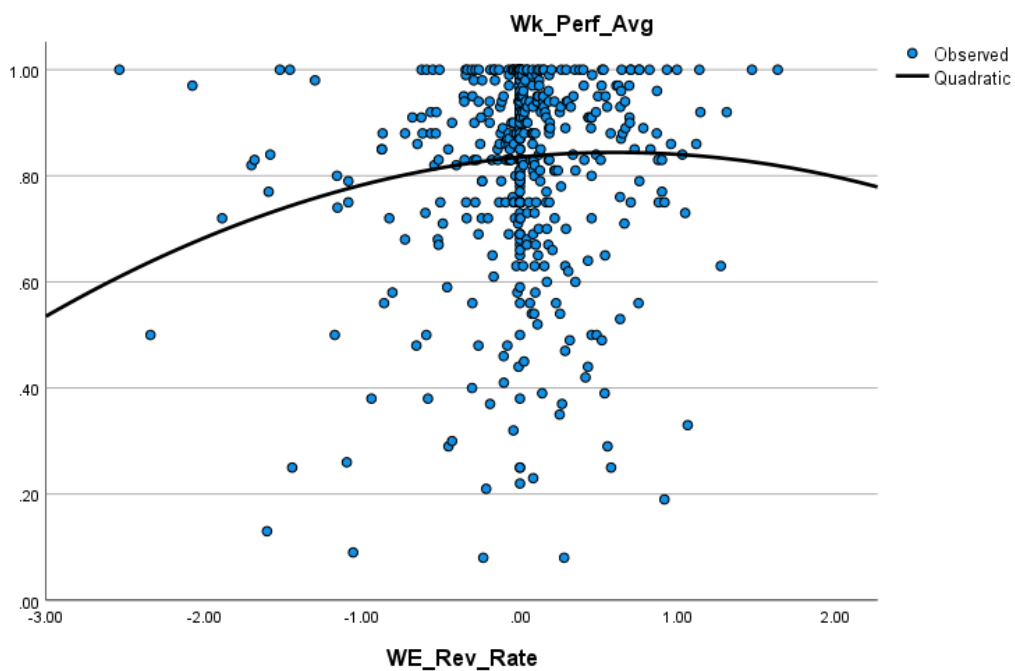
### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW RATE MODERATOR

#### Model Summary and Parameter Estimates

Dependent Variable: Wk\_Perf\_Avg

Equation	R Square	Model Summary				Parameter Estimates		
		F	df1	df2	Sig.	Constant	b1	b2
Quadratic	.015	4.057	2	534	.018	.835	.029	-.024

The independent variable is WE\_Rev\_Rate.



**APPENDIX 9**

**SUR REGRESSION – WORK PERFORMANCE AND PROBABILITY OF TURNOVER**

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Work Performance</b>				
	Beta	Std. Error	t value	Sig.
Intercept 1	0.910	0.021	43.346	0.000
<i>Independent</i>				
Freelancer's Work Engagement	-0.009	0.013	-0.643	0.520
Customer Orientation <sup>1</sup>	0.020*	0.011	1.777	0.076
Self Efficacy <sup>1</sup>	0.033***	0.011	2.955	0.003
Risk Taking Propensity	-0.010**	0.005	-2.096	0.037
Strategic Time Use	-0.010***	0.002	-5.166	0.000
Strategic Time Use Squared	0.000***	0.000	3.162	0.002
Work Engagement X Review Rate	0.035	0.023	1.559	0.120
<b>R-squared</b>	<b>0.118</b>			
<b>Adjusted R-squared</b>	<b>0.106</b>			

<sup>1</sup> We used regression factor scores using items for the variable

<b>Dependent Variable: Freelancer's Probability of Turnover</b>				
			t value	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error		
Intercept 1	1.203	0.066	18.278	0.000
<i>Independent</i>				
Freelancer's Work Engagement	-0.162***	0.034	-4.743	0.000
Customer Orientation <sup>1</sup>	0.044	0.035	1.255	0.210
Self Efficacy <sup>1</sup>	-0.155***	0.035	-4.391	0.000
Risk Taking Propensity	0.010	0.015	0.682	0.496
Strategic Time Use	-0.004	0.006	-0.636	0.525
Strategic Time Use Squared	0.000	0.000	0.612	0.541
<b>R-squared</b>	<b>0.147</b>			
<b>Adjusted R-squared</b>	<b>0.137</b>			

<sup>1</sup> We used regression factor scores using items for the variable