



Sharing' in the gig economy: From equitable work relations to exploitative HRM

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Sharing' in the gig economy: From equitable work relations to exploitative HRM

ABSTRACT

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Purpose: This paper examines HRM in the gig economy through a moral economy lens and elucidates how sharing and firm ownership influences the (un)ethical use of HRM practices and worker treatment.

Design/methodology/approach: Conceptual and empirical insights from contemporary HRM literature are synthesised through a systematic literature review to elucidate pressing challenges for research and practice.

Findings: Our analysis reveals that the different ownership structures of gig firms shape the nature and degree of sharing. Thus, we advance a new integrated conceptual spectrum of sharing and HRM practice from worker equity to exploitation. The gig economy built on investor ownership leads to greater sharing with investors and tends to be more exploitative of workers, whereas platforms built on collaborative ownership engage in greater peer-to-peer sharing which is more equitable and leads to higher quality work relations and HRM.

Originality/value: A new integrated conceptual spectrum of sharing in the gig economy is advanced, which aids in understanding evolving developments in HRM theory and practice.

Practical implications: The closer an organisation's alignment with the more equitable/relational end of the gig economy spectrum, the better the work relations and HRM.

Keywords: gig economy; sharing economy; moral economy; equity; exploitation; HRM practice

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of the gig or sharing economy is transforming work relations and HRM for an increasingly large number of workers (Holland and Brewster, 2019). In the UK, the number of adults performing gig work has more than tripled in the space of just six years (2016-22) from 2.3 to 7.25 million (Fennell, 2022). Empirical research has struggled to keep pace with this unprecedented rate of growth and the array of implications unfolding for workers and HRM (Dundon and Rafferty, 2018; Rubery and Johnson, 2019). In the main, these developments are seen as exposing workers to poor working conditions, raising questions over their ethical treatment and HRM (Rowley, 2017; Slee, 2017; Sundararajan, 2017). Thus, we urgently need to harvest insights from recent literature to identify key foci for future HRM research and practice.

In engaging with these developments, many use the terms gig and sharing interchangeably, with some regarding them as all but the same (Murillo et al., 2017). In this paper, the gig economy is defined as 'the exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms ... on a short-term and payment by task basis' (UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2018: 4). Gig activities often require individuals to share their property and resources to deliver services, so the use of one or both economic labels can be semantic, influenced by calls for greater moral economy (Pearlstein, 2020; Sayer, 2015). For example, gig firms often draw on the sharing economy trope to avoid being branded exploitative and amoral. This is underpinned by promises of greater earning opportunities and freedom for workers (Hall and Krueger, 2018). However, critics continue to raise concerns over the poor

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3 conditions available to workers and insidious efforts to exert greater control (Veen et al., 2019;
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5 Good et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2019). Therefore, we need to unpack conceptual and empirical
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7 literature on sharing and morality in the gig economy to better understand the complexity of
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9 these disruptive work relations for workers and HRM and the moral and ethical tensions
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11 presented (Rinne, 2017).
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17 Consequently, we apply a moral economy lens (Sayer, 2000, 2018a, 2018b; Umney, 2017;
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19 Laaser, 2016), which focuses on the ‘ways in which economic activities, in the broad sense, are
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21 influenced by moral-political norms and sentiments, and how, conversely, those norms are
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23 compromised by economic forces’ (Sayer, 2000: 80). This framework for analysis draws on
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25 social exchange theory (Cross and Dundon, 2019) by examining tensions between self-interest
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27 in an increasingly market-driven world and calls for greater wellbeing and justice in work and
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29 society more broadly (Umney, 2017).
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35 Specifically, we examine the following questions. How do firms manage their relationships
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37 with gig workers through a moral economy lens? And, how do the HRM practices adopted by
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39 firms contribute to the balance between the equitable and exploitative treatment of workers?
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44 These important questions are addressed by first examining the concept of a moral economy
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46 and how this influences the emphasis placed on sharing in the gig economy and the quality of
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48 HRM practice and work relations in the case of gig work (Simmons, 2008). We then present an
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50 original systematic review of conceptual and empirical HRM literature engaging with sharing
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52 and the moral economy in the case of gig work. Based on the analysis undertaken, we identify
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54 three moral economy themes, which aid our understanding of HRM practice in the gig
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56 economy. These themes form part of a new integrated conceptual spectrum of sharing from
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3 worker equity to exploitation, which challenges existing moral economy assumptions and
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5 generates implications for HRM research and practice.
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10 **2. Gig and sharing activity through a moral economy lens**

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14 **The concept of a more moral economy builds on social exchange theory (Cross and Dundon,**
15 **2019)** by focusing on wellbeing and justice in the analysis of social, political, and economic
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17 relationships and arrangements (Götz, 2015). In the case of work and employment, individuals
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19 are typically dependent on their employer, which can expose them to potential exploitation and
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21 undermine their well-being (Sayer, 2018a). This is because organisations enjoy structural
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23 power advantages over workers, which are exerted through HRM by setting pay and working
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25 conditions and controlling working practices (Laaser, 2016; Steers, 2009). Much of this is
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27 driven by a longstanding pre-occupation with the bottom-line, which results in a focus on
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29 transactional relations (Sayer, 2007).
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38 From a moral economy viewpoint, workers' needs extend beyond economic ones to dignity,
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40 trust, autonomy, and voice, which can often be side-lined when work relations and HRM
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42 become more transactional (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Interestingly, there is evidence that
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44 these moral considerations are becoming louder and more influential, with some CEOs in the
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46 US seeking to broaden the purpose of the firms they lead, so that they 'serve' all Americans
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48 (Business Roundtable, 2019). Bolton et al.'s (2012) study recommends using a moral economy
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50 lens as an ethical framework to assess HRM practice within contingent work arrangements.
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52 Their study highlights the ethical deficiencies engendered by disregarding the 'human' element
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54 of HRM.
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3 A moral economy perspective on work relations involves assessing whether organisational
4 practices are just or unjust to varying degrees considering what workers receive (e.g., pay),
5 what they are permitted and forced to contribute, and the ethical implications of these socio-
6 economic dynamics (Bolton & Laaser, 2013). For example, a moral economy perspective
7 makes a valuable distinction between earned and unearned income. The former relates to work-
8 based income, which is paid to workers in return for the contributions they make to the
9 production or delivery of valuable goods and services. The latter is a form of quantitative
10 contributive injustice, whereby an organisation retains unearned income rather than sharing it
11 evenly with those contributing to its production (Sayer, 2012).
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26 Such a lens also prompts us to consider qualitative contributive justice, meaning the quality of
27 the tasks workers undertake and the opportunities they have for self-development (Sayer,
28 2018b). This includes examining whether workers have opportunities to perform skilled tasks,
29 whether they have autonomy over these tasks and whether firms adequately invest in training
30 and development (RSA, 2017). The HRM practices deployed by gig firms are therefore of
31 particular importance in shaping individuals' experiences of gig work.
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42 Studies engaging with the moral economy are relatively under-utilised within work,
43 organisation, and management (Sayer 2007), but calls for greater moral economy are growing
44 (Bolton et al. 2012; Breslin & Wood, 2016; Khurana, 2017; Pearlstein, 2020; Umney, 2017),
45 with some studies using a moral economy perspective to analyse HRM practices such as
46 performance management (Laaser, 2016). However, relatively few studies have applied this
47 framework to the analysis of HRM practice in the gig economy. We apply this framework in
48 this paper because it provides a rich analytical lens to examine the role played by sharing in the
49 gig economy, how this is morally rationalised and the nuanced implications for gig work
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3 relations and HRM practices. As Sayer (2011) argues, it can be used to investigate the moral
4 and social consequences of economic processes. Therefore, it is applied in this paper to analyse
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6 how organisations offering gig services treat workers and manage their relations with them
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8 through HRM.
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14 **3. Method**

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19 To examine how firms in the gig economy manage human resources and how this contributes
20 to worker equity and/or exploitation, we conducted a detailed review of contemporary
21 conceptual and empirical literature in line with established systematic review conventions
22 (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009; Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). Each of the paper's co-authors were
23 involved in the review process.
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33 The terms 'gig', 'sharing economy', 'platform*' and 'moral economy' were used initially to
34 search the abstracts, key words and titles of journal articles in Scopus, ProQuest, Emerald, and
35 EBSCO databases. This approach returned a high number of search results and many of which
36 were irrelevant. For example, in Scopus, 'sharing economy' returned over 4300 results before
37 the application of filters. We then used relevant search strings such as 'sharing economy' AND
38 'HRM', but this approach returned a low number of search results. For instance, in ProQuest,
39 'sharing economy' AND 'HRM' returned 2 results before the application of filters. Therefore,
40 to provide a focused and comprehensive peer-reviewed literature base we used the four initial
41 terms: 'gig', 'sharing economy', 'platform' and 'moral economy' to search specific journals
42 related to HRM, work and employment, general management and computer science. All
43 journals were included in the Academic Journal Guide produced by the Chartered Association
44 of Business Schools.
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Insert Table 1 about here

As can be seen in table 1, a total of 626 potentially relevant articles were identified. 305 articles were excluded by screening the titles of articles, their abstracts and key words. The remaining 321 articles were exported to Mendeley, a reference management tool which removed duplicate articles. The full remaining articles and their bibliographies were then reviewed which left 262 papers. This careful and systematic filtering process is set out in figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The content of the articles was analysed using NVivo, employing axial and in-vivo coding (Tyskbo, 2019). First, we used NVivo codes drawn from the articles and our research questions to categorise sections and sentences. For example: ‘pay’, ‘flexibility’, ‘recruitment’, ‘performance management’, ‘voice’, ‘traditional organisations’, ‘legislation’, ‘co-worker interaction’, ‘platform-worker interaction’, ‘motives’ and ‘ethical issues’. Axial coding was then applied by clustering the in-vivo codes into prevalent common themes. After reviewing, merging, and breaking down the common themes, three final themes were identified through our systematic review.

4. Findings

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5 The key themes identified through the analysis of the literature reviewed are examined in this
6 section: (1) sharing and HR promises; (2) gig work relations; and (3) moral and ethical HRM
7 concerns. In section five of the paper, we advance an integrated framework illustrating how the
8 degree of emphasis placed on sharing influences the balance between worker equity and
9 exploitation, along with nature and quality of HRM practices and socio-economic relations
10 between organisations and gig workers.
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26 *4.1 Circumscribed sharing and HR promises*

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30 Firms using gig arrangements often draw on moral justifications for their business models by
31 referring to the autonomy and earning potential available to workers, implying enhanced worker
32 well-being and power sharing. The empirical accounts of gig workers examined in this review
33 affirm these to be the main draws of this type of work arrangement (Bellesia et al., 2019;
34 Graham et al., 2017; Mäntymäki et al., 2019; Moisander et al., 2018). On this basis, gig-workers
35 invest their time, effort and resources based on the promises made by firms.
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46 However, the much-vaunted financial rewards and autonomy are not fulfilled for every gig
47 worker, with many instead experiencing low pay and restricted choices (e.g., Goods et al., 2019;
48 Kost et al., 2017; Kougiannou and Mendonça, 2021; Veen et al., 2019). This is because firms
49 typically retain the sizeable profits they glean from these arrangements and share them with
50 their investors rather than workers (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Such firms own and control
51 digital platforms not for their own use, but to extract unearned income from workers and
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3 customers. Firm executives may contribute to service delivery to some extent by designing or
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5 managing platform operations, but their relative contributions vary. Their salaries mainly
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7 reflect their position of power, the service charges applied and cost-saving practices, which
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9 typically serve to disadvantage workers (Josserand et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2019).

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14 Inequalities can manifest in various ways. For example, Moisander et al. (2018) studied
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16 ‘CloudNine’ (pseudonym), a gig firm where business partners sell products and try to recruit
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18 their own distributors. The firm’s promotional materials state, “if you’re willing to put in the
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20 time, effort, and hard work, the [CloudNine] experience can lead to more financial opportunity,
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22 flexibility, and freedom to determine your own path” (Moisander et al., 2018: 386). However,
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24 the researchers found that most of the gig workers they sampled did not break even, because
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26 they incurred additional costs, for instance travelling to recruitment talks and purchasing
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28 business support materials. The study found that many business partners left within the first
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30 year due to the quantitative contributive injustices they perceived, and the HR promises they
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32 perceived to be unmet.
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40 Mäntymäki et al. (2019) illustrate how the claims made by a ride-sharing platform of high pay
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42 were untenable, because of income inconsistency. For example, a driver said that their income
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44 was great until the platform raised driver expenses and cut pay rates unilaterally, whilst still
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46 deducting commission. Their income was also inconsistent due to minimal information sharing
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48 with workers about HRM practices, reinforcing a climate of distrust and arguably unethical
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50 decision-making. Similarly, many food couriers receive customer destination information after
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52 they arrive at restaurants to collect the food order(s) (Goods et al., 2019).
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3 At the other end of the spectrum, some platforms do offer greater transparency and enable
4 greater peer-to-peer sharing due to their more collaborative business models. For example,
5 BlaBlaCar permits individuals who are traveling to a particular destination to advertise a free
6 seat in their car (Aversa et al., 2021). The platform recommends a fee to charge riders. Drivers
7 have some discretion to advertise a different fee, but the fee must be classed by the platform as
8 not-for-profit, thus only covering the cost of the journey. For pre-booked seats, riders must pay
9 an additional service fee, enabling BlaBlaCar to generate unearned income. Other more
10 collaborative gig enterprises include freelancer-run Loconomics, which provides a range of
11 different services from acupuncture to bookkeeping, and Up and Go, which connects customers
12 to professional cleaner cooperatives (Meijernik and Keegan, 2019).
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28 Another key dimension to power sharing is job crafting. Relatively low barriers to entry enable
29 firms to leverage the moral principle of inclusivity and construct an image of providing equal
30 work opportunities. However, this obscures the qualitative contributive injustice embedded
31 within the gig economy, where most tasks are poor quality, relatively low skilled and
32 standardised (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2014; Schor, 2017). Firms such as TaskRabbit
33 advertise tasks that potentially require more specialised and higher-level skills than driving or
34 delivering goods. ‘Taskers’ set their own hourly fee and clients scroll through their profiles to
35 choose a tasker (Ravenelle, 2019). However, clients must pay a service fee of around 15%,
36 which is likely to influence the amounts clients are willing to pay taskers. Although some tasks
37 require potentially higher-level skills, for example translation, many call for relatively low-
38 skilled labour such as cleaning and delivery work.
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56 Some scholars have studied platforms offering higher-skilled and more creative work like
57 software development (Bellesia et al. 2019; Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2013; Howcroft
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3 and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Jarrahi et al., 2019). Such platforms provide workers with
4 opportunities to utilise more diverse skillsets and enjoy greater autonomy over task execution.
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6 Moreover, they receive comparatively higher wages to incentivise innovation, knowledge
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8 sharing and workforce flexibility. Nevertheless, each job is temporary and unpredictable.
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10 Responsibility for skill development, a crucial element for higher-skilled independent
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12 professionals is offloaded to individual workers themselves in the gig economy (Leighton,
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14 2016; Kost et al., 2019).
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21 Some on-demand platforms (e.g., Foodora, Deliveroo) use algorithmic performance statistics
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23 to determine worker access to scheduling systems (Heiland, 2022; Veen et al., 2019). Empirical
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25 studies capturing worker experiences have shed light on how gig firms offer potential bonuses
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27 to persuade contractors to work certain shifts, or more hours (Wentrup et al., 2019; Griesbach
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29 et al., 2019). Yet some workers miss surge pricing or bonus notifications and restrict their
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31 labour effort based on personally set targets (Veen et al., 2019). Lyft's service fee (around 20%)
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33 is not applied to drivers working more than 50 hours a week (Aloisi, 2016), thereby
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35 incentivising long and unhealthy working hours, which raises safety and ethical concerns. Gig
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37 workers offering online services may have comparatively more power over when they work
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39 (Bush and Balven, 2018), but scholars have found they had to stay online for protracted periods
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41 and/or work non-standard hours so as not to miss out on potentially lucrative gigs (e.g., Bellesia
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43 et al., 2019; Shevchuk et al., 2021).
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51 *4.2 The nature of gig work relations*

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56 For many gig workers, the absence of close managerial supervision is appealing (Goods et al.,
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58 2018; Jossierand and Kaine, 2019). Yet the findings of empirical studies often critique the use
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3 of app-based performance management systems, including customer ratings (e.g., Schörpf et
4 al., 2017; Wu et al., 2019). Below, we set out the need to examine the broader issue of triadic
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6 socio-economic relations between gig workers, their managers, and customers. This is because
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8 of the fundamental importance of these relations to the well-being of gig workers, which require
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10 more relational HRM practices to reconcile the tensions and challenges that can arise. (Leicht-
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12 Deobald et al., 2019).
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19 Many gig firms position themselves as moral facilitators of positive social interactions and
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21 resource usage. However, our review demonstrates that this framing obscures how interactions
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23 are enmeshed in a complex and unequal web of socio-economic work relations.
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28 In many gig firms, customer evaluations have replaced conventional HRM with respect to the
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30 allocation of work (Cutolo and Kenny, 2021; Kuhn and Maleki, 2017; Ravenelle, 2019).
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32 Customer feedback can be subject to unethical biases and discrimination and are often affected
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34 by factors outside a worker's control (e.g., traffic, customer mood/personality). The feedback
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36 they provide generates implications for gig workers and their reputations. For instance, low
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38 ratings can lead to sanctions or the loss of access to a platform (Chai and Scully, 2016). In the
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40 case of ride hailing services, some firms offer drivers meeting performance targets guaranteed
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42 rates when surge pricing occurs (Wu et al., 2019). Even BlaBlaCar, which is not-for-profit,
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44 implements an app-based evaluation system, which potentially influences the contributions
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46 secured by drivers towards future journey costs. This can lead drivers to spend money on in-
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48 car amenities and engage in emotional labour to improve their customer ratings (Rosenblat and
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50 Stark, 2016).
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3 Gig firms are often characterised as social forums. However, social interactions between
4 managers and gig workers, if they occur, are usually limited and infrequent. For example, gig
5 workers receive app notifications if they are underperforming, because the customer ratings
6 they have received are too low or they take too long to deliver goods or accept jobs (Mäntymäki
7 et al., 2019; Veen et al., 2019). The adoption of such HRM practices renders the work
8 relationship a solely economic transaction and downplays individuals' social and ethical needs
9 including respect, interaction, and recognition.
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21 Limited social interaction between managers and gig workers means that limited opportunities
22 exist for workers to express their grievances and work-related concerns (Kougiannou and
23 Mendonça, 2021; Rosenblat and Stark, 2016), which would foster greater power sharing and
24 ethical decision-making. Empirical studies reporting workers' experiences refer to the generic
25 and unhelpful responses received when they speak to support staff by phone, or fill in online
26 enquiry forms (Wentrup et al., 2019). Gig workers have claimed that working terms are a 'one-
27 way street', they either agree or they quit (Mäntymäki et al., 2019). Participants in Moisander
28 et al.'s study (2018) claimed that any complaints or criticism about CloudNine were forbidden
29 and silenced. Business partners were encouraged to distance themselves from 'negative
30 thinkers'.
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47 The individualistic and competitive environment found in many gig firms (Graham et al., 2017;
48 Purcell and Brook, 2022) can hinder strong co-worker ties. For example, a courier in Griesbach
49 et al.'s (2018) study explained how he saw his work as a game in which he competed against
50 other couriers. Such individualistic behaviours were the product of performance statistics,
51 inconsistent incomes, and on-going recruitment.
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3 Gig firm recruitment usually involves minimal application stages and induction. Empirical
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5 research comparing Deliveroo with UberEats found that the former had a more formal selection
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7 and onboarding process and basic training on customer service and health and safety (Veen et
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9 al., 2019). Such firms present themselves as enabling the un- or under-employed to engage in
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11 sharing and enhance their well-being, self-esteem, and income. However, recruitment and
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13 selection processes usually offer minimal opportunities for firms and gig workers to familiarise
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15 themselves with each other (Wentrup et al., 2019). Furthermore, as digital platforms can recruit
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17 individuals at comparatively little cost, existing workers are often disadvantaged by fewer
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19 opportunities for work (Howcroft and Rubery, 2019; Goods et al., 2019).
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26 Continuous recruitment potentially has more of an immediate impact in the case of on-demand
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28 service providers (e.g., UberEats, Lyft). Reputations that take time to build are more likely to
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30 affect client and organisational decisions to recruit gig workers offering services online (e.g.,
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32 virtual assistants, software developers), but such workers face intense and increasing
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34 competition (Bellesia et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2017).
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40 CloudNine studied by Moisander et al. (2018) arguably develops a greater sense of community
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42 and worker social ties than typical gig firms because of its ownership structure. Business partner
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44 earnings depend on individual sales and the sales of distributors they recruit. Gig workers
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46 receive support, guidance, and advice from their recruiters. However, distributor relationships
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48 are instrumentalised and viewed from an economic perspective. Any individuals they establish
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50 new relationships with are considered potential clients or future business partners.
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56 *4.3 Moral and ethical HRM concerns*

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3 Gig workers are afforded few legal protections due to their employment status (e.g., [Inversi et](#)
4 [al., 2022](#); Kuhn and Maleki, 2017; Leighton, 2016), because their contracts often include
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6 statements such as: “under your IBO [or partner, or service provider] contract, you will not be
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8 treated as an employee” (Moisander et al., 2018: 385). Firms often recruit workers as
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10 contractors to avoid incurring employment-related costs such as pension contributions and paid
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12 leave (Wright et al., 2019). Some gig firms vehemently resist offering employee status to gig
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14 workers, whereas others have switched to offering employee status. For example, Shyp, a gig
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16 parcel delivery firm started recruiting ‘employee’ couriers, but this was done to secure more
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18 direct control over their operations rather than for moral purposes (Aloisi, 2016).
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26 A moral economy perspective demonstrates how HRM practices are influenced by moral
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28 judgements and norms, which generate varied worker responses. Numerous on-demand firms
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30 have faced litigation over their contract terms, with gig workers arguing that they are legally
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32 and morally obliged to classify them as employees (Morgan, 2018). However, gig workers may
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34 wish to remain as independent contractors, fearing that employee status would restrict their
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36 flexibility or their ability to do multiple jobs and so impact their wellbeing (Josserand and
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38 Kaine, 2017; Mäntymäki et al., 2019). Yet this flexibility is constrained as discussed above and
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40 influenced by whether an individual solely engages in gig work through one platform or
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42 whether they do so through multiple platforms or in addition to full- or part-time time
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44 employment (Bellesia et al., 2019; Schor, 2017; Kost et al., 2017; [Wu et al., 2019](#)).
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46 Furthermore, these working patterns may be influenced by gender, with women typically being
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48 more likely to rely on gig work as their only source of income ([Gerber, 2021](#); Howcroft and
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50 Rubery, 2019).
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3 Even though in-person social interactions between gig workers tend to be limited because of
4 the work organisation structures in place, co-worker bonds can still form. For example, caring
5 co-worker relationships can develop when workers engage in forums to seek and share advice
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10 (Wood et al., 2018). Moreover, Kougiannou and Mendonça (2021) study a food courier network
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12 where members used social media to communicate issues and help and support each other.
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Joining a union can present risk to gig workers due to their precarity and most platforms resist
union engagement (Però and Downey, 2022; Polkowska, 2021). Nevertheless, workers for food
and transport gig firms in several countries have engaged in union and non-union resistance
over their employment status. The outcomes of such resistance have been uneven, but workers
and unions tend to lack substantive influence (Inversi et al., 2022). However, the recent ruling
by the Supreme Court in the Uber BV v Aslam [2021] case that Uber drivers are ‘workers’
rather than ‘independent contractors’ is significant.

Other examples of gig worker resistance are identified in empirical findings. In Griesbach et
al.’s (2019) study, workers reported that over time the Instacart app identified the lowest pay
rate per delivery workers will accept in a particular region. One worker stated that workers in
her region were less willing than other regions to accept low pay rates per delivery and so the
app had ‘learnt’ that avoiding delivery rejections and customer delays meant offering higher
rates to workers. To resist performance monitoring and quantitative contributive injustice, Veen
et al. (2019) found that some food delivery couriers stole food and manipulated app systems to
hide their locations, or to deactivate the app-based time restrictions on accepting jobs.

The gig economy also creates work for ‘backstage’ labour. ‘Airbnb for Work’ explicitly targets
organisations arranging accommodation for their employees, while Ikea has partnered with the

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3 TaskRabbit platform to offer furniture assembly services (Schor, 2017). However, these
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5 developments raise questions about their HRM and working conditions (i.e. employment status,
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7 pay, other benefits). Airbnb initiated a living wage pledge offering wage guidance to US hosts
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9 and organisations employing professional cleaners (Chai and Scully, 2019), but adherence to
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11 this pledge is unlikely to be robustly monitored or enforced.
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17 In the case of highly skilled professionals, McKeown and Cochrane (2017) contend that
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19 although organisations overwhelmingly adopt compliance-based HRM approaches to manage
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21 freelance gig workers, approaches geared towards harnessing gig worker commitment and
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23 cooperation are more likely to benefit both workers and organisations. This is because more
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25 relational HRM can contribute to knowledge sharing and learning between workers. However,
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27 how organisations use and codify such knowledge may stimulate further moral tensions.
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33 **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

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37 The findings from our review enable us to make a number of important contributions to the
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39 mounting literature on changing work relations and HRM in the gig economy. Our analysis
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41 reveals that the different ownership structures of gig firms shape the nature and degree of
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43 sharing. The side of the gig economy built on investor ownership leads to greater sharing with
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45 investors and tends to be more exploitative of workers, whereas platforms offering collaborative
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47 ownership engage in greater peer-to-peer sharing that is more equitable and leads to higher
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49 quality work relations and HRM. On this basis, we advance a new integrated conceptual
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51 spectrum of sharing in the gig economy from worker equity to exploitation. Please see figure 2
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3 The development of this new conceptual spectrum contributes to existing HRM literature by
4 offering a new analytical framework for researchers to evaluate and compare the nature and
5 degree of sharing in gig economy organizations along three key dimensions: (1) circumscribed
6 sharing and HR promises; (2) gig work relations; and (3) moral and ethical HRM concerns.
7
8 Importantly, the spectrum includes some of the potential outcomes of varying degrees of
9 sharing, which are important for HR practitioners, organizational and policy makers to be
10 cognisant of. For instance, the degree and nature of sharing can shape tensions and relationships
11 in the gig economy, which can have a significant impact on worker, organizational and societal
12 interests, and objectives. The spectrum therefore promotes a longer-term understanding of the
13 implications of more or less sharing oriented HRM practices for different groups. From this,
14 researchers can offer more mutually beneficial policy and practice recommendations.
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31 By presenting sharing in the gig economy as a spectrum, our framework also encourages
32 researchers to examine and theorise the evolving nature of HRM practice in the context of
33 increasingly contingent work relations. As demonstrated above, organisations may shift their
34 HRM approach to extract greater value from workers and exercise greater control but may also
35 improve their HRM practices to respond to moral economy concerns. Ultimately, an
36 organisation's position on a sharing spectrum between equitable treatment and exploitation is
37 unlikely to be static. For example, they may start out as a collaborative platform to then be
38 bought out by competitors or investors. Establishing standards and a code of practice for
39 organisations in the gig economy could help researchers assess whether and how HRM
40 practices in gig organisations evolve (Sharing Economy UK, 2022).
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Insert Figure 2 about here

Secondly, despite growing literature on the gig economy (e.g., Gerber et al., 2022; Inversi et al., 2022) and the moral economy (e.g., Laaser, 2016; Khurana, 2017; Umney, 2017; Breslin & Wood, 2016), few studies have analysed gig HR practices through a moral economy lens. The application of this framework has enabled us to shed light on how the degree of sharing influences the balance between transactional and relational approaches to HRM and the treatment of workers and to tease out differences between firms with respect to these multi-level dynamics.

For example, investor-owned firms focusing more on profit maximisation and less on collaborative peer-to-peer sharing tend to employ algorithmic HRM practices that track and discipline workers without human interaction, which is often damaging to workers and their social protection (Dugan et al., 2020). The absence of trust and commitment consolidates the transactional nature of the exchange for workers as opposed to perceiving the relationship with the platform in a broader and more relational sense (Ashford et al., 2018; Dundon and Rafferty, 2018).

Relatedly, a moral economy lens reveals that the implementation of sharing-oriented practices involves more than enhancing contractors' economic rewards (Alacovska, 2018). Contractors have multiple needs, and their concerns extend beyond pay to other interrelated elements of HRM such as legal protections, dignity, autonomy, recognition, voice, and social interaction ((Però and Downey, 2022; Polkowska, 2021)). For example, in the absence of adequate legal protections (Leighton, 2016; Aloisi, 2016), our findings show that workers and other stakeholders attempt to exert moral regulation by resisting detrimental and unethical practices

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3 (Griesbach et al., 2019; Goods et al., 2018). It may be that a sharing index ought to be devised
4 and published on a regularly updated basis to encourage organisations to align themselves and
5 their HRM practices with the right-side of the spectrum in figure 2 characterised by greater
6 equity to fulfil their proclaimed purpose as a sharing organisation.
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14 Thirdly, our findings contribute to the development of a more nuanced moral economy
15 framework. A moral economy lens is usually adopted to analyse work relations between
16 workers and a single employer. However, in the case of the gig economy, individuals may do
17 gig work for multiple parties. Gig work may be their sole or a supplementary source of income
18 on top of other full or part-time employment. This is likely to affect their views on gig work
19 relations, how they are treated and how they view the HRM used (Kost et al., 2017; Josserand
20 and Kaine, 2017, Wu et al., 2019). Moreover, our findings reveal that seemingly positive
21 developments such as offering individuals employee status rather than contractor status, may
22 not be introduced primarily for moral economy reasons, but instead to gain greater control
23 (Aloisi, 2016). It is likely that HRM practitioners will need to deftly navigate the combination
24 of these contrasting goals if alignment with a more equitable gig model is to be achieved.
25 Moving away from ‘independent contractor’ status can provide important legal protections
26 (Inversi et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2019). HRM practitioners along with other stakeholders need
27 to push for higher quality HRM in gig firms to mitigate the potential for employee status to
28 affect worker well-being in other complex ways.
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51 Our paper demonstrates that gig firms and their service providers engage in different levels of
52 sharing and that these dynamics play out differently across gig firms, generating an array of
53 moral outcomes. For instance, at one level, ride hailing companies apply a proportionately small
54 fee to the fares customers pay to drivers per journey (Wu et al., 2019; Mäntymäki et al., 2019).
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3 However, they engage in greater sharing with shareholders than workers and constrain genuine
4 peer-to-peer sharing. The status of firms embracing the concept of the sharing economy ought
5 to be challenged from a moral economy perspective when they are disproportionately profiting
6 from peer-to-peer sharing by generating multi-million or multi-billion-dollar revenues to
7 engage in sharing with investors (Slee, 2017). If greater sharing with workers is not achieved,
8 it may be that the role of HRM becomes increasingly side-lined. Further theorization of the
9 different levels of sharing and future research into the attendant moral implications is therefore
10 important.
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24 Some firms share comparatively more profits and employment risks with their office or tech
25 experts and even provide them with access to stock options, but this can foster polarisation
26 within the labour force (Marchington, 2015). Such polarisation is an underexplored issue in
27 HRM research in the gig economy but is also likely to extend to the training opportunities
28 available and the skill level of tasks undertaken by employees and contractors in gig firms
29 (Sayer, 2018b). Accordingly, a moral economy lens needs to be extended to take account of the
30 complexity of multiple socio-economic relations and standpoints in the gig economy.
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42 Fourthly, new approaches to recruitment, pay, performance management, training and
43 development and voice are surfacing in the gig economy and being widely replicated (Rosenblat
44 & Stark, 2016; Griesbach et al., 2019; Bush and Balven, 2018). Many of these developments
45 in practice involve the growing use of software to extract greater value from workers and
46 customers. Workers are most likely to be squeezed in these triangulated relationships and so
47 HR managers need to proactively encourage greater organisational and customer alignment
48 with moral economy concerns to maintain a balance between each party's interests.
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3 Although workers pursue a wide range of interests, empirical research shows that gig workers
4 are attracted to gig firm promises of high incomes and independence (Bellesia et al., 2019;
5 Mäntymäki et al., 2019; Moisander et al., 2018). This suggests that uncovering new ways to
6 enhance HRM practices in gig firms and more traditional organisations (including those hiring
7 gig workers) may help improve labour effort, commitment, and satisfaction (Wheatley, 2017).
8 Indeed, research has shown how more traditional organisations can provide flexibility to
9 employees over their shifts in ways that resemble the flexibility provided to gig workers
10 (Nogues & Tremblay, 2019).
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24 Advancing a spectrum of sharing in the gig economy based on secondary literature potentially
25 limited the depth of our conclusions about the extent of emphasis placed on sharing and
26 mutuality in gig firms. However, we sought to limit the potential for this by conducting a
27 thorough review of empirical and conceptual studies in high-quality peer-reviewed journals to
28 ensure that the analysis and framework developed was based on strong credible foundations.
29 Future primary research could use this framework to contextualise changing HRM practices.
30 For example, subsequent studies could examine how different levels of gig task and skill
31 complexity influence worker opportunities and autonomy with respect to training and skill
32 development. From an internationally comparative perspective, the role of institutional and
33 cultural conditions in mediating the balance of worker equity and/or exploitation in gig firms
34 in different countries could also be examined as research into changing HRM practices in the
35 gig and sharing economies increases with the growth of these economic models.
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54 In conclusion, our article demonstrates the need for HRM researchers to question how the
55 business models of different gig firms in various industry and country settings are morally
56 rationalised by examining worker, manager, and consumer experiences. Our multi-dimensional
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3 conceptual spectrum incorporating HRM practices can be applied and built upon in future
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5 empirical HRM studies to investigate how the management of human resources in different gig
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7 firms influence the balance between worker equity and/or exploitation, and the implications for
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9 workers and organisations.
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Figure 2: The gig economy as a spectrum of sharing from worker equity to exploitation

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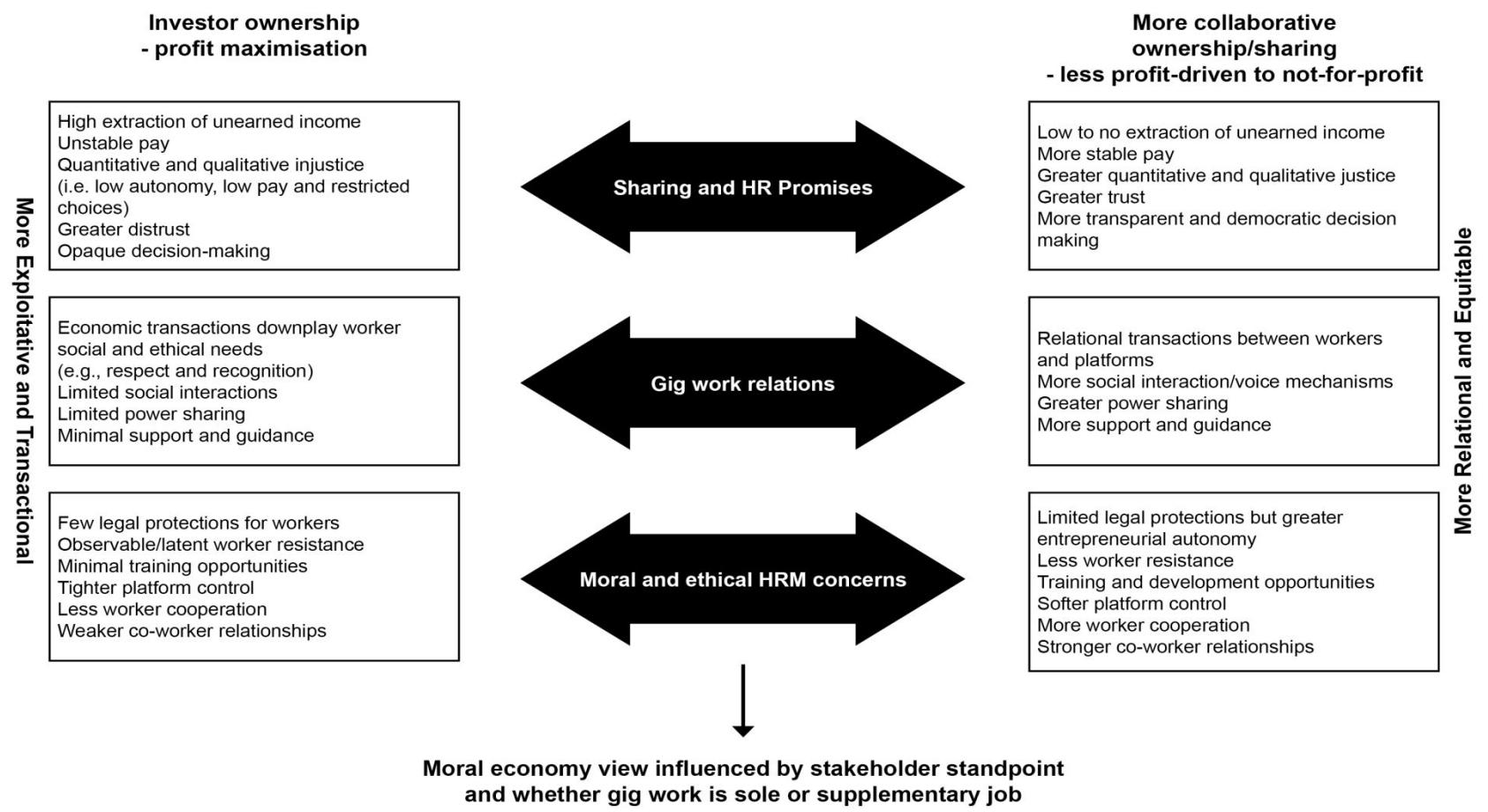
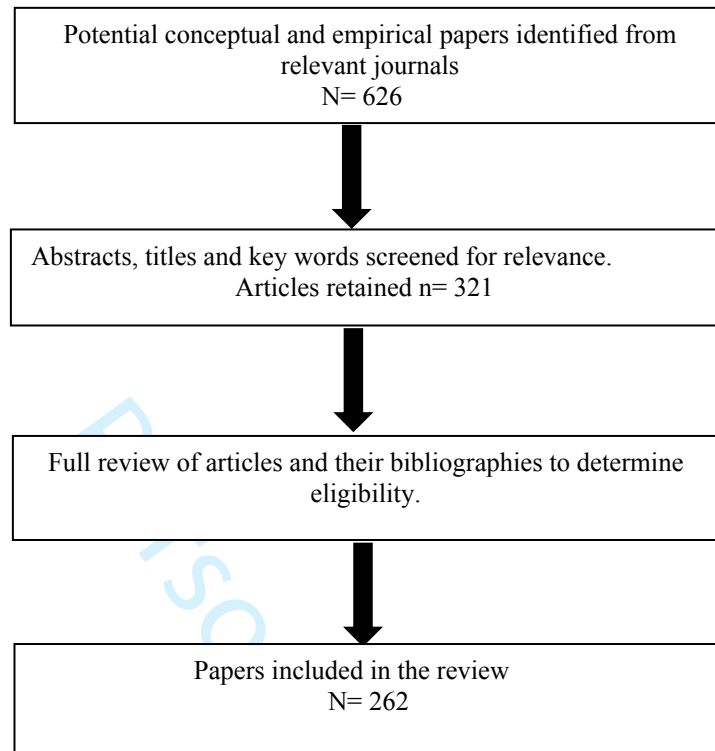


Figure 1: Literature search process



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Table 1: Search results focusing on specific journals (n of relevant articles after screening abstracts, keywords and titles in brackets)

Journal	Gig	Sharing economy	Platform*	Moral Economy
Personnel Review	2 (2)	2 (2)	8 (2)	0
Employee Relations	1 (1)	0	8 (2)	0
International Journal of Human Resource Management	8 (8)	0	21 (9)	0
Human Resource Management Review	2 (2)	0	6 (2)	0
Human Resource Management	0	0	6 (2)	0
Human Resource Management Journal	3 (3)	0	3 (3)	0
Work, Employment and Society	19 (19)	0	22 (20)	10 (10)
Human Relations	7 (7)	0	13 (4)	0
New Technology, Work and Employment	19 (19)	2 (2)	36 (31)	0
British Journal of Industrial Relations	3 (3)	0	4 (2)	0
European Journal of Industrial Relations	2 (2)	0	7 (4)	0
Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society	2 (2)	0	2 (2)	0
Industrial Relations Journal	2 (2)	0	4 (4)	1 (1)
Journal of Industrial Relations	15 (15)	0	14 (10)	1 (1)
Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research	5 (5)	3 (3)	14 (10)	0
Academy of Management Perspectives	0	2 (2)	14 (8)	0
Academy of Management Journal	1 (1)	0	7 (0)	0
Academy of Management Annals	0	0	3 (0)	0
Academy of Management Review	0	0	4 (2)	0
Journal of Management	1 (1)	1 (1)	19 (6)	0
Journal of Management Studies	0	8 (8)	26 (10)	0
British Journal of Management	0	0	15 (3)	0

Journal of Management and Organization	1 (1)	2 (2)	7 (2)	0
Journal of Managerial Psychology	8 (8)	0 (0)	10 (6)	0
International Journal of Information Management	5 (5)	8 (8)	162 (9)	0
Computer Supported Cooperative Work: The Journal of Collaborative Computing and Work Practices	3 (3)	1 (1)	41 (18)	0
Totals	109 (109)	29 (29)	476 (171)	12 (12)

Personnel Review

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3 **Sharing' in the gig economy:**
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5 **From equitable work relations to exploitative HRM**
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